JCFS CFP for a Special Issue:
Vernacular New Waves
—Translocality, Affect, and Connectivity in Contemporary Chinese Cinema

A Special Issue of the *Journal of Chinese Film Studies*

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This special issue of JCFS uses "vernacular new waves" as a framing and critical heuristic. It does so to capture and highlight an assemblage of ongoing place-inspired, locally-situated, and/or topolect/accent-based cinema and media/visual culture movements and projects emerging from the interrelated spheres and infrastructures of art/film education and criticism, cultural production, and film circulation/exhibition across China since the 2010s.

The 2010s has arguably witnessed the emergence of what one may call the "new" New Wave (*xin xinlangchao*) filmmakers who were born in and/or are based at second-/third-tier Chinese urban centres and provincial cities such as Hangzhou, Chongqing, Guiyang, and the Chaoshan (Teoswa) area (Eastern Guangdong, comprising of Chaozhou, Shantou, and Jieyang). The regional turn also encompasses works by up-and-coming filmmakers from ethnically diverse areas like Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. For instance, Qinghai-born auteur Pema Tseden's (1969–2023) filmmaking practices and oeuvre could be taken as a transgenerational linchpin connecting his own Amdo-dialect-speaking works with other emerging talents and their works that he helped nurture, such as Sonthar Gyal, Lhapal Gyal, Dukar Tserang, and Jigme Trinley, whose activities would expand what is known as Tibetan New Wave. Additionally, the phenomenon of "*Dongbei* Renaissance" (*Dongbei wenyi fuxing*) has re-aligned the PRC's Northeastern provinces' historical pasts and worked through their post-industrial transformations with its cross-genre explorations in literature, film & television drama, platform-based short video, and popular music. Meanwhile, since the late 2010s, debates surrounding "New South Writing" (*xin nanfang xiezuo*) have shifted attention toward writers whose literary creations engage with Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan and extending to Macau and Hong Kong. What cultural critics have foregrounded in these "Southern" subjectivities, localities, and imaginaries–openness, fluidity, and unconventionality (Yang 2021)—also prompts us to envision an equivalent "New South" cinema.

Distinct from their Urban Generation predecessors including Jia Zhangke, Wang Chao, and Wang Xiaoshuai, whose works have also canvassed non-cosmopolitan centers such as Fenyang, Datong, Anyang, Wuhan, and the Three Gorges area, and occasionally spoken local dialects, the new New Waves auteurs have burst onto the Chinese arthouse screens and domestic and international film festival worlds with works that feature the extensive use of topolects and dialects, ethnic minority languages, and soundscapes. Moreover, these aspiring filmmakers—often educated in specialized film production programs in China and overseas—have demonstrated great

enthusiasm and curiosities to experiment with various forms of storytelling and style so as to leverage and reconfigure their native places, provincial areas, and the local socio-urban transformations as spatial, ethnographic, affective, and aesthetic resources for their creative work. Necessarily reconfigured within the changing cultural governance in the 2010s and partially facilitated by the coming into effect of the Film Industry Promotion Law (*dianying chanye cujinfa*) in 2017, as well as the 14th Five-Year Plan for Chinese Film Development issued in 2021, the development of the new New Waves have been closely associated with the re-generation of China's art cinema (*yishu dianying*) as a much more clearly defined terrain of the Chinese film industry. That is, the happening of new New Waves needs to be grasped within an unevenly-distributed institutional, infrastructural, and technological environment and media ecology comprising governmental, public, and private entities and schemes intersecting across the components of production, distribution, exhibition, circulation, film education and criticism that are often translocally–namely local to local–configured and articulated.

With this special issue, we explore the critical horizons, methodologies, and intellectual interfaces that enable a complex understanding of the "vernacular" in relation to spatial-affective formations such as *guxiang* (native place), *difang* (place/locality), *bendi* (the local), *zaidi* (local situatedness), and so forth. The framing of "vernacular new waves" therefore does not simply draw attention to the linguistic aspects of the films, such as their use of topolects, accents, and related soundscapes; it also underscores multisited filmmaking practices that are closely associated with place-based histories and environments and locally grounded in specific sociocultural milieus, while attending to the sensibilities and affective flows with which these practices are entangled. At the same time, these "new waves" intersect with various forms and infrastructures of cultural production, circulation, and distribution. Specifically, translocality, which, according to Tim Oakes and Louisa Schein, concerns "a simultaneous analytical focus on mobilities *and* localities" (2006, 1), may help us understand how these new waves move across scales and forge connections among the local, the provincial/regional, the national, and the global. This raises one overarching question: have these vernacular new waves reconfigured the imaginaries of Chinese national cinema, or does their presence instead inspire us to discover refreshing, alternative critical horizons?

Intriguingly, the recent, much-discussed runaway hit *Dear You* (*Gei Ama de Qingshu*) is a Teochew-language transgenerational family drama by Shantou-born filmmaker Lan Hongchun. The film evokes the poignant histories of Teoswa-born Chinese who migrated to Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand while struggling from afar to support the families they had left behind. Unlike Lan's previous Teochew-language films, which performed well primarily in Guangdong, *Dear You* grossed RMB 1.99 billion (USD 293.4 million) across mainland China (Wong 2026) and was also released theatrically in markets including the UK, Ireland, France, Japan, and North America. The unprecedented success of *Dear You* provokes us to ponder the blurring of the division between art cinema and mainstream commercial cinema in China today. More importantly, we may wonder whether *Dear You* constitutes a new strand of national cinema or whether its treatment of diasporicity allows for more nuanced ways to comprehend the interrelations between the translocal and the national.

With these concerns in mind, this special issue invites contributions on topics including, but not limited to, those raised by the following questions:

- How might interrogating "the new"—the cultural dynamics and politics of emerging happenings and cultural trends—through the projects in question refresh our political and aesthetic imaginations of China/Chineseness?
- How might these trans-genre waves and happenings in film and media culture illuminate interdisciplinary and relational inquiries pertaining to translocality, affect (e.g., structures of feeling and sentiments), and geographical/ecological connectivity?
- How might we grasp their cinematic and media imaginaries regarding the interrelations between the centre and the periphery, between the communal and the personal, between the terrestrial and the oceanic, between the urban and the rural, and between the South (*nanfang*) and the North/Northeast (*beifang/dongbei*), as well as the more complicated, non-binarist entanglements among them?
- How could we approach the political economy and infrastructures surrounding the production, circulation, and criticism of these emergent waves and trends?
- How can we comprehend their cultural and sociopolitical significance from the perspectives of materiality, technology, and cultural governance?
- How might we develop pedagogical modules for teaching these new waves within interdisciplinary humanities curricula today?

References:

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Important Dates

Deadline for abstracts (300-500 English words, excluding references) together with a short bionote (no more than 150 words): December 31, 2026.

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Contact

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About the Guest Editors

Ma Ran is Associate Professor in the Japan-in-Asia Cultural Studies and Screen Studies programs at Nagoya University. Her research explores Inter-Asia and transnational screen cultures, including Okinawan image cultures and Sino-Japanese media connections. Her latest book chapter, "Chinese-in-Japan Documentary and Media Reportage in the New Millennium: Toward a Disjunctive History of Transnational Affectivity," appears in *Reportage in the Chinese-Speaking World* (University of Michigan Press, 2026). She is the author of *Independent Filmmaking across Borders in Contemporary Asia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2019) and curates Asian independent films with partners in Osaka, Beijing, Nagoya, and Tokyo.

Seio Nakajima teaches sociology and Asian studies at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University. His research includes organizational analyses of the Chinese film industry, as well as ethnographic studies of Chinese film audiences and consumption. His recent work includes "Transborder Assemblage: *Legend of Hei* in Japan," *Journal of Chinese Film Studies* 5(3) (2025): 527–547.

About the Journal

Journal of Chinese Film Studies (JCFS) is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal which focuses on the history, theory, criticism, practice and industries of Chinese films and provides a platform for cutting-edge academic research and debate. It is committed to advancing interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of Chinese films and cinematic practices across multiple genres and platforms. The journal seeks original research articles that pursue innovative research directions and methodologies or engage with significant historiographical or interpretive issues of films and cinematic practices from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora.
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