Independent Filmmaking across Borders in Contemporary Asia

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2 A Landscape Over There

Rethinking Translocality in Zhang Lu’s Border-Crossing Films

Abstract

This chapter examines three border-crossing films by the Korean-Chinese (chaoxianzu) filmmaker Zhang Lu, namely Desert Dreams (2008), Dooman River (2010), and Scenery (2013). Using the conceptual framework of translocality, this study first explores how Zhang, as a translocal auteur, leveraged his multi-layered identities to engage the global film festival network. Not only does Zhang reinvent the border as a new scale to scrutinize the translocal movement of deterritorialized subjects and diasporic peoples, he also sheds light on the significance of place in identity formation and further examines the power geometry of globalization. As such, Zhang’s translocal filmmaking both intersects and challenges us to rethink Chinese independent filmmaking and Korean diasporic cinema.

Keywords: film festival network, translocal auteur, chaoxianzu/ethnic Korean, Yanbian, Korean diaspora cinema

Born and raised in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (YKAP, Yanbian Chaoxianzu zizhizhou), part of Jilin Province in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), third-generation Korean-Chinese filmmaker Zhang Lu taught literature at Yanbian University before venturing into filmmaking.

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2 Zhang’s grandfather fled from Uiseong County (Uiseong-gun), North Gyeongsang Province (Gyeongsangbuk-do, currently part of South Korea) to China in 1919, while his mother crossed

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It was after moving to Beijing and living there for ten years that Zhang had the impulse to direct a film of his own. Starting from zero background in filmmaking, Zhang’s debut short *Eleven* (*Shiyisui*, 2000) was entered into the competition at the Venice International Film Festival and caught the attention of the international film community.

With his first dramatic feature film, *Tang Poetry* (*Tangshi*, 2003), Zhang moved on to collaborate with South-Korea-based companies for ensuing film projects, some of which would be co-productions between his own studio Lu Film (est. 2009) and various overseas cultural and film bodies. Zhang’s oeuvre, which is independently produced and predominantly uses the Korean language including dialects,³ has mainly been circulated in and endorsed by international film festivals and through the arthouse niche market within South Korea and beyond. Upon accomplishing his supposed ‘lifework’ of *Dooman River* (*Duman-gang*, 2010) in his native Yanbian, Zhang once had the idea of quitting filmmaking when he relocated to Seoul for a college teaching job in 2012. Yet after a short hiatus, Zhang restarted with a commissioned film festival project. Starting from his seemingly light-hearted drama *Gyeongju* in 2014 (a semi-romance story takes place in the historical city of Gyeongju), Zhang is increasingly seen engaging the urban petite bourgeoisie’s everyday life in contemporary South Korean society, wherein he also experiments with stylistic formulas and narrative tropes that blur the boundaries between dream, memory, and reality.

With his creative trajectory in mind, this chapter pays more attention to Zhang’s early works prior to *Gyeongju*, particularly three of what I shall call ‘border-crossing’ films: fiction features *Desert Dreams* (*Gyeong-gye*, 2008) and *Dooman River*, and his first documentary feature *Scenery* (*Pung-gyeong*, 2013). I mainly frame my discussion from two perspectives. First, I turn to the auteur’s flexible positioning as a translocal filmmaker whose creative work intricately intersects multiple film communities in South Korea, Mainland China, and beyond. It is crucial to see how Zhang leverages his translocal

identity and diasporic affiliations to engage the political economy of the global film festival network. Second, and more importantly, this chapter explores how Zhang’s films have revolved around the cinematic trope of border crossing to explore the issues of location and dislocation, mobility and immobility, and identity.

Reframing Translocality

Before elucidating Zhang Lu’s translocal authorship, it is necessary to examine the conceptualization of translocality – even though I have touched upon translocalism in Chapter One – to grasp how it may connect with our understanding of Zhang’s authorial positioning and his transnational works. In their introduction to Translocal China, Tim Oakes and Louisa Schein emphasize approaching translocality with a ‘simultaneous analytical focus on mobilities and localities’ (Oakes & Schein 2006: 1; emphasis in original). They also turn to the ‘subjective dimension of translocality’ without losing sight of the physical, material movement of both human and non-human actors, including objects, ideas, images, and so forth (ibid.).

The ‘translocal’ turn in geography studies, and in particular in Oakes and Schein’s anthropological survey, has inspired film scholar Zhang Yingjin in his spatial studies of Chinese cinema, which highlights the PRC’s post-socialist filmmaking specifically since China’s entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001. Zhang has suggested how we could gain new perspectives into the production, circulation, and exhibition of contemporary Chinese cinema in terms of ‘space and polylocality’. He has been quick to suggest how the ‘everyday’ no longer functions ‘as the fixed local’ but ‘occur at various scales, from the local (or translocal) to the national and global’ (2010: 75). And somewhat understandably, his examination has mainly foregrounded how Chinese independent filmmaking/filmmakers responded to and intervened in the drastically changing cityscape and disorienting urban experiences into the new millennium. Nevertheless, Zhang Yingjin’s remapping of the ‘(trans)local’ has been to a great extent confined to and contingent upon the social imaginary of a globalizing, urbanizing (Mainland) China and its geographical territory. His interrogation of subjectivity – whether of Chinese film auteurs or their film characters – is incorporated into a critique of the political economy of post-socialism, while he has shown less interest in reflecting upon the disparate articulations of ‘Chinese’ identities and senses of belonging. Such perceived dissatisfaction then leaves much to be explored regarding
films from the PRC that address marginalized communities and cultural landscapes that are not necessarily Sinocentric and/or urban-located, and cases wherein the translocal movement and imagination on and off screen are related to auteurs and/or subjects who are from diasporan communities and/or ethnic minorities within and outside of China.

In his survey of translocality, Zhang Yingjin refers to Arif Dirlik and what the latter advocated as ‘place-based imagination’ (see Dirlik 1999). Dirlik’s re-conceptualization is closer to what Oakes and Schein refer to as the ‘cultural approach’ to place, which, differing from the ‘materialist approach’, advocates ‘a sense of local knowledge and experience as an alternative to the universal pretensions of abstract scientific discourse’ (Oakes & Schein 2006: 20). Nevertheless, Dirlik does not turn a blind eye to the ‘absolute’ process of deterritorialization (Buchanan 2005: 30). Nor does he simply try to resurrect any retroactive essentialization of ‘place’ as opposed to ‘space’. Rather, his intervention envisions place and the place-based consciousness as a ‘project’ that, despite its utopian connotations, seeks to generate new contexts ‘for thinking about politics and the production of knowledge’. Such a project can be achieved by means of grounding the observation and articulation of social relations and categories at the local level, ‘from below’ and in everyday life (Dirlik 1999: 151-152). Sensibility as such towards place in the age of globalization plays a crucial part in reimagining the interconnection between the local (or national) and the global given the deceptive symmetry between the two.

Dirlik’s challenge illuminates ‘a recognition of the primacy of place, and of its autonomy, and, on that irreducible basis, to produce translocal or, better still, transplace alliances and cooperative formations’ (quoted in Zhang 2010: 6; emphasis in original). Zhang Yingjin similarly suggests that translocality could be examined in three areas: ‘places of attachment or identification, people whose physical or imaginary movements across scale connect disparate spaces and places, and technologies and modes of communication that facilitate such attachment, identification, movement, and connection’ (ibid.: 9).

In emphasizing scale and place, translocality contributes to reconsidering transnational cinema studies. In Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim’s illuminating thesis calling for a ‘critical transnationalism’ in film studies, they stress that the conceptualization of ‘transnational cinema’ itself ‘risks celebrating the supranational flow or transnational exchange of peoples, images, and cultures at the expense of the specific cultural, historical, or ideological context in which these exchanges take place’ (Higbee & Lim 2010: 12). Engaging Higbee and Lim’s critique, Chris Berry argues, ‘The multitude
of transnational projects constituting these transborder cinema practices cannot all be reduced to and accounted for wholly in terms of the logic of the market, its so-called imperatives, and the even larger forces such as cultural affinity that shape it in certain ways (2010: 123). Translocality may therefore provide a useful framework to examine transnational filmmaking practices like Zhang Lu’s, which do not necessarily register the celebratory discourse of Asian integration and regionalism characterizing most market-driven co-production projects and industrial collaborations in the region. As already indicated in Chapter One, considering that the transnational is also one manifestation of the translocal, I prefer the latter to foreground the local-to-local connection apropos of independent filmmaking.

**Departing from Yanbian: Zhang Lu as a Translocal Auteur**

In arguing for Zhang Lu to be seen as a translocal film auteur, it is necessary to consider how the dual aspects of mobilities and localities frame the way we comprehend the interrelations between: 1) Zhang’s ethnic Korean/Korean-Chinese identity in relation to his authorial positioning; 2) his translocal, transnational filmmaking practice, especially the production, circulation, and exhibition of his films at variously scaled film festivals and on the niche market; and 3) his works that feature travelling subjects and their stories of journeying, migration, and displacement. Furthermore, ‘translocal authorship’ is used here to differentiate from the mode of transnational, commercial, generic co-production in Southeast Asia and East Asia despite their possible overlaps. The former foregrounds a mode of independent production and specific authorial agency in connecting places, network actors, and subjectivities. The emphasis concerns how Zhang’s grassroots-level translocal alliance connects with the place-based imagination and everyday life experiences at the textual and extra-textual levels. Such tendencies shed light on how the auteur would ‘favor street-level views over cartographic surveys, contingent experience over systematic knowledge, and bittersweet local histoires over a grand-scale global history’ (Zhang 2010: 74; emphasis in original).

Oakes and Schein point out that translocality envisions how mobile subjects have developed multiple layers of attachment, since ‘time-space compression has made it possible to translate identity into various scales simultaneously, by identifying with multiple localities in both practical and imaginary ways’ (Oakes & Schein 2006: 10; emphasis in original). The aim is not to make a problematic assumption about how Zhang Lu has
conveniently developed cultural identifications with both China and South Korea on equal, undifferentiated terms, which was never the case. Rather, such potential translocal identifications need to be questioned and further contextualized in underlining how the ethnic Korean (or Chaoxianzu in Chinese) identity itself is historically structured and conditioned, with a focus on the locale of Yanbian (Yeongbyeon in Korean). Meanwhile, I should also mention that, although this chapter does not revolve around the conceptual framework of Sinophone, as indicated elsewhere, the heuristic of place-based imagination indeed interlinks with what has been repeatedly emphasized by Shu-mei Shih that ‘Sinophone must be place-based’ (Shih 2007: 34). As I will further highlight in the ending section, underpinned by its rethinking of diaspora as well as that of the essentialized notion of Chineseness, Sinophone studies have partially reverberated with what Oliver Dew has proposed as a ‘post-zainichi’ moment and the ‘post-zainichi’ mode in zainichi/Koreans-in-Japan cinema, the latter two of which for Dew have expressed ‘an uneasiness, if not an outright rejection of, any fixed concept of identity’ (Dew 2016: 19). Meanwhile, it has inspired me to see how Zhang Lu’s filmmaking and his works, while being potentially celebrated as a unique type of Korean diasporic filmmaking – that is, a Korean-Chinese cinema – also contest the idea of diasporic authenticity and question the ‘axis of origin and return’ oriented around the idea of a singular ‘homeland’ (Klein 2004: 26). As illuminated by Sonia Ryang, ‘Koreans – as with any diasporic people – are divided, and their internal division has been a sharp, irreconcilable one, reflecting both the artificial partition of their homeland and the fratricidal civil war that impressed a finality on the expatriate community’s split loyalties’ (Ryang 2009: 8).

In his study on the geopolitical positioning of Yanbian, Daniel Gomà stressed that, ‘Unlike other national minorities (shaoshu minzu) of the PRC, Koreans are one of the few ethnic groups that come from territories not under Beijing’s control’ (Gomà 2007: 870). With a population of approximately 2 million,4 ethnic Koreans or the Korean minority in China are the descend-

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4 The number of ethnic Koreans in the YKAP used to exceed that of the Han nationality. According to online statistics released in 2018 by the government of Jilin Province, the population number of chaoxianzu was 757,200, making up 36.04% of the total population of the prefecture (see ‘yanbian chaoxianzu zizhizhou 2017nian guominjingji he shehuifazhan tongjigongbao’). As Gomà has stressed, ‘But Yanbian is more than a simple autonomous zone: since 1952 it has become the touchstone of Korean culture for Koreans living in China. Beijing is also worried about Yanbian’s geopolitical importance. Covering an area of 42,670 square kilometers, the autonomous prefecture shares a border of 623 kilometers with North Korea and 223 with Russia’ (Gomà 2007: 879).
ants of migrants from the Korean peninsula between the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century and the end of the Second World War. As explained by Gomà, ‘The first wave of immigration arrived in the 1860s when a terrible famine in the north of the peninsula forced numerous Koreans to cross the Chinese border and establish themselves in Yanbian’ (ibid.). Although not the focus of this chapter, I want to make clear that the unfolding history of Korean people’s transborder migration and displacement for over a century has intricately entangled with the geopolitical turbulence and social vicissitudes in this part of East Asia.\textsuperscript{5}

In particular, from China’s socialist era, ethnic Koreans in the PRC have been recognized and governed as one of the Chinese state’s 55 ‘ethnic minorities’ (\textit{shaoshu minzu}, in addition to the Han majority).\textsuperscript{6} The identity formation for ethnic Koreans has been subjected to changing state policies and social-engineering projects that seek to integrate the ethnic minority groups into a multi-ethnic and unitary Chinese state.\textsuperscript{7} It was within the

\textsuperscript{5} The historical trajectories and contexts include but are not limited to: the Japanese empire’s expansion and imperial war; the establishment and fall of the puppet regime of Manchukuo (1932-1945) in Northeast China; waves of Korean nationalist movements across Manchuria, the Korean peninsula, and Japan; China’s civil war (1945-1949) fought between the Chinese Communist Party and the government of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang); the founding of the PRC in 1949; the Korean War (1950-1953) and the subsequent division of Korea into the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK); and last but not the least, the Cold War.

\textsuperscript{6} In this chapter, ‘ethnic minority’, ‘minority nationality’, and ‘minorities’ are basically used interchangeably to indicate \textit{shaoshu minzu} in the PRC. For law scholar Wang Linzhu, ‘minorities have the rights to territorial autonomy under the Regional Ethnic Autonomy (REA) regime, as well as to other preferential policies respecting financial, technical, social, and cultural affairs’ (L. Wang 2015: 2). Nevertheless, \textit{minzu} was considered synonymous with ‘nationality’ within the PRC until the 1990s, when upon seeing the dissolution of the former socialist states and the problematic implications of nationality, the Chinese state started to prefer the use of ‘ethnic minority’ and ‘regional ethnic autonomy’ to register \textit{minzu} in its official discourse (ibid.: 4). For more on \textit{minzu} and \textit{shaoshuminzu} as a discourse in Chinese cinema studies, refer to Zhang, Y. (1997).

\textsuperscript{7} The area of Yanbian was historically called ‘Gando’. Important to our understanding of Yanbian’s historical complicity and its current role in the border dispute between the PRC and the ROC/DPRK is the Gando Agreement, signed between Japan and China (Qing Dynasty) in September 1909, which ‘formally recognized Chinese control of the region known as Gando in Korean, Jiandao in Mandarin, and Kanto in Japanese’ (Gomà 2007: 867). Due to its associations with Manchukuo’s colonial rule, the name of ‘Jiandao’ was no longer in use since the founding of the PRC. The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region (\textit{Zizhiqiu}) was established by the Chinese central government in 1952, and in 1955, the State Council officially promulgated the creation of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (\textit{Zizhizhou}). Scholars have approached, from various perspectives, how Yanbian remained a geopolitically significant locale, if not a sensitive zone in relation to the complicated power entanglements between the CCP, the former Soviet Union,
context of China’s post-socialist economic reform beginning in 1978, and particularly with the PRC’s establishment of diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992, that the ethnic Korean communities were able to establish and fortify their translocal connections on various fronts with South Korea – mainly in Yanbian and other locales in Northeast China. At the same time, currently the largest group of foreigners in South Korea are the Korean-Chinese (Joseonjok in Korean), who have mostly migrated to Korea as workers and job-seekers since the 1980s.8

Zhang Lu’s native prefecture of Yanbian is not only a conjuncture for interrelations between the PRC and South Korea. Yanbian’s geopolitical and geographical position is further complicated by the fact that the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture shares a border of 623 kilometres with North Korea (Gomà 2007: 879). The border zone therefore also constitutes a frontier for the ethnic Korean community to engage with North Korean people and learn about their conditions in everyday life, which were a major source of inspiration for Zhang’s Dooman River.

We should not disregard how Zhang’s (Korean) diasporic status, linguistic ability, and cultural insights have significantly underscored his transnational alliance – his working mobility presents an almost unrepeatable model for other (ethnic Han) Chinese filmmakers to copy.9 On the other hand, Zhang’s translocal movement has complicated the way we approach his ethnic identity and diasporic affiliation when they are defined, set in motion, and are no longer essentially confined to ‘the margins of China and Chineseness’ (Shih 2011: 711). Zhang has arguably leveraged border crossing, both in terms of film practice and discursive articulation, to disturb the centre-periphery dichotomy within which his ethnic and cultural identity and his native Yanbian are implicated. It is proposed that he could even ‘jump across’ the given scale-hierarchy (local-national-regional-global) that underpins his positioning in relation to certain reified forms of identity construct and power structures.

China’s Nationalist Party (Kuomintang/Guomindang), and the DPRK regime in its postcolonial transformations since the collapse of Manchukuo in 1945 (see Cathcart 2010; Colin 2003; Gomà 2007).

8 According to Sébastien Colin, Yanbian had its frontier opened to North Korea in the mid-1980s and South Korea in the early 1990s (Colin 2003: 2). Meanwhile, when it comes to possibilities of citizenship and legal rights, the Korean state has stipulated disparate schemes to privilege Korean-Americans over Joseonjok, the latter of whom are classified as foreign and are more regulated under low-skill work (see Seol & Skrentny 2009).

9 Jin Guanghao, also an ethnic Korean filmmaker from YKAP, won the Busan International Film Festival’s ‘New Current’ award with his debut film Life Track in 2007; this film was produced by Zhang Lu.
I do not have enough space in this study to elaborate on this, but I believe it requires a separate project to canvass the cultural productions by generations of ethnic Korean/Chaoxianzu writers, poets, playwrights, intellectuals, and so forth who have used both the Korean and Chinese language in search of diversified tropes and styles to depart from and engage ‘Yanbian’ as a geopolitical territory and discursive foothold to frame and articulate layered sense(s) of identification and national belonging.\(^{10}\) It is not to contend that Zhang Lu’s creative trajectory has necessarily interlaced with practices of these PRC-based minor artists as a collective.\(^{11}\) However, for one thing, as will be examined further, it still remains a crucial question whether we can also categorize Zhang’s cinema as part of PRC’s ethnic minority filmmaking, that is, as Chaoxianzu cinema. On the other hand, better knowledge of Chaoxianzu’s diverse cultural articulations, despite the constrained, often ideology-laden discursive sphere available in the PRC for such engagements, is integral to a more delicate understanding of Zhang Lu’s changing authorial positioning. I argue that fictions like *A Quiet Dream* (*Chun-mong*, 2016), *Ode to the Goose* (*Gunsan: geowireul noraehada*, 2018), and *Fukuoka* (2019), which were shot after Zhang relocated to Seoul, have taken a candid stance towards the issues of national identity and identification apropos of ethnic Korean subjects from Yanbian, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan, with somewhat humorous yet highly self-reflexive underpinnings.

Moreover, perhaps no connective sphere other than the international film festival network could better illustrate the dynamics of Zhang Lu’s translocal filmmaking as well as the tension with which it is entangled. Zhang’s South Korean productions often circulate under the national tag

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10 In his chapter in the anthology of contemporary Chinese literature, Mark Bender only uses a few lines to describe ‘ethnic Korean literature’ (Bender 2016). Nevertheless, there has been no lack of academic attention directed towards ethnic Korean literature (*Zhongguo chaoxianzu wenxue*) within the PRC (see H. Jin 1992; Quan & Zhao 1992; also see X. Jin 2002). Yanbian University (with its university journal published since 1974) has been playing quite a prominent role in initiating academic studies on Chaoxianzu literature and translating/introducing related research output from, for instance, South Korean academia. In 2009, the university started a long-term, state-funded, gargantuan project of a 100-volume ‘complete anthologies’ on Chaoxianzu historical documents (*chaoxianzu shiliao daquan*) (see *Zhongguo chaoxianzu shiliao quanji*).

11 I am using ‘minor’ here in the Deleuzian sense so it is not merely about the ethnic minority status of these cultural creators (also see Chapter One). For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, minor literature is best embodied through Kafka’s body of work, and it can be approached from a tripartite framing. First, it is ‘not a literature of minority language’ but one that ‘a minority makes in major language’ through the ‘determin territorialization of the language’. Hence ‘minor literature’ should not be simply equated with a ‘minority literature’, despite possible overlaps between the two. Second, it is political in connecting with ‘the question of the individual’. Third, it produces collective assemblage of utterances (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 16-19).
of ‘South Korea’ on the film festival network, as evidenced by his decision to pitch his projects at the Busan International Film Festival’s Asian Project Market, as is also the case with his romantic comedy _Gyeongju_ (2014) premiered at the 67th Locarno International Film Festival. The latter was also showcased at the New York Korean Film Festival 2014, an event launched by the non-profit Korea Society.

At the same time, Zhang’s transnational affiliations with overseas film production entities and international festival funding schemes are not isolated cases for independent filmmakers in China, considering the complicated socio-political and economic situation within the PRC to produce, distribute, and circulate arthouse films. For instance, as one of the leading Chinese independent auteurs, Jia Zhangke not only founded his film company Xstream Pictures in both Beijing and Hong Kong, he also established a long-term partnership with Japan’s Office Kitano for his second feature film, _Platform_ (Zhantai, 2000). Nonetheless, as far as Sinophone cinema is concerned, Zhang’s ethnic minority background often directs the focus away from the talk of transnational capital flow and technology transfer towards the implications of national identification. For instance, when Zhang Lu’s tenth drama feature _A Quiet Dream_, also a Korean production, was premiered at the 2016 Busan International Film Festival, Chinese online entertainment media _Tencent_ emphasized how the Chaoxianzu filmmaker situates his filmmaking in between Seoul and Beijing (‘chaoxianzu yimin houdai zhang lu: jiazaizhongguo, shiye zai hanguo [The Descendant of Chaoxianzu Immigrant Zhang Lu: Home in China, Career in Korea]’).

International film festivals ‘have become multilayered, global industrial events that link different players and entities in getting films made and shown’ (Wong 2011: 129). However, this does not necessarily mean that the festival system has already transcended its inherited linkages with national cinema and its ‘limiting’ imagination, both discursively and institutionally (see Higson 2000). Festival programming becomes increasingly autonomous and performative in addressing desired curatorial ideals, extending to the choreography of all festival sectors and including the industry segments of marketplace and pitching sessions. Thus, festival programmers or its curatorial body can actually make strategic use of (or in some cases, not use) the ‘country of origin’ to reinforce certain curatorial agendas, which are not without political significance.

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12 For instance, Zhang Lu entered his new project titled ‘Yanagawa’ for the 2018 Busan International Film Festival’s Asian Project Market (APM), and the ‘country’ was designated as ‘Korea’ (Asian Project Market).
The tags of national cinema should not be one-dimensionally equated with the author’s truth claim of identity, but they always need to be contextualized and read in light of specific programming strategies. For instance, in 2009, the Locarno International Film Festival’s Open Door, a film co-production initiative supporting independent film projects from countries ‘in the South and East’, was dedicated to Greater China (‘Open Door’). According to Frederic Maire, the festival artistic director at the time, this edition included ‘all Chinese-speaking people; i.e., continental China, Hong Kong, as well as Taiwan’ (Blaney 2009). Zhang Lu pitched his project Father for the 2009 edition of Open Door as a filmmaker from mainland China. Intriguingly, a pitch from Guo Xiaolu, a diasporic filmmaker and novelist who has based herself in London since 2002, was also included in the line-up of Greater China projects. Another example is the fourth Chinese Independent Film Festival in Tokyo in 2013, which presented a mini-retrospective of Zhang Lu with a lineup of three films (Tang Poetry, Chongqing, and Dooman River). Such a curatorial gesture somehow leveraged the high visibility and acclaim of Chinese independent cinema as one controversial genre of contemporary Chinese cinema in the film festival and global arthouse circuits.

We could assume that the international festival system has difficulties accommodating and locating translocal, transnational projects like Zhang's within its globalizing yet inconsistently structured industrial and discursive interface. But it may also be worthwhile to switch the perspective. Critical transnationalism demands that we not lose sight of the ‘scale, distribution, and diversity of such exchanges and their impact at a local level’ and the effects such exchanges might have ‘within and beyond the nation-state’ (Higbee & Lim 2010: 12). Thus, the contesting labels of ‘nationality’ on Zhang’s oeuvre actually connote how contingently yet creatively his border-crossing cinema has been in carving out alternative channels and networks and establishing different assemblages of alliance ‘within and beyond’ specific geographical and geopolitical spheres.

Three Takes of Border-Crossing

Desert Dream, Dooman River, and Scenery are three films that contest banal insights into places and senses of belonging by tracing the meandering trajectories of deterritorialized people such as immigrants, North Korean defectors, and foreign labourers. As Trinh Minh-ha insightfully points out, ‘To speak about the concept of border crossing as a major theme in contemporary cultural politics is, in a way, further to empty it, get rid of it,
or else let it drift – thereby preventing it both from settling down and being “resettled” (Trinh 2011: 46).

Zhang Lu’s obsession with events of arrival and departure can be traced back to his debut short film titled Eleven. This 15-minute-long short, shot on 35-mm film, opens with the arrival of an 11-year-old boy, together with a middle-aged man who seems to be his father, at a desolate industrial belt used to stockpile coal. The boy tries to befriend a gang of boys who are playing soccer, and his efforts are invariably doomed. The minimalist cinematic grammar in Eleven is suggestive of Zhang’s film style in its becoming: its mise-en-scène mainly consists of a monotonous landscape of coal piles, a tunnel, and a dilapidated hut. There is a sense of isolation and depression highlighted by the modernist film score, given how sparse the dialogue is in the film. Cinematic mechanisms such as the long shot and deep focus are deployed to frame a protagonist whose spatial existence is demarcated and constrained by visible or invisible grids (e.g. the track, the electric pole, the wire, and even the imaginary football pitch). Although the short itself is not specifically about journeying and mobility, it does look at how the visit of a stranger may disturb the given structure of interrelation and how it may predict acts of violence.

My analysis of Desert Dream, Dooman River, and Scenery departs from two perspectives. First, I look at how Zhang Lu leverages the narrative theme of border crossing to explore translocal connections on various scales. Another focus is on the protagonists and filming subjects regarding how translocal movement has modified their ways of identification and sense of belonging. ‘Place’ will be used in a similar fashion to Dirlik and Zhang Yingjin in order to emphasize the resistant potentiality of Zhang Lu's place-based methodology. Inspiration is also drawn from Oakes and Schein’s affirmation that ‘the concept of translocality maintains a focus on the body as a scale of spatial struggle and meaning by considering what mobility does to the body on the move and in place’ (Oakes & Schein 2006: 18). Therefore, although not highlighted in this study, translocality is grasped as a type of bodily knowledge in terms of its affective potential to engage viewers.

Desert Dream

In his third feature film Desert Dream, Zhang Lu developed a more complicated plotline where the characters are connected through parallel events of arrival and departure. Hungai (Bat-ulzii) and his family live in a yurt at the edge of the desert on the Mongolian steppe. One day, Hungai’s wife leaves for the city seeking medical care for their daughter’s hearing impairment.
A North Korean woman named Choi (Seo Jung) later stumbles on Hungai's yurt with her son Chang-ho (Shin Dong-ho).

Despite its shooting location in Mongolia and its highlighting of the issue of North Korean defectors, *Desert Dream* is not meant to scrutinize the borderland conditions and the Korean peninsula's political geography per se. The geopolitical tension is only vaguely hinted at with a brief sequence of tank patrolling. It is later suggested that Choi's husband died during the family's tragic effort to flee across the Gobi Desert and enter Mongolia, one of the well-trodden escape routes taken by defectors, but their terrifying adventure is never revealed in detail. As Zhang Lu explains, the film's original title was the Mongolian term *hyazgar*, which is specifically used to describe the borderline between the desert and grassland (see Lee 2007). It can be directly associated with Hungai's utopianist efforts to plant saplings at the edge of the steppe to fight against the encroaching desert. Supposedly, a second layer of *hyazgar* concerns the broadly defined 'boundary'. Zhang explores the translocal, transnational connections by turning to the various acts of border crossing and journeying.

Hungai takes in the defectors and welcomes them as his surrogate family. The host and his guests can hardly comprehend one another via verbal communication in Korean or Mongolian, but they manage to (mis)understand one another through a variety of alternative means such as gestures, sign language, painting, song, and even silence – a realm of bonding and knowing that goes beyond the grasp of even an omniscient audience aided by subtitles. When Hungai temporarily leaves for the city, the woman and boy are entrusted to care for the yurt and guard it until his return, and the roles between the host and guest are dramatically reversed. The consequence of the man's absence is tragic: Hungai's trader friends rape Choi when he is away. It might have been a punishment acted out on 'transgressors' like Choi, indicating the irrationality and fear directed toward people who have lost their home. The violence also signifies the rupture and inconsistency of Choi and Hungai's translocal, transcultural bond, if it had ever been achieved.

Zhang’s exploration of the circumstances of the North Korean defectors, a gesture potentially associated with the auteur’s own diasporic identity, is complicated by Hungai’s untimely and reluctant trip on horseback from his remote yurt – an empty sign of the disappearing nomadic lifestyle – to the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Seemingly unable to cope with his urban adventure and its shocking effects, Hungai finds himself a total stranger upon meeting his now fully recovered daughter and wife in a modern residential apartment. Here, a sense of loss and rootlessness connects Choi's refugeeism with Hungai's self-exile (in choosing not to follow his family to
the city and to continue to plant the saplings in the first place). The latter is symptomatic of how ‘modern society appears as a foreign country, public life as emigration from the family idyll, urban existence as a permanent exile’ (Boym 2001: 24). Therefore, Zhang’s humane approach to the issue of refugeeism is placed within a broader concern of how modern subjects constantly have to negotiate their sense of place and belonging in relation to translocal mobility and drastic social transformations. Instead of celebrating any ‘fantasy of global smooth space’ (Berry, 2010: 113), the filmmaker highlights the perils and frictions integral to the acts of border crossing. In other words, he reinvents the border zone as a new scale to position the North Korean defectors in their transnational connections with other places and other people in (East) Asia, without necessarily defusing the political urgency and precarious nature of their fleeing.

**Dooman River**

The theme of border crossing is further explored in *Dooman River*, a film named after a border river with multilingual names that insinuate the historical entanglement and regional geopolitics between China, North Korea, Russia, and Japan. This film is set and shot in a border village populated by ethnic Koreans on the Chinese side of Yanbian along the Dooman River (*Tumenjiang* in Chinese Pinyin). Zhang collaborated with a non-professional cast, with most locals and villagers playing themselves. As the filmmaker points out, the film plot was constructed upon the villagers’ everyday experiences interacting with their North Korean neighbours from the other side of the river. Twelve-year-old Chang-ho (Cui Jian) lives with his mute sister and grandfather in the village. He recently befriended a North Korean boy of about the same age named Jeong-ji (Li Jinglin) who has risked his life to cross the frozen river in winter in search of food for his starving family. The continual arrival of escaping North Koreans starts to disturb the village’s tranquil pace of life, and border control and patrolling tighten on both sides. Chang-ho’s friendship with Jeong-ji also reaches a freezing point after he has learnt about his sister’s rape by an anonymous North Korean defector to whom his family had kindly offered shelter.

*Dooman River* is an ambitious lifework that Zhang Lu had always dreamt of accomplishing. He had partially experimented with the idea, namely with characters like the North Korean defectors in *Desert Dream*. Through

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13 Regarding the Sino-Korean border dispute, refer to Gomà (2007); and also Shen & Dong (2011).
2.1 Chang-ho lying on the frozen river

this film, the director wanted to ‘describe how this river could integrate both people, make them be in close connection, and how it could isolate and estrange them, which is sometimes transparent, sometimes inundated or sterile’ (The Global Film Initiative 2011: 3). Departing from the river border, Zhang examines the translocal connections between three Korean communities across the PRC and the Korean peninsula. The border village is not one-dimensionally portrayed as a peaceful ‘home’ invaded by the North Korean border-crossers and transgressors but rather as a site to negotiate multiple Korean identities as well as the regional geopolitical and economic entanglements implicated in such identifications. Accordingly, the filmmaker not only turned to defectors and refugees from North Korea, who crossed the river either in guerrilla style (as Jeong-ji and his young friends did) or by organized action. He also looked at Korean-Chinese villagers who have migrated to South Korea as foreign labourers, as is the case with Chang-ho’s absent mother, who is never seen but only heard on the phone when she calls home.

It is intriguing to see how Zhang has again complicated the acts of border crossing. The various forms of mobilities registered by the defectors and migrant workers illustrate the inequality and hierarchy inherent in the translocal connections across borders. Refugeeism foregrounds regional geopolitical complicacy and the precarious conditions of the border crossers from North Korea, but the Korean-Chinese migrants’ trajectory is no less
prescribed and delimited by the power structure of global capitalism. As suggested by Zhang Yingjin, the politics of Dirlik’s project on ‘place-based imagination’ lies in how it modifies the local-global asymmetry and its agenda in giving voices to the weak over ‘the voices of globalism that erase both people and places’ (quoted in Zhang 2010: 6). We can see how Zhang Lu seeks to retool the border as a new trans-national, inter-regional dimensionality to mediate the ‘local-global’ dichotomy. Therefore, border crossing has constituted a vantage point to shed light on people and places that were previously obscured by the globalist discourse.

Second, and more importantly, a new scale as such is also utilized to rethink the Korean-Chinese identity and its diasporic affiliation. Towards the film’s end, Chang-ho, protesting in vain against Jeong-ji being taken away by the PRC border police, jumps off the roof. We could interpret Chang-ho’s suicidal jump as a demonstration of the villagers’ unrequited love for their aggressive neighbours, but we can also consider it as a violent, emotionally charged eruption of the frustration and anger over the impossibility of formulating a bond of affection across borders that potentially relates to a unified sense of being Korean and belonging to one community.

In *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (Tongnian wangshi, 1985) by Taiwanese arthouse maestro Hou Hsiao-Hsien, a stubborn grandmother wants to follow a railway in suburban Taiwan to return to her hometown in Southern China. In *Dooman River*, similarly there is an old lady from the village who seems
to suffer from dementia and persistently searches for her way back to the side that is today’s North Korea. The closing credit sequence of *Dooman River* then features a horizontally composed long-take shot, where from a distance we see a tiny black figure, which is the old village lady, moving excruciatingly slowly on a snow-covered bridge over the river. Her futile efforts to find her way home, together with the repeated tale about how she held her mother’s hand and crossed a bridge over the river to the China side when she was still young, are poignantly interwoven with Zhang Lu’s moving family history of migration and displacement. Nevertheless, Zhang engages the border village, border river, and all types of border crossers not to envision and eulogize ‘a sense of grandiose transnational belonging and connection with dispersed others of similar historical origins’ (Ang 2001: 12) but to address the impossibility of homecoming and to problematize a homogeneous, essentialized idea of ‘homeland’.

**Scenery**

In 2013, Zhang Lu was commissioned by South Korea’s Jeonju International Film Festival to complete a digital short under the theme of ‘stranger’ for the festival’s annual omnibus initiative. The result was *Over There* (2013), a work inspired by the filmmaker’s experience after settling down in Seoul and seeing more foreign workers than foreign tourists in the city (see Ji 2013).
As Zhang’s first venture into documentary, foreign workers of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds are interviewed in the metropolitan area of Seoul, with a majority of the interviewees coming from developing countries across Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific (including central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan).  

Zhang then developed Over There into the feature-length Scenery (2013), considering the ‘scenery’ one made of strangers on the street. This documentary work arguably marked a turning point in Zhang’s translocal filmmaking. Observing South Korean society at closer range by living inside it, Zhang reframed his diasporic perspective to develop a new format of place-based imagination. His focus shifted away from his survey of intersecting Korean communities at the border area to the translocal subjects living on the margins of Korean society.

Instead of simply taking up an on-the-spot observational style to record the daily lives and working routines of foreign immigrants, most of whom are low-wage manual labourers, Zhang proportionally uses static long takes to foreground a heterogeneous urban landscape, of which these migrants are becoming an essential part. The filmmaker turns to an array of nondescript places such as working sites (e.g. a workshop, office, factory, greenhouse, market, and abattoir), private realms (e.g. a home and dormitory), public spaces for gathering and socializing (e.g. a church, mosque, market, and

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14 According to the central government organization for statistics, Statistics Korea (KOSTAT), the number of employed foreigners amounted to 962,000 people as of 2016, with a majority of them being ‘Korean-Chinese’ (45.9 percent) (see '2016 Foreigner Labour Force Survey' 2016)
ethnic enclaves), and sites for transportation and passage (e.g. the subway and airport). Such a methodology is reminiscent of Zhang Yingjin's thesis that 'the notion of the translocal acknowledges the coexistence of different locals in the same urban area, albeit in different spaces and places; it also means that not all locals are equally indigenous to a locality, thereby leaving room for questions of migration and diaspora' (Zhang 2010: 75). Zhang Lu's observational segments are also uncanny in capturing several moments of disappearance: upon the arrival of the subway, waiting passengers are suddenly gone; a swing in the park moves without a rider; a toy tricycle glides with no one pedalling it. These spectral moments connote the untimely arrival or departure of subjects absent from the spectators' sight, which is symptomatic of the haunting, unrecognized presence of the immigrant labourers.

Oakes and Schein pose that translocality has enabled us to view subject formation as 'a place-making process imbricated with the experience (real or imaginary) of mobility and connection across space and scale' (Oakes & Schein 2006: 20). They pose that place travels with the body, 'as it is constantly being made and remade as part of the ongoing process' in constructing the subject (ibid.). Scenery invents an innovative way to explore how such a place-making process is corporeally and affectively experienced by inviting the subjects to speak about their most memorable dreams during their stay in Korea. Blurring the dividing line between fiction and reality and between the private and the collective, dream-telling is used in this documentary as a powerful narrative device to trace the translocal connections and flows
that overwrite the foreign migrants and restructure their sense of affiliation and belonging as embodied experiences.

The dreams suggest how transnational identity formation for migrant workers is a negotiated process that also generates a complicated range of repressed desire, yearning, and feelings such as confusion, fear, despair, and anger, and also an affective dimension of the precarious labour that has often been ignored or paid little attention to. The stylized ‘talking heads’ interview sequence tightly frames the interviewees against generic backdrops to underscore a sense of immobility and stereotype, whereas the dream-telling sequence constitutes an act of remembrance and performance that liberates the subjects and allows them to engage with other temporalities, places, and experiences. For instance, the documentary opens with the narration of Augustino, a young man from East Timor whom we later see giving an interview while preparing to leave the country in a well-lit airport lobby. Augustino confesses that in his dreams of East Timor, he often meets and chats with his mother who had passed away. With slight variations, several of the shared dreams are about hometowns; relationships with families, friends, and lovers; nightmarish visions; or wishful thinking of returning, reunion, or becoming successful on foreign soil. Some narratives are an intriguing mixture of dreams during sleep and those strived for in waking life.

Despite its focus on migrant workers, Scenery does not privilege an activist tendency that seeks to interrogate the precarious human-rights conditions of immigrants under the political economy of globalization. The film also shifts away from directly drawing on the labourers’ accounts of their everyday struggles or hints of success in order to elicit sympathetic responses from audiences. In archiving dreams and delineating an assemblage of sensibilities and feelings that these mobile subjects have yet to fully recognize and articulate, this documentary proffers audiences an alternative perspective to engage the politics of translocal mobility. The politics does not simply lie in how the film reveals that the migrants’ modes of experiences are as much contingent on the hierarchical global neoliberalism system within which South Korea and other developing countries in Asia are unequally positioned. More importantly, the politics concerns how Zhang’s documentary experimentation has disturbed the ‘meaningful fabric of the sensible’ (Rancière 2011: 63) that defines ‘who can say and hear what, where and when’ (Demos 2013: 28), in modifying the ways migrant subjects could make themselves visible and audible, thereby creating new horizons for spectators to see and hear ‘people caught in the cracks of globalization’ (Ezra & Rowden 2006: 7).
Between Chinese Independent Cinema and Korean Diaspora Film

Re-envisioning the Chinese Indie

This concluding section turns to how Zhang’s translocal filmmaking has intersected Chinese independent cinema with Korean (and Korean-Chinese) diaspora filmmaking, where ‘borders’ have been invented as a new scale to interrogate but also to connect to the practice and discourse of translocality in both film modes. The first highlight is how Zhang’s place-based imagination has interconnected with and also extends Chinese independent cinema’s diversified projects of ‘visualizing polylocality’ (see Zhang 2010). In the context of this study, Chinese independent cinema is used as an umbrella term to encompass a wide spectrum of fiction and documentary works emerging since around the late 1980s that have been produced, circulated, and exhibited outside of the party-state’s ideological apparatus as well as outside of the domestic mainstream film market.

Since the early 2000s, the political economy of Chinese independent cinema has been further diversified and differentiated, with more independent filmmakers actively seeking to obtain screening permits from the censor in order to gain access to domestic theatres. The introduction of digital video cameras to the PRC since the early 2000s and the proliferation of online media channels and digital platforms have also opened up unprecedented opportunities for amateur filmmakers to produce and circulate their own works. Also labelled the ‘Urban Generation’, Chinese independent filmmakers respond to and work through the disorienting and destructive process of urbanization and city-making in contemporary China. Their works often seek to engage the tension between polylocality and translocality by turning to different modes of mobility, experiences of entrapment, migration (mostly internal), and displacement as well as various groups of marginalized, floating urban subjects (e.g. migrant workers).

As suggested earlier, Zhang Lu’s filmmaking originates from within Beijing’s dynamic cultural milieu (his debut, Eleven, was shot in collaboration with a crew of Beijing Film Academy students), even though when he first started out he had barely any affiliations with the local independent film circle. His debut short film is a highly personal, self-reflexive experimentation that can be interpreted as a middle-aged man’s haunting dream about his own childhood. However, the dystopian spatiality as well as the estranged human relation also overlap with the recurrent tropes found in other Chinese independent works. Although Zhang’s first feature Tang Poetry was already a co-production project
with Korea, it was not until his second feature *Grain in the Ear* (*Mangzhong*, 2005) that Zhang consciously directed his attention toward the ethnic Korean people as well as their multifarious connections with the two Koreas.

Notably, in his 2010 monograph on polylocality and contemporary Chinese cinemas, Zhang Yingjin had yet to shift his attention to a spectrum of independent films (both documentary and fiction works) that structure their place-based imagination around ethnic minority identities, cultures, communities, and the spaces of these ethnic groups (which were usually used as shooting locations).\(^{15}\) These productions themselves deserve a thorough analysis that is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, these films can be called ‘new ethnic films’ – for lack of a better term – in order to differentiate these works from the Chinese national cinema's ideologically and politically sanitized genre of ‘ethnic minority films/ minority nationalities film’ (*Shaoshu minzu dianying*). Specifically, ethnic minority films are closely associated with the PRC’s centralized studio system in the Mao era. They often feature ‘picturesque landscapes, melodious music and song, beautiful costumes, exotic customs, and romantic love’, which are motifs that had been integral to espousing cross-ethnicity solidarity under the Chinese Communist Party’s enlightenment and guidance (Zhang 2004: 208). Importantly, in these ‘minority films’, minority people hardly occupy a position as the subject of knowledge but ‘are always directed to pay their homage to the nation-state’ (Zhang 1997: 80).\(^{16}\) Chris Berry further suggests that ‘minority nationalities films’ currently need to be reconsidered given that ‘central control has given way to a market economy and citizen initiative’, when the minority nationalities start to tell ‘their own stories’ (Berry 2016: 90).

Into the 2000s, for instance, we see the emergence of a ‘Tibetan New Wave’, namely ‘indie Tibetan-language films made by native Tibetans’ that also exhibit ‘a particular genre and cultural theme concerning the current state of Tibetan life in China’ (Yü 2014: 126). Pema Tseden is the most representative auteur of this genre. All of his independently produced works (which are submitted to the state for legitimization, for obvious reasons) are widely circulated at international film festivals. These films usually register a minimalist realist style characterized by ‘the use of Tibetan language, all Tibetan cast and crew as well as Tibetan location’ (‘Tibetan

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15 With this said, in one of his 1997 articles, Zhang Yingjin indeed examined the ideology of ‘Chineseness’ in reviewing Chinese film history, wherein he closely examined the genre of ‘minority film’, that is, the ethnic minority film, or *shaoshuminzu dianying*.

New Wave Cinema’). Vanessa Frangville posits that Pema Tseden’s oeuvre has constituted a ‘minor’ cinema in creating space for the virtual community of Tibetan people to emerge and speak for themselves (see Frangville 2016). However, Dan Smyer Yü leverages the notion of ‘transnational’ to situate Pema Tseden’s filmmaking and his cinematic approach to Tibetan Buddhist values within its multi-scalar connectivity with China (between Beijing – his ‘pre- and post-production and marketing location’ – and Qinghai/Amdo as ‘his homeland and filming site’) and beyond (Yü 2014: 126).

According to Chris Berry, the fact that Pema Tseden is a ‘minority nationality’ doesn’t necessarily mean that he makes ‘minority nationality films’ (2016: 90), an assumption that could also be extended to Zhang Lu. However, questions arise when we turn to Han-Chinese filmmakers who approach ethnic minority identities and their communities. Would identity politics constitute a productive discursive framework for us to scrutinize such a diverse body of new ethnic films?

As an example, consider Tuya’s Marriage (Tuya de hunshi, 2006), a film that competed in the 2007 Berlin International Film Festival along with Desert Dream. Director Wang Quan'an turns to a Mongolian woman called Tuya (Yu Nan) and her ethnic community in Inner Mongolia. We may problematize the fact that the protagonists in this film speak slightly accented Mandarin, while the Mongolian language is only used as non-diegetic sound and in songs. However, Wang succeeds in examining the local Mongolian community’s anxieties over modern transformation by turning to Tuya’s persistent search for remarriage partners. Throughout the process, she struggles to reposition herself as a woman, wife, and mother in a reconfigured socioeconomic fabric that seems to put more value on commodity exchange and economic calculation.

An equally intriguing case might be Li Ruijun’s River Road (Jia zai shuicaofengmao de defang, 2014), a road movie (not by car but on camel) lamenting the ruined nomadic landscape and the disappearing ethnic Yugur (yugu) culture. The film is set in Su’nan Yugur Autonomous County in the filmmaker’s native province of Gansu in China. As part of the preparation, Li even had his nonprofessional cast (a mixture of Yugur and Han) trained to speak the dying Old Turkic language. We may say that Li, whose independent arthouse productions to date mainly rely on international film festivals for distribution and circulation, is motivated by a strong preservationist if not exhibitionist drive in rediscovering the remote landscape and the eroded cultural traditions of the Yugurs and of Gansu. But it would be reductionist if we were to only emphasize Li’s identity as ethnically Han to undermine his continuing efforts since his earlier works such as The Old Donkey (Laolutou,
Independent Filmmaking Across Borders in Contemporary Asia

2010) and Fly with the Crane (Gaosu tamen, wo cheng baihequle, 2012) in scrutinizing how people from some of the least developed rural areas in China have painfully negotiated the process of urbanization and modernization.17

Generally speaking, Zhang Lu has dialogued with and even occasionally participated in Chinese independent cinema’s artistic intervention in disrupting and redefining the ideologically rigid and hierarchical (centralized) apparatus of image production and circulation in the PRC. Here, Chinese independent cinema’s artistic intervention includes but is not limited to practices of deploying accents and dialects (sometimes ethnic languages), representing regional/remote locales and the migrating/floating populations across the expansive territory of the PRC, and, importantly, utilizing their rhizomatic, variously scaled networks of exhibition and circulation within and outside of the PRC, the last of which have also significantly intersected with the proliferating digital online media and video platforms nowadays. Meanwhile, a perspective of translocality could be revamped to contest any essentialist division between Han-Chinese and non-Han ethnicities when we consider the independent filmmakers’ authorship/authorial positionality. Translocality can also be useful in revealing how Zhang Lu’s border-crossing films interrelate with these new ethnic films at two levels. At one level, by reinventing scales to explore border zones, frontiers, and the marginalized territories extending beyond national borders, Zhang’s filmmaking joins forces with the latter in disturbing the conventional geographical and geopolitical imagination of China and the Han-Chinese ideology in independent works. In other words, both cinemas have contested Chinese independent cinema’s seemingly habitual (dis)engagements with the issues of identity through rethinking ‘Chineseness’ – whether it correlates with continental Chinese culture, the Chinese nation-state, its ethnic constituents, or the use of Chinese languages.

At another level, we may also grasp the ‘heightened sense of polylocality’ (Zhang 2010: 90) in Chinese independent cinema and the sensibilities

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17 In future studies, it may be productive to see how the ‘new ethnic films’ mentioned here, including those by Li, can be related to the so-called New Chinese Cinema in the 1980s by the Fifth Generation filmmakers that also feature ethnic minority characters and places, such as Zhang Nuanxin’s Sacrificed Youth (Qingchunji, 1985), which turned to the remote mountain area where the Dai (Thai) people lives. Zhang Yingjin proposed how New Chinese Cinema as a whole, including ethnic minority-themed works like Sacrificed Youth, arguably functioned as a ‘minority discourse’ vis-à-vis the state discourse; at the same time, these works of New Cinema also ‘participated in reshaping cultural nationalism in contemporary China’ with its ‘characteristic, or even obsessive, fascination with an entire repertoire of recognizable cultural symbols and traditions in the nation’ (Zhang 1997: 82-84).
toward the local and global imbalance in light of what Raymond Williams terms the ‘structures of feeling’, namely the sets of social relations and experiences that are yet to be fully consolidated into fixed structures but have already manifested themselves as a certain tendency and style, given that the drastic modern transformations are still ongoing in everyday life. Therefore, Zhang’s oeuvre connects with the structures of feeling or the multifarious vernacular experiences of urbanization and globalization found in the independent works that are not necessarily produced or located at the centre of China or Chineseness.

**A Korean-Chinese Diaspora Film?**

In this part of conclusion, I want to briefly turn to how Zhang’s translocal filmmaking can help us to grasp a possible Korean-Chinese diaspora film, although it is a pity that I will not be further analyzing Zhang’s film works produced since *Gyeongju*, which may help to extend some of the debates presented here. In the context of critiquing Chinese diasporic identity, Ien Ang cautions against the tendency to essentialize diaspora as the ‘sameness-in-dispersal’ instead of ‘difference-in-togetherness’, thus pointing out that diasporic identity ‘can be the site of both support and oppression, emancipation and confinement’ (Ang 2001: 12). Wang Yiman, however, shifts her attention to the ‘symbolic and affective significance’ of ‘home’ and the ‘imagined togetherness’ of the diasporic formation, proposing that we should see how the diasporic filmmakers, not unlike their diegetic characters, relate to their ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ laterally, in a contingent manner (Wang 2012: 537–538). What has been proposed by Wang also connotes a cultural transversalism that underlines the framing of minor transnationalism. I shall argue that the transversal perspective helps to dislocate the minority and the diasporic from a hierarchical model that valorizes ‘the most dominant and the most resistant’, so that the ‘horizontal communication’ amongst minority cultures as well as the ‘postcolonial minor cultural formations across national boundaries’ can be made visible and compared (Lionnet & Shih 2005: 11).

It is by now well known that some of the most inspirational discussions on Korean diaspora filmmaking nowadays can be found in the studies on

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18 In September 2014, Harvard University’s Korea Institute programmed a ‘Korean Cinema and Transnationality’ film series, in which Zhang Lu’s *Dooman River* was screened under the title of ‘Korean-Chinese Diaspora Film’. Their use of this term has been adopted. See https://korea.fas.harvard.edu/event/korean-cinema-and-transnationality-film-series.
zainichi or Koreans-in-Japan cinema culture (see Dew 2016; Ko 2010; Ogawa 2017; also see Wada-Marciano 2012). Despite the consideration of zainichi as the ‘diaspora without a homeland’ (see Ryang & Lie 2009), diaspora as a research framework is not necessarily foregrounded with equal emphasis in zainichi cinema studies. It is tempting to view Zhang Lu’s transnational, translocal trajectory in light of his trans-generational zainichi Korean filmmaker counterparts such as Sai Yōichi, Yang Yong-hi, and Matsue Tetsuaki (a third-generation naturalized when he was young), to name just a few.

Zainichi Korean filmmakers have taken different points of departure when they work on identity issues to articulate senses of belonging. At the level of film production and circulation, however, while zainichi filmmakers are seen as mostly being integrated within the Japanese film industry and domestic networks, it is also noticeable that the filmmaker Yang Yong-hi – who is the daughter of a high-ranking member of Chongryun (The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), which is the DPRK’s de facto embassy in Japan – was able to obtain South Korean nationality later and leverage her South Korean connections to find new audiences and sources for funding (Ogawa 2017: 33). Shota Ogawa also reminds us that, ‘Other Zainichi Korean talents such as Sai Yoichi, Kim Su-jin, and Lee Bong-ou have, for instance, carved out a niche in the film industry by actively collaborating with South Korean studios, producers, and directors’ (ibid.).

In comparison, with hardly any connections to the Chinese film industry,20 Zhang Lu has developed closer ties with film and cultural entities and filmmakers’ communities in South Korea. The bonds have become even stronger since he moved to Seoul, considering how Zhang was able to convince the trio of A-list Korean actors Ahn Sung-ki, Moon So-ri, and Park

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19 Sometimes the articulations by second- and third-generation filmmakers can take rather confessional, self-reflexive, and tension-filled forms. In his survey on video documentaries by (Japan-born) second/third-generation zainichi filmmakers within a framework of ‘intimate ethnography’, for instance, Oliver Dew has illustrated how filmmakers like Matsue Tetsuaki (third generation) and Yang Yong-hi (second generation) have leveraged the format of ‘family portrait’ to work through and react to ‘familial’ traumas, that is ‘the dilemma faced by the first generation of diasporic Koreans-in-Japan, between “assimilating” into Japanese society or “repatriating” to Korea’. Dew has illuminated how, through their own embodied performance in the documentaries, Matsue and Yang have attempted to ‘salvage the agency of their ancestors from overdetermining historical narratives’ (Dew 2016:190).

20 With this said, it is also worthy noticing that Zhang Lu’s 11th feature film Ode to the Goose and the 2019 film Fukuoka have been distributed by PARALLAX Films, the distribution arm of Midnight Blur Films (Wuyeshijiao), which is self-labelled as a ‘Chinese film production company, devoted to developing and producing director-driven films, both commercial and arthouse’ (see ‘About Midnight Blur Films’ n.d.).
Hae-il to volunteer for his experimental feature *Love and ... (Pilreumsidaesarang, 2015)*, which was developed from a short film commissioned by a Korean film festival. Arguably, Zhang’s diasporic affiliation has effectively constituted the lines of flight through which he not only positions himself outside of the aforementioned strand of ‘ethnic minority film’ in the PRC. He is also able to disregard the worrying environment and constraints faced by independent arthouse filmmaking within the PRC, where ethnic minority topics often entail extra censorship procedures that even involve decisions from bodies such as the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (*The CFI Guide to Film Production in China*).

Although I can only mention this in passing, another aspect regarding Korean diasporic cinema that is relevant here is the so-called Soviet/Russian Koreans, the *Koryo saram*. For instance, film scholar and filmmaker Kim So-young reflects on her documentary project about the Koryo people, the Korean diaspora in Eurasia that entered Russia around the 1860s and were deported by Stalin to Central Asia in 1937 (see G. Kim 1993; G.N. Kim 2004; German N. Kim & King 2001). In *Heart of Snow, Heart of Blood* (2014), the first documentary of her ‘Exile Trilogy’ series (2014-2017), Kim turns to how Alex Kim, one of the Uzbekistan-born Koryo diaspora protagonists, struggles to survive in an ethnic town near Seoul since his ‘return’ to South Korea. Kim grasps Koryo identity in terms of the traumatic experiences of ‘exclusion, deportation, migration, and state violence’ (Kim 2016). In *Goodbye My Love, North Korea* (2017), the finale of her trilogy, Kim traces back the drifting trajectories of eight North Korean students at Moscow Film School who became political exiles in 1958 after denouncing Kim Il-Sung. Kim So-young has arguably taken a place-based methodology to shift away from a macro-chronology revolving around the axis of ‘origin and return’ and to pay attention to the rhizomatic trajectories of migration and mobility. She posits that ‘The dispersion and dissemination might trigger a productive re-orientation of a geopolitical sense of sovereignty centred on the peninsula, which has been the stage of a protracted turf war between the big powers of China, Russian, Japan, and the US’ (Kim 2016). Seen from such a perspective, Zhang Lu’s border-crossing works have proffered no less compelling narratives regarding the complicacy of Korean-Chinese diasporic formation. I shall contend that translocality constitutes a useful framework to thread together the disparate strands of Korean diaspora filmmaking across multiple locales, not in terms of any homogenized identification with a homeland but exactly through envisioning how the formation of diasporic identities has been a painful, contingent process of fragmentation, friction, and differentiation.
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