

*Configuring the Anthropocene Visuality and Countervisuality of the East
River in China*
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Anthropocene visuality, as framed by visual scholar Nichols Mirzoeff (2014), is an imperial visualization regime that renders human's conquering of nature as natural, righteous and beautiful. The Anthropocene visuality produces an aestheticization of nature's degradation as well as an anesthesia of our senses towards ecocatastrophes. It is essential to cultivate a countervisuality which observes "the right to look" (Mirzoeff, 2011; 2014) at the Anthropocene crisis and form new sensibilities and political actions. While Mirzoeff mainly situates his analysis of the Anthropocene visuality in western history and visual culture, in my research project I will contextualize this analytical tool in Chinese society and visual culture.

The major subject of visuality I will contemplate is the East River (Dong Jiang as in Chinese) in the Chinese Pearl River Delta, which plays an essential role in China's ecology and development but lacks analytical research from environmental humanities. I will examine how the East River is visualized with Anthropocentric aesthetics through China's socialist, post-socialist and globalization history using several key visual materials. I will also look at potential countervisualities that engage with different "stories" (Serenella & Oppermann, 2014) of the more-than-human actors in the East River ecology and cosmology. Apart from turning my research into an academic paper, I will further develop an essay film project "Storying with the Qingxi River" (working title) I have been conducting for years on the East River, as an artistic intervention to further practice countervisuality.

The East River is one of the three tributaries of the Pearl River that flows across southern Chinese mega cities and prosperous industrial areas including Guangzhou, Dongguan, Shenzhen and Hong Kong. It is referred to as the lifeblood for sustaining the economic and urban life in the region, while simultaneously enduring severe ecological degradation due to anthropogenic activities. The East River could be seen as a hyperobject (Morton, 2013) of the Chinese Anthropocene, which bears the features of anthropogenic remodeling resulting from socialist construction, post-socialist marketization, globalization, fragmented environmental authoritarianism, etc. and yet it's constantly phasing beyond our grasp of its full extent. Such aspects include the irregular hydrological variations due to climate change, the flow and composting of toxins and heavy metals influencing the river's ecology (Yang et al., 2018).

In popular Chinese visual productions, the East River is often visualized as a vitality force in threefold: it's a "red" river that environs the communist guerilla resistance against the Japanese army in the 2nd Sino-Japanese War; it's a "mother" river which nourishes the Hong Kong compatriots through serious droughts; it's a wild force to be conquered and utilized for economic production through modern technologies such as dams, hydroelectric power stations, factories, etc. The visuality of the East River is charged with anthropomorphism and

developmentalist aesthetics, which render the industrial pollution, ecological degradation and biopolitics of the river economy invisible and anesthetized.

I will trace countervisualities in alternative stories of different actors in the East River ecology, such as female migrant workers' factory poems that uncover the "slow violence" of the world factory upon the migrant females' bodies and psyches (Zhou, 2017); the pollution-induced sex-reversal fish; the water hyacinths once imported to feed farmers' pigs but rapidly growing into a dominant invasive species . . . I will also develop my on-going essay film project on the river ecology in my hometown, an industrial town named Qingxi (which means "clear creek" in Chinese) through which the East River flows. I have been documenting the river's change in my town on and off through photographs, videos, and sounds for the past several years. I will thread the collected materials into a diverse stream of stories that highlight the affective and material mediation of the river.

Overall, this research aims to further bring the discussion of Anthropocene visibility and countervisuality in the Chinese society through an interdisciplinary approach and generate both academic and artistic output. It will contribute to the transdisciplinary approach to access the "many Anthropocenes" (Toivanen et al., 2017) beyond current Eurocentric discourse, while also contributing to the growing field of Chinese environmental humanities.