

The Urban in the Ruins: Studies of Ecotopia in Chinese Urban Texts in the 2000s

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In China, as well as other parts of the world, works that connect urbanization, environment, and art reflect a growing trend and tell an inconvenient truth. The past decade was witness to China's exhibition of its power. The same decade, however, saw a massive loss of life in natural disasters, and a perpetual demolition and construction that led to the displacement of Chinese people in the name of progress. A sense of the uncanny has become part of the daily life of China. The proposed project serves as part of the larger monograph, that I am currently working on, on the relationship of ruins, nature, and creativity in post-socialist Chinese literary and filmic texts; investigating in particular the role of "nature" in the shared imagination of the post-socialist urban. The proposed project to be completed during the stay at Rachel Carson Center will be a major part of the monograph, examining the ways in which literature and independent films have become effective means of drawing attention to both the reckless development and the depletion of rural life due to marketization and globalization. The project will shed light on the impact of urbanization and modernization on nature, urban landscapes, and the quotidian by analyzing literary and filmic texts.

The bigger monograph project looks at five subjects that are of great consequence to contemporary Chinese writers and filmmakers—the rural landscape, water, animals, the city, and commodities—and traces the ways these subjects are discussed, appropriated, challenged, and reflected upon. Rather than dealing directly with environmental issues, these writers and filmmakers forge a new relationship with nature and the countryside by creating forms of ecotopia, which shapes their identity and allows them to come to terms with the realities of post-socialist China. The proposed project will adopt an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, cross-media approach to the study of urban environments in Chinese literature and independent films. This project aims to trace the intricate relationship between rural and urban landscapes in post-socialist China, where the former is reimagined in the latter. It is hoped that by tracing these new relationships, we will show how writers and filmmakers challenge the orthodox political histories that celebrate economic success at all costs, and how they offer ways to reconnect with the lost countryside and its memories. The texts produced in the early 2000s do not present the countryside as a refuge; instead, they acknowledge the untraceable and unapproachable aspect of the rural landscape, which is often associated with a home the authors have lost. The only way to reimagine the

relationship is to reconnect with specific elements in nature—land, water, animals; and commodities.