



*Erika Tan*

*A JOURNEY OF REMEMBRANCE / A JOURNEY OF CONNECTIONS*

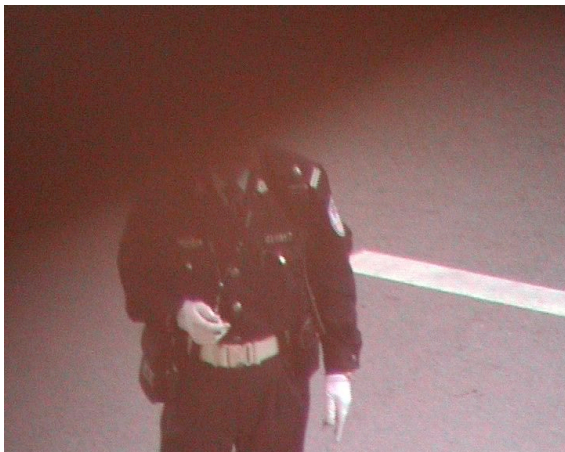
Returning to the material and otherwise, of past and multiple journeys to China, the work is an exercising of archaeological ambitions. Careful unearthing, approximate re-tracings, subjective interpretations and wild speculations become the means through which a personal psycho-geography of 'China' is developed. This is looking at China through and with *difference*, from a distance.

Erika Tan is a London based artist and curator whose work has evolved from an interest in anthropology and the moving image. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including *Thermocline of Art* (ZKM, Germany 2007), *The Singapore Biennale* (2006), *Around The World in Eighty Days* (South London Gallery / ICA 2006), *Incommunicado* (Hayward Touring exhibition 2003) and *Cities on the Move* (The Hayward Gallery, London 1999). Her work is available for viewing on <http://www.luxonline.org.uk/>



*The conception, of this trip is very old.*

*First conceived when?  
As far back as I can remember. <sup>1</sup>*

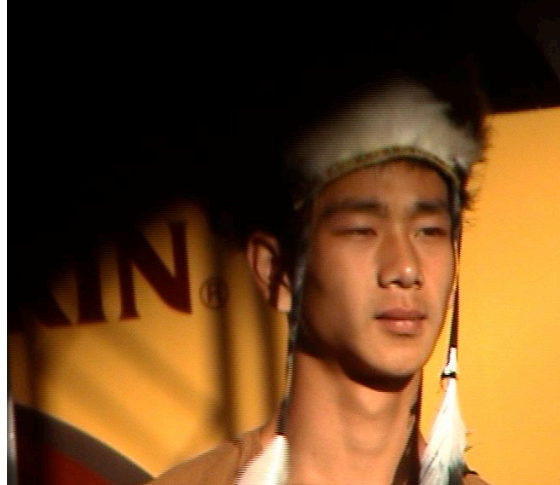
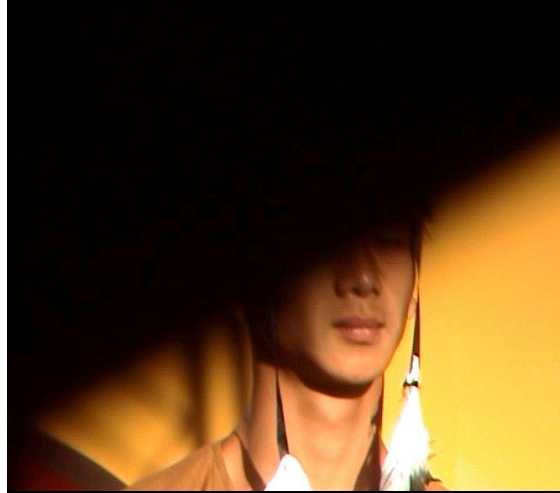


My earliest image of China is the one where my mother having evaded the watchful eye of her 'Tour Guide' and broken away from the official group, found herself surrounded by a group of people. As she started to ask for directions in English to a young student, she became aware of a synchronicity of movement developing between her own articulations and the silent mouth movements made by the group. 'Watching her every word' took on a new connotation.





Being watched was something both she and my father mentioned a lot. It was 1975, they were travelling on a trade mission from Singapore and reminded before they left that they were Singaporeans first, that they were not 'Chinese'. My mother never was Singaporean; it is a hard thing to be. In this image of mine, of China, she stands a head taller than the group, her hair is tied back, but a few loose blond strands stray in the breeze. I think she's wearing baby blue corduroy flares and a tie-dye t-shirt, but the dull army green jackets of the group surrounding her obscures this and I start to doubt the appropriateness of this attire on official business. Perhaps it was a linen suit instead.



As for the photograph of my mother in China, I'm not sure it ever existed, but the image remains strong and stable each



One certainty: China inspired the first lie I remember telling. Entering the first grade, I told my classmates that I was born in China. I think they were impressed.

I know that I wasn't born in China.

The four causes of my wanting to go to China:

material

formal

efficient

final

The oldest country in the world: it requires years of arduous study to learn its language. The country of science fiction, where everyone speaks with the same voice. Maotsetungized.

Whose voice is the voice of the person who wants to go to China?

A child's voice. Less than six years old.

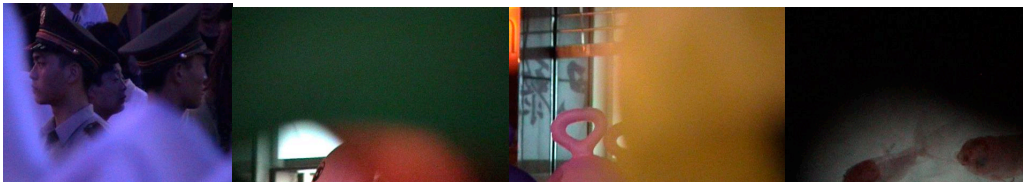
Is going to China like going to the moon?

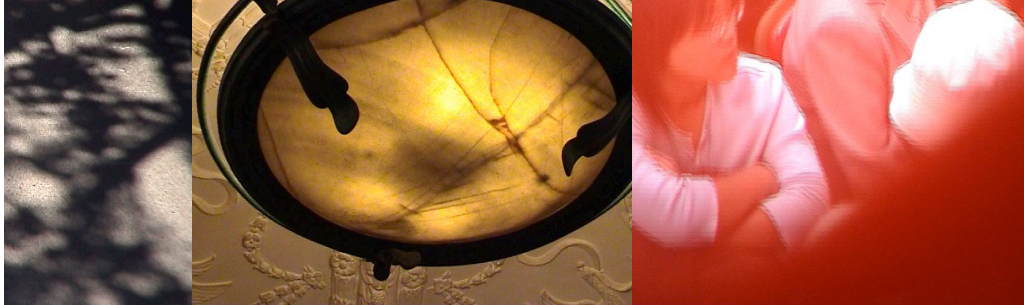
I'll tell you when I get back.

Is going to China like being born again?

Forget that I was conceived in China.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Susan Sontag, *Project for a Trip to China*, from *I, etcetera*. Picador USA, 2002





One certainty: China exposed the complexity of lies told by those distanced from China by movement, birth and politics, but still insisting on some form of representational authority. Including my own.

Insert 'n' into the middle of 'lies'.

The four causes of my first journey to China:  
expectations by others that I would / accompanied an English boyfriend who got a scholarship to study there / escaping England but not returning to Singapore / postponing life

Or more simply: expectation / duty / rejection / deferment  
Or was it: explore / confront / become / prove

China was the place left behind by my paternal grandparents and sought for by my mother. It is where, somewhere 'over a hill', my grandmother's ancestral village lies. If only this part of the story had been told more often, questions asked and records for women were included in clan histories.

As for the voice who wants to go to China; it's that of an 18 year-old Hertfordshire girl, learning Mandarin in night classes after work in the 50's.

This imagining 'China' may have conceived me.  
But did it author my desire and the imperative to go?

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