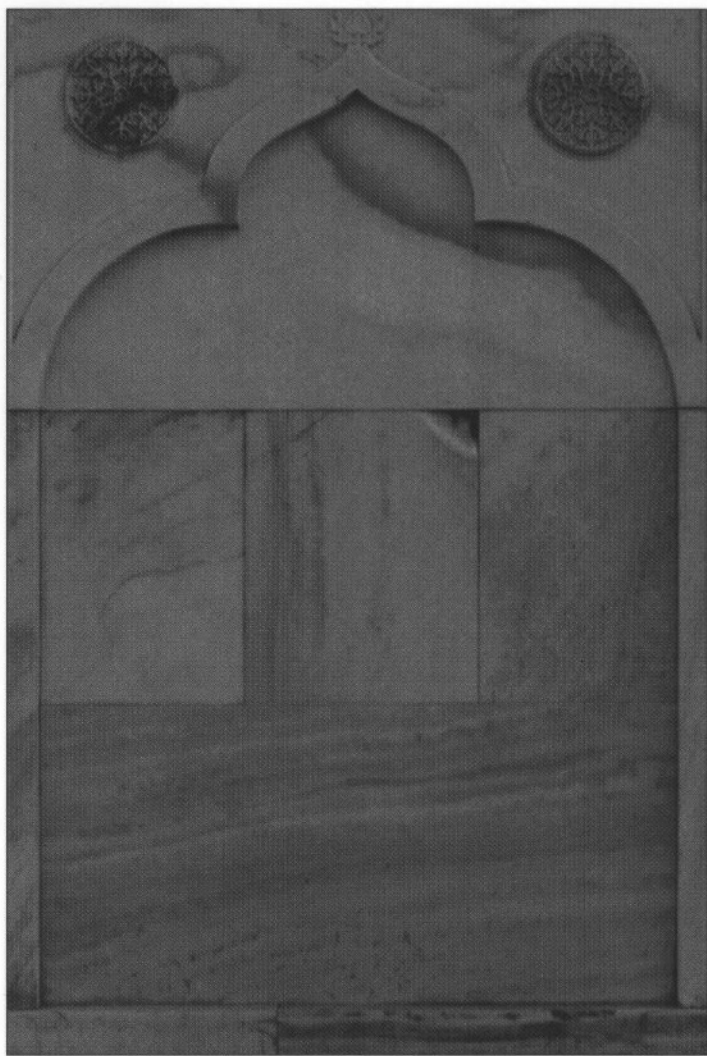


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BEHIND THE HYPERREALITY EXPERIENCE: THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS OPENING CEREMONY

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Introduction

While the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony (Gunts & Ebersol, 2008, August 8) is an orthodox example of a Chinese political and economic parade, it was approached through the geographical relocation of Western audiences, and performance through broadcast media, and the reshaping of Chinese ancient history and traditional philosophy presented as simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994) of Chinese aesthetics through the contemporary digital hyperreal¹ environment. Irrespective of the West acknowledging the already-changed perception of China's extracting Western technological resources, the aesthetic manifestation of the Opening² revealed to the world that China is innovative in its own way.

Yet the framing of the collective aesthetics in the Opening represented by Brooks (2008, August 12) is a Western view of the dichotomy between individuality and collectivity (collectivism), capitalism and communism, and self and otherness. Today, China maintains the operation of a capitalist system beneath its communist sovereignty. To many Western observers, this structure continues to purport collectivity. Yet in my view, it is the constant repositioning between the two systems that takes effect and functions; there is no absolute individuality and collectivity, or self and otherness; there is instead a constantly re-translating, reshaping, and re-formulating of the dichotomised. In another words, constantly lingering in between the dichotomised for achieving temporal resolutions for the here and now would be a more pertinent proposition to describe the current Chinese approach.

This paper is in large part of the discourse that responses to the Opening, with consideration towards how the ceremony might be understood within a larger framework of hyperreal public spectacles. My proposition is that collectivism has been the underpinning design strategy of Olympic opening ceremonies since the 1930s. This paper, which is situated in the art and design paradigm, suggests that immense presentation of simulacra of classical Chinese aesthetics through the medium of digital technology to create an environment of hyperreality is the key stimulus to

1 In his discussion on Simulacra and Simulation, Baudrillard (Glaser, translated, 1994, p. 125) gave a basic concept of hyperreal as "neither possible nor impossible, neither real nor unreal".

2 Opening is used in this paper as the abbreviation of Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony 2008.

- Zhang, Q. (2008, August 28). *Collective culture earns China top gold*. Retrieved May 18, 2009 from http://www.upiasia.com/Society_Culture/2008/08/28/collective_culture_earns_china_top_gold/4556/
- Zhang, Y. (Producer & Director). (2006). *Curse of the Golden Flower*. [Motion Picture]. China: Beijing New Picture Film Company.
- Zhu, X-D. [朱旭东]. (Producer). (2008, September). *Chinese World*. [华人世界] (*Hua Ren Shi Jie*) [Television broadcasts]. Beijing: CCTV.

Biographical note

Dr. King Tong HO is currently the senior lecturer of postgraduate studies in the School of Art & Design at AUT University. His teaching and research areas are postgraduate supervision, photography, digital imaging, ink jet printmaking technology, and Chinese aesthetics and philosophy in contemporary art practices. His current research interest focuses on the cultural aspects of contemporary photography in China. He is the chairman of Photowhisper Incorporated, a society dedicated to New Zealand Chinese photographers; and a member of New Zealand Asian Studies Society. In Hong Kong, he worked as a professional photographer in the advertising industry for twenty years before his immigration to New Zealand in 1994. He was also a founding member of Hong Kong Institute of Professional Photographers (HKIPP) and a member of Hong Kong Designers Association (HKDA).

A HAUNTING VOICE: A PLACE FOR LITERARY WIVES IN THE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL EXAMINATIONS IN QING CHINA¹

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Introduction: Women and the civil exam

From the Tang (618-906) Dynasty, the civil examination system was a modest mechanism to broaden the social base for recruiting talent and selecting officials. In the Song period (960-1279), due to the political consideration of the centrifugal power of regional clans and military leaders threatening the central authority, Emperor Taizu 太祖 (Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤, 927-976; r. 960-976) and Emperor Taizong 太宗 (Zhao Kuangyi 趙匡義, 939-997; r. 976-997) devoted themselves to establishing a government which was dominated by literati. In order to recruit scholar officials, the civil examination was further advocated as the measure of talent. Though the civil exam was systemized in the Tang Dynasty, it was not until the Song Dynasty that the Chinese society was transformed and dominated by scholar officials.² This cultural and social change was significant during the Tang-Song transition. It verified the decline of dominance by the aristocratic great clans in the Sui (581-618) Tang era, and the general public, restricted to males only, could upgrade their social status by studying and passing the civil exam.³

Until the Ming-Qing (1368-1912) era, passing the civil examination was an ideal goal deep-rooted in Chinese mind, since what followed the success was the gentry social status and official political position. In the absence of alternative careers of comparable social status and political prestige, becoming an official was the ultimate

- 1 An earlier version of this paper entitled "A Haunting Voice: Was there a Place for Women in the History of the Civil Examinations in Qing China?" was presented at the "History Spring Symposium" held at the University of Hong Kong on May 7, 2009. This paper also forms a portion of my M. Phil. research on writings to and about husbands in anthologies of Qing women's works.
- 2 According to several statistical researches, there were a total number of 6,656 *jinshi* degrees offered in the Tang period. In the Song Dynasty, the total number of *jinshi* degrees increased sharply to 39,711. See John Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China: A Social History of Examinations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 132-33; Benjamin Elman, *Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 648; Liu Haifeng 劉海峰 and Li Bing 李兵, *Zhonggou keju shi 中國科舉史* (Shanghai: Dongfang chubun zhongxin, 2004), pp. 432-444.
- 3 Peter Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 32-75.