
Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way: Mindful Entry as Counterbalance

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Abstract (in French and English)

In 2010, Beijing artist Hua Jimming produced two public performances as part of the Infecting the City performing arts festival in Cape Town, South Africa titled Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way. Wrapped from head to toe in newspapers from Beijing and Cape Town, he walked through the CBD, and on another day walked up the well-known landmark Table Mountain.

Walking into Africa in a Chinese Way references kinhin (jīngxíng), the Zen Buddhist practice of walking meditation that cultivates mindfulness. The performance in South Africa stems from a history of walking and crawling performances by the artist, including Walking Feet (1995), Crawling on the Great Wall (2001), Crawling along the riverbank at Tongzhou (2001) Hong Kong Anti-War Festival (2002), and Crawling before the front of the Tokyo Gallery in the 798 Art District (2003).

Through an in-depth analysis of this work, this paper utilizes Hua's performance practice to develop a mindful approach to current China-Africa relations, resisting simplistic, aggressive stereotypes of imperialist entry perpetuated largely by the Western media. By analysing ideas of the wrapped body, woundedness, prostration and meditation, it presents a counterbalance to the imposing symbols of the Great Wall of China and Table Mountain. Further, Kinhin is linked to broader theories on corporeality and the act of walking that emphasize the relationship between bodies and place.

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