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Welcome

Welcome to our first special issue of the IAFOR Journal of Asian Studies. We encourage you to submit your work to our journal for peer review. We hope that you find the papers in this special issue insightful and an encouragement to publish your research through this journal. We have invited Dr. Robert Hyland to be guest editor of this special edition and his introduction follows.

Dr. Seiko Yasumoto, Editor

Professor Jason Bainbridge, Associate Editor

Introduction

This volume is a special edition dedicated to the examination of recent trends and issues in contemporary Chinese cinema. The genesis of this issue began with a conference on Post Olympics Chinese Cinema, held at Queen's University's, "Bader International Study Centre." The conference was intended to explore the changes which have emerged in contemporary Chinese cinema following the intense media interest in China after the media frenzy the 2008 games attracted. The articles collected in this issue primarily focus on films produced after the Beijing Olympics of 2008 and examine an increasingly liberalized Chinese cinema; a cinema marked by issues of the national, post-national and trans-national.

The Beijing Olympics were a watershed moment for China, where a supposed restrictive society obscured to the west by a Bamboo Curtain, hosted a global national event as a forum to reveal itself as a newly minted global economy equally competitive in sport, culture and spectacle. P. Horton quotes the *China Daily* (Renmin Ribao) of August 30, 2004, celebrating China's victories in the previous Athens Olympics.

When a country is powerful its sport will flourish. Chinese athletes' excellent performance at the Olympic stage is inevitably proof of our great achievements in economic reform and modernization. . . The achievements at the games have showed China's ability to stand proudly and independently among the other nations in the world. . . Chinese athletes will make more contributions to realize our nation's great revival. (Horton 106).

What becomes interesting in this assertion is the posited correlation between gains in sport and China's rising economic power. Communist China's previous Spartan attitude toward the Olympics was that achievement in sport – the strength, prowess and virility of the athletes – was testament to the strength and diligence of the communist labouring spirit. In the *China Daily* report of 2004, however, the association of sporting games with increased economic influence suggests that with a stronger economy there is a concomitant increase in concentration on leisure activities and developing of the commercialization of entertainment product, with sport and games now cast as entertainment spectacle with a financial imperative. The towering figure of basketball star Yao Ming in the 2004 Olympics became a testament to China's new power of attraction with its ability to create star athletes. The games had come to signify the emergence of the Chinese body as both a dominant athletic and *cultural* power. Writing before the games, Julia Lovell states: "To China, the 2008 Olympic Games represent a great deal more than a fortnight-long sporting spectacular. The 29th Olympiad is the country's international coming out party: a global recognition of this ancient civilization's euphoric twenty-first-century resurgence" (9) and indeed the mise-en-scene of Zhang Yimou's spectacular opening ceremony was a prolonged paean to Chinese cultural dominance.

Compounding the problems of hosting the games, was the need to prove China's economic and transportation infrastructures were up to the challenge of accommodating global traffic and tourism, and that China had the power and capability to create infrastructure equal or superior to those of the West while under the intense scrutiny of global media. China's heavy handed approach to censorship and control of dissenting voices was one such aspect of the modern Chinese state that was heavily criticized in English language press in the pre-games period, and in response China began, by necessity, to loosen some of the strictures on filmmaking practice. Chinese cinema is currently in the midst of an economic and cultural, renaissance. The Chinese box office has, in only the last five years, become the second largest film market in the world, with a 27% rise in revenue in 2013 alone (Larson 2014). With the rapid rise in Chinese film consumption and production, current Chinese cinema deserves examination.

This issue has its beginnings in a conference on Post-Olympics Chinese Cinema, but that conference itself had roots first nurtured ten years ago in Beijing. The journal *Asian Cinema* held a conference jointly with universities in Beijing and Shanghai to coincide with the centenary of Chinese film. While visiting Beijing in 2005, I felt that the city was unfinished, resembling one massive construction site and indeed, there was a permanent dust in the air as old buildings were continually being pulled down in order to erect glistening new shopping centres. The officially recognized film industry too, seemed to wane, with accounts of the members of the sixth generation filmmakers facing battles with censors over their right to tell stories that involved the injustices and iniquities that such rebuilding entailed. Prior to the Olympics, film censorship seemed to reach its zenith with the banning of Jia Zhangke's 2004 film *The World*, a film that is moderately critical of China's economic disparity and lack of safety regulations in cheaply built tenement housing – two of the characters die in a presumed gas leak. But in retrospect, perhaps this was one last tightening of the Bamboo Curtain before the big unveil; as China prepared to reveal itself to the world as both an economic and cultural super power – a final papering over the cracks before displaying itself to the world's scrutiny with the Olympics of 2008 and the Shanghai expo in 2009.

While it is easy to see the geographic and physical changes to China from the last 20 years, one shouldn't underestimate the concurrent ideological shifts. China of the post Olympic era departs greatly from the China envisioned by Mao Zedong. While Mao's policies extolled the virtues of self reliance with an emphasis on the qualities of the rural identity – culminating in the relocation of urban students to the countryside: the China of the post-Olympics era is a testament to the unifying properties of the urban, as millions of migrants pour annually into the cities. While Mao's policies promoted industrialization yes, it was industrialization without urbanization; promoting self reliance and ruralism: China in the post-Olympics era has had an ideological shift from indigeneity to globality.

And now it is 2015 and Jia Zhangke once again has a film that is courting controversy. Jia's *A Touch of Sin* (2013), reluctantly approved by the censors in October 2013 has still yet to be premiered in Chinese cinemas. However, in early 2014 the film was leaked to pirate websites, became widely available through streaming video sites and finally was quietly released for commercial distribution through DVD sales (Brezeski). The film's appearance on store shelves is a surprise, considering its graphic violence and subject matter critical of China's history of repressed desires and enforced conformity, subject matter which is precisely that which the Chinese censors of the pre-Olympics era would have considered as unsuitable for distribution and would have been banned outright at the script writing stages. The Chinese Communist Party's reluctance to publicly ban the film which had already won accolades at Cannes and

New York, becomes a testament to the post-Olympic nation's tentative first steps toward tolerating serious critical dialogue. The CCP's response wasn't entirely embracing, however. According to the *Economist*, "a recently leaked directive from the Central Propaganda Department instructs Chinese media not to conduct interviews, report or comment on the film" (2013). The film, critical of the inequities in modern China (while condemning individuals' selfishness rather than the political system) is available for those who wish to see it, but the blanket media ban prevents people from being aware of the film's existence. So only a select few cineastes with an interest in Jia's work will have been made aware of the film's existence and fewer still will actually see the film. Indeed, in celebrity-obsessed urban China, Jia, a prize winning director of 18 films, is relatively unknown as a filmmaker (he is more famous as a contributor to the micro-blog *weibo*) and is instead known for his role in the 2009 Shanghai World's expo. But regardless of how the film was presented or how its release and publicity have been undermined, the film *was* released and the quiet distribution of that film marks another turning point in contemporary Chinese cinema. Perhaps it is no longer entirely accurate to consider China's cinema a censored industry – that term carrying with it so much baggage from previous eras of total control that the word cannot be said without obfuscation – so much as a censored cinema; one that has restrictions on graphic imagery, violence, and sexuality and one that has limits to the numbers of films financed and approved for distribution, but one which is increasingly coming to resemble the market driven industries of the US, Canada and the UK where Jia's film did find limited release, but failed to receive wide media coverage and didn't play in any but the most arthouse of venues in the biggest of cities. Indeed, the film's American distributor earned a paltry \$154,120 in total box office revenue (Box Office Mojo), a figure that was doubled by the film's French distributors in a single weekend. The truth is that while many, globally, should see the film, most people won't see it, neither in China nor in the supposedly democratic and free West, with arthouse cinema being relegated to special interest audiences and regularly being eclipsed in market sales by box office entertainment spectacles.

How to read “Chinese” in cinema: Contesting national cinema

There is tension inherent in the discourses relating to the cinema of a region or geo-political area. Andrew Higson (1989) writes “Although the term ‘national cinema’ is often used to describe simply the films produced within a particular nation state, this is neither the only way in which the term has been used, nor is it, I want to argue, the most appropriate way of using the term” (36). This sentiment proves particular true for Chinese cinema, as the term has and can be applied variously to the cinema produced by a geographical area; members of shared cultural heritage; or financed and produced by a single political body. And subject to the context of its usage, the term Chinese cinema can be equally and wrongly applied to the cinemas of Hong Kong, Taiwan, or the so called sixth generation filmmakers, whose work is rarely recognized by Chinese film regulatory bodies. Higson (1989) provides four approaches to how a nation's cinema can be defined via production circumstances, cinematic text, marketing/consumption and film criticism (36 – 37). The term ‘Chinese Cinema’ has historically been applied in both popular and critical discourses in a liberal manner, often interchanging a geo-political area, the language spoken in a film, the culture manifest in a film or to describe a body of films' relationships to other cultural heritages and texts. Such discourses on cinema are in fact embedded in the notion of *trans-national* which is often used to account for such inclusions into the catalogue of ‘Chinese cinema,’ seeking to identify cultural or modal commonalities between works produced in a larger geographic region. Higson proposes that a body of cinema can be seen as national in opposition to the dominant Hollywood mode, creating a binary of oppositional poses between the Hollywood model and

non-Hollywood cinematic idiom, that it is in contrast to the Hollywood mode that the national emerges. Conversely, Higson asserts the internal measure is to compare a nation's cinematic output with other texts from that nation, to rout out similarities that express 'the nation'. It is the tracking and tracing of such idiomatic commonalities which allows for inclusions of Hong Kong and Taiwanese cinemas into the greater rubric of 'Chinese cinema.' And yet increasingly these terms are becoming inadequate. Many of the films considered by critics as representative of Chinese cinema (the films of the sixth generation filmmakers, for example) were never screened in China and were never officially recognized by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television. Indeed, is it appropriate to use the term 'Chinese cinema' to apply to films which have not been recognized by either the public or the political nation? Can a film that has been refused recognition by both a nation's political body and its public, still representative of that nation and its ethos? If a film is produced by the Chinese diaspora, and has neither financial nor political ties to China, can it be representative of Chinese heritage but not the politics? These questions are not easily resolved.

The films examined in this volume often pose uneasy relations to traditional notions of the Nation – often being funded by transnational flows of capital, failing to receive licensing through the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), never having received distribution in China and therefore not being representative of populist patterns of consumption, and in some instances, failing to have been consumed or marketed as indicative of Chinese culture or heritage. And yet in each instance, the authors invite the readers to reconsider the works as constituting a degree of 'Chineseness' through the texts' relationships to other Chinese cultural modalities.

The papers collected in this issue all explore the presence of China and 'Chineseness' in an era of transnationalism and the global age. In the first paper "From Recording to Ritual: Weimar Villa and 24 City", Jinhee Choi, writing about modernist sensibilities and the documentary impulse in post socialist cinema, examines in her analysis a film by the German/Taiwanese filmmaker Bernd Behr, as emblematic of a contemporary attitude toward Chinese modernity which is shared by Jia in his *24 City*. By tracing modernism as a sensibility that transcends national ties, Choi creates thematic links between two very different works, but which share a sensibility of de/reconstruction. Conversely, in the paper "Contested Identities, Exploring the Cultural, Historical and Political Complexities of the 'Three Chinas'" Li Qiao and Ros Jennings ask the reader to consider what exactly constitutes the *Chineseness* in Chinese cinema? This question has been a prevalent problem in Chinese cinema studies, but the consensus has been to demarcate between three Chinese cinemas (Hong Kong, Taiwan and that of the mainland), a distinction which lies upon socio/political and nationalist lines. Li and Jennings question the appropriateness of making such distinctions in an era of post-nationalism, where pan-asian (and indeed trans-national/multi-national) co-productions are common. In the article, Li inquires whether the films of the three Chinese language industries have narratives that are purely nationally motivated, or is there a pan-regional ideology that encompass the three "Chinese" cinemas? Li proposes to read cultural affinity among the three, and ultimately a shared cultural *heritage* as present in all three cinemas, and looks for a means beyond national boundaries, to unite the three disparate industries. Continuing with this line of reasoning, the third author Brent Keogh in his "Sounds, Swords and Forests: An Exploration into the Representations of Music and Martial arts in Contemporary Kung Fu Films" extends the signifier 'Chinese' beyond the cinemas of the three Chinese language film industries and includes in his reading of Chinese sensibility in cinema, films produced in the west; specifically martial arts films, which all contribute to a global understanding of sino-centric culture and ideology.

All of the articles included in this volume deal with issues dear to contemporary Chinese ideology, and one such conflicting attitude present in the films studied in this volume, is the conflicted relationship to the past. Jing Meng in her article “The Conundrum of Nostalgia. Sentimentalism in *Under the Hawthorne Tree*,” examines how there is a recent trend to look upon Maoism favourably, and in the current climate of chaotic modernism, there is impetus to look at the simplicity of life under socialism as a lost set of values, negated by rapid modernisation. Continuing the theme of lost identities, Emma Tipson examines the conflicted relationship between the Hong Kong industry and that of the Mainland, as manifest in the films of Wong Kar Wai and Ann Hui particularly, in her examination of Hui’s post handover film *A Simple Life* (2011) examining the loss of a Cantonese identity in the context of increased Sinosization. Moving from the Hong Kong film industry to that of Taiwan, Yang PanPan argues that in the recent *xiaoqingxun* films found in the Mainland but originating in Taiwan, there is a sentimental attachment to the innocence of youth that can exist within modernity. Yuan Yilei examines trans-nationalism and the challenges of translation, in her examination of the subtitling of Zhang Yimou’s remake of the Cohen brothers’ *Blood Simple*. Yuan, in the article “Subtitling Chinese humour: The English Release of *A Woman, A Gun and a Noodle Shop*” identifies several difficulties in this climate of pan/transnationalism where genre, jokes and extra-linguistic material often get literally lost in translation. The Zhang film becomes particularly interesting in its subsuming of the Cohen brothers black humour into a tradition of Chinese dark humour, a humour that was often lost on the western audience.

The last five years of filmmaking in the three Chinese language film industries has provided a rich wealth of material for investigation, and while China has had increasing economic power in recent years, China is developing a culture of soft power as well. This journal edition investigates the rise of contemporary Chinese cinema, not for its indications of what China *will* become, but rather as a means of examining what China *has* become as a global economic superpower, and global culture producer. In much critical and academic discourse on China, there is a continued sense and use of language that presents China as developing into something. I feel that such observations are somewhat disingenuous, presuming the nation is still in the process of becoming – but becoming what? It is already the largest nation by population; it is already an economic and political giant and is the biggest holder of U.S. debt (holding 1.2 trillion dollars); it has entered the space race and it is a significant contributor to the science and technology sectors. And of course it has a huge and demanding market for cinema. This issue, then, offers a chance to review and revise some of the myths and stereotypes of Chinese cinema, which perhaps have their roots in the cultural revolution, perhaps were exacerbated with the violent suppressions in the Tiananmen square incident, and which perhaps should have been put to rest with Beijing’s lighting of the Olympic torch. China is not what it was in the mid twentieth century; indeed it’s not what it was in the end of the 20th century. China is not even what it was a mere ten years ago when I felt Beijing was still under reconstruction. And so this journal edition was established to begin the process not of looking at what China is becoming, but rather, to look at what China has become.

Dr. Robert Hyland

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From Recording to Ritual: *Weimar Villa* and *24 City*

Dr. Jinhee Choi

Abstract

This paper's title is inspired by Guttman's 2004 book *From Ritual To Record*. It examines the remedial and ritual role of cinema in artist film *Weimar Villa* (Bernd Behr, 2010) and critically acclaimed Chinese film *24 City* (Zia Zhang-ke, 2008). The cinematic documentation of newly sprawling urban spaces and of dismantling an old military factory in post-socialist China in these two films, well complements the "xiangchang"—or being on the scene—rhetoric that has governed contemporary independent Chinese documentaries. The function of these two films, I argue, progresses from recording of the actual to the performing of the ritual.

Both of the films' aesthetics and their relationship with modernity provides a comparative framework to forge an interesting relationship between these two films and the modernist city films; *Weimar Villa* alludes to the Weimar culture via the temporal and spatial displacement of Bauhaus style architecture in China, while some of the aesthetic strategies employed in *24 City* resemble the Soviet modernist cinematic movement. I discuss how the modernist and post-socialist "city films" echo each other yet forge diverging relationships to the "promised" modernity, underscoring the historical and ideological disjuncture between these two eras.

Key words: City films, *24 City*, Zia Zhang-ke, Bernd Behr, Chinese documentary, artist films, modernity, post-socialist Chinese cinema, *Weimar Villa*, modernist, post-socialist

Introduction

Images of demolition and construction have become prevalent visual icons in post-socialist Chinese cinema. With the rapid marketization of both urban and rural areas across the People's Republic of China (PRC), it is not only metropolitan areas such as Beijing and Shanghai, but *xiancheng* (县城 the country-level city) and small towns that have also witnessed a drastic transformation of living environment, with old neighbourhoods being quickly replaced by regimented satellite cities and shopping malls (Zhang, 2010). The resultant life styles, as Robin Visser (2010) notes, have become “indiscriminately uprooted” (p.20).

Recent scholarship on the post-socialist Chinese cinema has foregrounded the “documentary impulse” to record demolition sites and the changing cityscape (Lovatt, 2012; Wu 2011; Xu and Andrew, 2011). At first glance, the term “documentary impulse” seems inadequate in considering the effects of cinematic rendering of such change, not to mention that it limits the role of documentary to that of chronicling historic events. Two films—*Weimar Villa: Unreconstructed* (Bernd Behr, 2010) and *24 City* (Jia Zhang-ke, 2008)—that will be discussed here will provide an interesting case study to reconsider the role of cinema in the spectator's experience of the post-socialist modernity. *Weimar Villa* is a film by Taiwanese-German artist Behr, who is based in London. Behr presents a construction site in the then newly developing residential area of Anting New Town—a satellite city at the outskirts of Shanghai—at the time of shooting. On the other hand, in *24 City*, through the interviews of various generations of workers, Jia uncovers the history of a factory called 420 in Chengdu.

This paper, whose title is inspired by Guttman's 2004 book *From Ritual to Record*, can help to illuminate the remedial and ritual role of cinema in these two films, which complements the “documentary impulse”. Allen Guttman (2004) in his work on modern sports traces out the changing status of the Olympics “from ritual to record”—that is, how the Olympics which began as a ritualistic ceremony has become the international event for public entertainment. Luke McKernan (2011) further hones into the relationship between “rituals” and “record” in his discussion of the cinematic treatment of the Olympics in the 1920s, pointing out their contrasting impulses to document and dramatize. A similar tension perhaps governs the films that will be discussed here; their function progresses from recording of the actual to the performing of the ritual.

My approach here is comparative in terms of both the films' aesthetics and their relationship with modernity. *Weimar Villa* alludes to the Weimar culture via the temporal and spatial displacement of Bauhaus style architecture in China, while some of the aesthetic strategies employed in *24 City* resemble the Soviet modernist cinematic movement. The cinematic documentation of newly sprawling urban spaces and their inhabitants in post-socialist China, however, betray a tendency that is in contrast to the abstract, utopian portrayal of modern cities in such films as *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929). I discuss how the modernist and post-socialist “city films” echo each other yet forge diverging relationships to the “promised” modernity, underscoring the historical and ideological disjuncture between these two eras; by analysing their formal similarities and contrasts, I hope to show their perspectives on the respective urban modernity, to which they actively respond and, perhaps contemplatively react.

Weimar Villa

Behr's work is slightly below ten minutes, consisting of construction footage of the Bauhaus inspired Anting New Town in China—footage shot in 2008. *Weimar Villa* (2010) reflects Behr's continuing interest in the co-dependency between architecture and cinema and the performative aspect of architecture that is culturally and spatially dislocated. In his previous work, *House without a Door* (2006), Behr uses footage that he shot of a replica of a Berlin housing estate that was built in Utah in the 1940s and has existed since the Second World War. In 1943, a German émigré Erich Mendelsohn and the Hollywood studio RKO were commissioned to design and furnish the replica, in order to test the military incendiary bombs that would be used in the air raids on Dresden and Berlin ("House without a Door," 2006). The title of Behr's work, adopted from *House without a Door* (1914), an early German expressionist film that no longer exists, alludes to his inability to get permission to film inside the replica and serves as a reminder of Mendelsohn's previous association with the German Expressionist theatre. Behr thus fictionalizes the interior space of this "German Village" in Utah with the images from expressionist films such as *Faust* (F.W. Murnau, 1926) and *Dr. Mabuse* (Fritz Lang, 1921). The images of the test site are also followed by pulsating shots of a house being built in the vicinity—a nearby town called Faust. The continuity between *House Without a Door* and *Weimar Villa* is apparent via their shared affiliation with, and allusion to, the legacy of the Weimar period (1918-1933) and their shared fascination with the reconstruction of Bauhaus architecture transplanted to 'other' localities: from Berlin to Utah in the US in the former and from Bauhaus to Anting New Town in China in the latter. *Weimar Villa* needs, however, to be carefully situated within the context of Shanghai's 'peri-urbanization' (Yu, 2009) as Behr's work is in conversation with the Chinese government's rhetoric of the modernization and mega-urbanization.

Initiated in 2001 under former Mayor Chen Liangyu, Shanghai underwent drastic suburbanization under the banner of "One City Nine Towns". Local district governments were closely involved with the planning, land acquisition, and construction of the infrastructure, in cooperation with large international architectural firms and local developers (Wang, Kundu, and Chen, 2010). Chen announced that nine towns would adopt the styles of Western cities, with some of their master plans chosen through international competitions: Songjiang was modelled after a British style, Anting German and Pujiang Italian, to list a few. These suburbs are designed to attract and disperse the population of Shanghai (14.8 million permanent residents in 2000) by turning rural land into residential areas. A rationale behind adopting such Western styles is, as Charlie Xue and Minghao Zhou (2007) note, "to break through the monotonous model of rural town construction and build a new order and identity for the rest of the developments" (p.22).

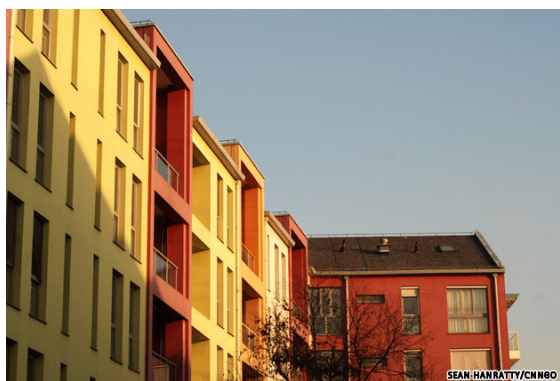


Figure 1. Anting New Town in the “Bauhaus” style



Figure 2. A couple having their wedding photo taken in Thames Town

A gap between the original intention to solve the problems of the overpopulated megacity and its consequences has become increasingly apparent. Songjiang “Thames” Town and Anting “German” Town, which were designated as two pilot projects of the “One City Nine Towns” plan, suffered from low occupancy due to the lack of local infrastructure. Most of the properties in Songjiang, for instance, were sold out for investment purposes rather than for living in, and the subsequent lack of community has now turned it into “a ghost town,” in which one can occasionally spot young couples (figure 2), who have their wedding photos taken in front of the landmark places (Wang et al. 2010). It has become, borrowing the term employed by Yomi Braester (2010), an “absurd transnational space” (p.300) outside Shanghai, which provides a tourist destination for those who can’t afford to travel abroad.

The media hype surrounding Anting “German” Town centers around the Speer Legacy: Albert Speer Jr., who is Head of the German architecture firm Albert Speer and Partners (AS & P GmbH) and whose master plan for Anting New town was adopted, is the son of Albert Speer, Hitler’s favourite architect (“Architect Sheds His Father’s Legacy in China,” 2004). AS & P opened an office in China in 1999 and won the contract for the design of the Shanghai International Automobile City in 2001. The Beijing Olympics Committee also signed with Speer Jr. for his plan to build a boulevard connecting the central axis of Beijing to the Olympic park, which further spurred more media frenzy with regard to a tenuous parallel between Nazi Germany and contemporary China (Smith and Banegal, 2007).

Anting New Town has a higher occupancy than Songjiang but still failed to serve its original purpose—to attract and accommodate the residents of Shanghai (with its population reaching 19.2 million at the end of 2009) as well as to serve the needs of the Shanghai automobile industry (Wang et al, 2010). Commuting from Shanghai via metro is feasible thanks to the No. 11 line, but the actual commuting time is a lot longer as Anting New Town is 2 kilometres away from the metro station, which takes 10 minute by bus ride and 25 minute by foot. Furthermore, a heavy reliance on the automobile (via Hu-Ning expressway) as a major form of transportation keeps low-income households from renting the properties in the area. Local landowners and residents, who were moved out of their houses for the redevelopment, cannot afford the rent and living costs, while the lack of commercial, medical and educational facilities make it difficult for the new owners to inhabit. It did attract, though, some foreign nationals; within the permanent residents of Anting New Town, half of them are

German, employed by Shanghai Volkswagen Co Ltd (Wang et al, 2010). As Wang, Kundu and Cheng (2010) put it, “the exclusive planning without local residents created a new settlement on farmland without any consideration of local living demand” (p.335).

The analysis of Behr’s work further needs to take into consideration the film’s exhibition venue. When I first saw his film at the Whitstable Biennale in Kent UK, it was shown in a loop with other films programmed under “UR-NOW: The Ruins of the Contemporary” which includes *Workers Leaving the Factory* (Harun Farocki, 1995) among others. The endless looping throughout the day affects the viewing experience, with no clear beginning and end to the film. Behr’s work as a whole even further disorients the viewer. As the film begins, it appears that the “documentary impulse” dominates the film—it is a recording of a construction site. Off-screen sound of drilling introduces the viewer to the construction site of white buildings, which instantly allude to the Bauhaus, with the workers in the middle ground partially hidden behind concrete blocks (figure 3). However, one would soon realize that such a diagnosis is too quick. With some of the shots shown in reverse while others’ temporality remaining ambiguous, the construction site becomes “un-re-constructed,” as the sub-title of his piece indicates.



Figure 3. The opening shot



Figure 4. Two workers carrying a cart

Some viewers may immediately detect the reverse motion of the first few shots, but they are very subtle. Most viewers would not notice it until a few minutes into the film, when one sees two workers moving backwards—one in the blue uniform is pulling, while the other is pushing a cart from behind (figure 4). The presence of human figures with movement helps the viewer to identify the direction and temporality of their actions.

A stylistic suspense builds up as the film alternates between shots in regular and reverse motion. The mood of the site also shifts between realistic and magical, fluctuating between serene and cheerful. The site becomes haunting, with shots of empty buildings, although off-screen sounds of swishing, pulsating noise indicates the presence of workers or machines being operated nearby. A shot of five or six workers walking backward in perfect line with their heads down makes them look like zombies (figure 5), as if it foretells the future ghostliness of the town. The idea of “haunting” with or without the appearance of ghost in Chinese cinema, claim Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (2006), disrupts the progress of linear time, constituting “a refusal of the sequential logic of modern “progress”” (p.32).



Figure 5. Workers walking like zombies.



Figure 6. A concrete block magically flies into the hand of a worker.

It is useful to compare here the backward motion employed with that in Dziga Vertov's *Kino Eye* (1924), especially a segment in which the entire process of production, distribution, and consumption of bread are shown backwards and in reversed motion: from the final product, a loaf of bread, to its baking, to the transportation and distribution of its ingredients, and to the processing and harvesting of wheat. Its reversed chronology serves the epistemic purpose in Vertov's film; that is, the film enables the viewer to "see" the social relations which Vertov adamantly believed film has the capacity and duty to reveal (Turvey, 2009). In *Kino Eye*, it is the reversed chronology that primarily helps urge the viewer to make the connections between the consumers in the city, the bakers in the factory, and the farmers in the field.

In contrast, backward motion in *Weimar Villa* reverses the goal and outcome of the workers' actions. Reverse motion not only facilitates workers' tasks but also makes their labour futile. Shown in reverse, heavy concrete blocks can magically jump into a worker's hands without him even trying to lift it (figure 6). The paint on the wall is removed, reverting the site back to the moment when more than half of the wall needs to be filled. Moreover, such reversed action helps the viewer to re-identify the worker's action in Behr's film. Pushing becomes pulling; hammering extracting; breaking gluing; painting erasing; and construction becomes paradoxically both un- or re-construction. There is an ethical dimension to this reversal; as Behr claims during a personal interview with the author (Behr, personal communication, July 21, 2010), workers' quotidian activities become ritualistic. Bobby Alexander (1997) notes that the ritual could be defined as "a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed" (p.139). Religious rituals, which Alexander focuses on, help to yield in the participants an experience of the transcendental reality or ultimate being. Behr's work underscores instead the medium's ritualistic capacity in transforming the everyday actions recorded, attributing to the workers' actions alternative meanings or even parallel reality.

One may associate Behr's work with a dominant form of critique on the consequences of the Chinese government's desire to leap forward. A visual allusion to the emblematic modern architecture may point to an apparent irony manifest in the planning of Anting New Town. The goal of the Bauhaus—"the attempt to reorganize life...to reconfigure the relation of objects to practice" (Schwartz, 2009, p.79)—does not seem to be materialized in Anting New Town yet. If functionalism or at least a discourse on functionalism was the driving force behind the inauguration and dispersion of the Bauhaus across the world, the basic function of architecture—

“dwelling” (Heidegger cited in Schwartz, 2009, p.72)—is absent in the houses in Anting. A Bauhaus style has been franchised yet has quickly become an empty icon, serving no purpose other than being a vehicle to generating profits for the real estate market and to ignite a lukewarm zeal for local tourism. The Bauhaus style buildings in Anting New Town may have become just ornamental.

During the interview conducted by the author, however, Behr (Personal communication, 2010) expresses reservations on the teleological assumptions underneath the criticism entertained above—that is, the Chinese urban development and its resulting eclectic cityscape viewed as “ironic” or even “ludicrous”. Behr continued, claiming that his film does not present a derogatory look at the simulacra. Rather the role of his film is “performative” in the sense that it engages in a dialogue with, both the site and its complex history embodied. The German Bauhaus and the “German Town” in Shanghai do not form a hierarchical relationship of the original and a copy, where the latter is measured and criticized against the former. Instead, Behr notes, *Weimar Villa* provides another vantage point to look back the modernity at its inception and its reconfiguration in the current state.

Behr’s *Weimar Villa* visually suspends and amends the present; the past merged with the present through its temporary reversals; the present co-existing with the future. Reversed motion not only changes the functions of actions, but also withholds the construction from its completion. The Chinese government incessant effort to “catch up” through the top-down urbanization is on halt, though only momentarily, and the blind desire to “leap forward” is counterbalanced by literally “moving backwards”. Through Behr’s work, the construction site provides an in-between-moment that encompasses both building and digging, constructing and decaying, the present and the past, and the present and the future. Unlike Vertov’s *Kino Eye*, *Weimar Villa* is neither didactic nor epistemic. Its goal is neither to criticize the urban planning in Shanghai, nor to underscore the deplorable vacancy of the site in the near future (although one can read it in such a way). The ritualistic role of cinema is what it departs from, and complements, the “preservational mode” of the New Documentary in China that emphasizes the ephemerality (or even spectacle) of demolition sites (Braester, 2010).

24 City

Cinematic allusions to early actuality and modernist films in *24 City* are prevalent throughout the film. Such allusions not only make the film increasingly self-reflexive about the medium, forging an intertextual relationship with the films of the 1920s, but also invite the viewer to reflect upon that modernity. The film’s working title, *Leaving the Factory*, refers to the Lumière’s Brothers documentary origin (Rayns, 2010). The film indeed begins with a shot of workers in blue uniforms on their bikes passing the entrance gate of the factory, which is counterpoised, half way through the film, by a corollary shot of the workers leaving the factory. The visual similarity as well as contrast with the Soviet constructivist aesthetic further underscores the different stages they occupy in relation to cinematic history. When workers are seen operating the machines inside the factory, the pacing and atmosphere reminds the viewer of comparable scenes in *Strike* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) or in *Man with a Movie Camera*.



Figure 7. Workers inside the factory



Figure 8. Workers ascending the stairs

In several shots, including the opening sequence, we see several workers operating machines. In contrast to the fast-paced, exuberant rhythm in the constructivist films, the film protrudes instead a languid pace, denying the celebration of the modern present in those earlier films. Jia states that the faded green hue of both interiors and machines further accentuates the outdated look of the factory; “this green color comes from real life. It represents my memory about that old system, the China that dates from more than a decade ago certainly. And the most important thing is that it still exists.” (Figure 7; Andrew, 2009, p.80) The disappearance of the socialist ideals is underscored in the monotonous facial expressions of a female worker, whose labour has lost the purpose or meaning within the community or nation. Her look seems to be in sharp contrast with that of a factory girl in *Man with a Movie Camera* whose swift hands fold boxes while she is smiling. The visual conflict of the workers ascending the stairs in contrasting directions (figure 8) reminds of a scene in such modernist film as *Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925) where the townspeople are gathering at the pier for the funeral of Bolshevik sailor Vakulinchuk. Jia’s allusion to soviet filmmakers becomes more explicit in his next film, *I Wish I Knew* (2010), in which the stone lion statues roar in the beginning of the film. Such visual allusion further helps forge both aesthetic and historical relationships between European modernist and Asian postsocialist city films.

Intercut between the process of emptying and the dismantling of the factory, nine interviews —some real and some fictional—present a history of Factory 420 intertwined with the process of development and transformation of Chengdu and the displacement and settlement of workers who were assigned to work at the factory. The film helps to empty the factory by extracting the memories of these workers who migrated, settled, and worked for the factory, and their children’s generation, whose lives tangentially touch on the socialist phase of the factory, and who refuse to play a part in its continuing legacy.

Factory 420 was founded as a secret manufacturer of military aircraft engines, transformed into a facility that produces domestic goods, and is eventually handed over to a real-estate development company. Interviews with different generations of workers and residents constitute the organic history of Factory 420 from its birth, growth, decline and rebirth. This collective history, however, falls short of reaching the organic unity between the modern life and workers as seen in *Man with a Movie Camera*. In the Soviet film, the unity between the city and its inhabitants is not only conveyed through the rhythm of the workers’ activities that are in perfect sync with that of both the city and its machines, but also through human life cycles embedded in the film: we have glimpses of a baby being born, a couple getting a divorce and a woman weeping for the death of a loved one (Michelson, 1984). However, unlike European city films

of the 1920s which underscore the industrial, synchronic time of modernity with social relations as a very integral part of the city, *24 City* foregrounds the diachronic history of the city of Chengdu, which underwent its transformation from a prosperous town in the ancient period, through a period as industrial city during the socialist modernization, and finally to a residential and shopping district, called “24 City,” which is named after an ancient poem about Chengdu.

Although Jia claims that the nine interviews form a collective memory of Factory 420 with the workers’ interviews often contrasting the then and the now of the factory, the film’s mise-en-scene constantly juxtaposes the workers as collective versus individual identities and their corresponding activities: labour vs. leisure. In a still shot of hundreds of anonymous workers singing during the land transfer ceremony for Chengfa Group, a parent company of Factory 420, their expressionless faces fill the entire shot with the individuality of the workers being completely erased, denying any foreshadowing for the subject of the interviews that soon follow. In fact the first interviewee, He Kikun is absent from the scene and instead is shown going up the empty stairs perhaps spatially adjacent to the hall, as one can still hear the speech of the president of the Group from the hall. A more personalized musical performance appears later in the film. When Little Flower (played by Joan Chen) is introduced prior to her interview, she partakes in a casual performance of the *yue* opera, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, at the workers’ leisure center. As she walks to the screen right, the camera moves with her, visually demarcating her as the next interview subject. The contrast between the anonymous workers versus an individual, manifest through the repetition of similar activities—musical performances—for different occasions, is further demarcated by style here.

In a similar manner, the political identity of the factory which represents the Chinese government war efforts in the 1950s, is curtailed by the mise-en-scene. The image of the deteriorated factory no longer carries the same magnitude of symbolic control as it had done in the past. A space for the workers’ ceremony turns into that for leisure. During the second interview with Secretary Guan conducted in a hall, there is a cut to two workers who are playing badminton on the stage against the painted backdrop of the two sets of four missiles behind the Great Wall that point at each other, the right set of which have already been launched. A parallel visual trajectory between the missiles in the painting and that of the badminton shuttlecock flying in the air further reveals the lost *raison d’être* of the factory.

The inevitability of the arrival of the liberated market economy, and the inability to reverse such a trajectory are signalled both by the film’s structure and the numerous poems and intertitles inserted throughout. A shot of a vehicle that drives through Chengdu, carrying a piece of dismantled factory equipment, is repeated both in the beginning and toward the end of the film (figure 9, 10), bookmarking the interviews with the migrated generation.



Figure 9. A truck driving through the street, carrying a dismantled piece of machinery



Figure 10. The same shot repeated for less of duration

As smoke comes out of, and blurs, the demolition site of the factory, *Spilt Milk* written by W.B. Yeats is layered over the image (figure 11), which further reinforces the idea of inevitability, *biran* (必然):

Things that we have thought and done,
Must (*biran*) ramble, and thin out
Like milk spilt on a stone.



Figure 11. The smoke from the demolition is marked by Yeats' *Spilt Milk*.

The Internationale sung by workers in the previous shot, provides an ironic sound bridge as it continues in the shot of the factory being exploded. As the poem connotes, with the demolition of the factory its memory would eventually disappear into the dust, but the film contributes to holding onto the memory of the workers and their families a little while longer.

In his interview with Dudley Andrew (2009), Jia informs us that the selection and construction of interviews is to present the “collective” memory of Factory 420. Jia claims that he interviewed over fifty subjects, but thought “nine characters become one when put together...What is left is common experience, which to most Chinese is common knowledge. These experiences are not very idiosyncratic or unique...What I filmed is not individual cases but collective memories” (Andrew, 2009, p.82). The interviewees are carefully chosen and constructed, but what they share is their estranged relationship with peers, family, and lovers. Hou Lijun’s heart-felt story about her grandparents underscores the difficulty in staying in touch with her grandparents once her mother migrated from Shenyang to Chengdu for her work. Dali (performed by Lu Liping) shares a painful anecdote of losing her child on her long journey to Chengdu. Song Weidong (performed by actor Chen Jianbin) reminisces over the breakup with his

girlfriend, as she had to move to another city for college. Little Flower (Joan Chen) contemplates and consoles herself over her single life, as she recalls her ill-fated romance with a man from a good family. Su Na (Zhao Tao) wishes to make enough money so that she could purchase a flat in 24 City and offer comfortable living for her parents.

The portraits of the anonymous workers who are not included in the nine main interviews, with the exception of Master Wang's family, may further point to the "representative" nature of the interviews selected. Workers are posed for the camera, artificially and even awkwardly. In these cinematic portraits, the emulation of, and differentiation from, still photography, provides another point of contrast with *Man with a Movie Camera*. Vertov alternates between still frames of a horse carriage with images of bourgeois women, and a close up of a little girl marvelling at the street magic show and their corresponding "moving images," the strips of which are being edited. Vertov's editing among the still frames, moving images, and the filmstrip, brings to the fore both the specificity of the film medium and the self-reflexive nature of his filmmaking. In contrast, Jia's cinematic portraits of these workers (figure 12-15) are not the snap shots of their memories. Rather, their function is similar to the reverse motion in Behr's *Weimar Villa*, in that it merges the temporality of the past and the present. If we follow Roland Barthes' (1977) observation on the temporality of still photography and of film—that is, photographic medium is of the past tense, while film of the present tense—Jia's cinematic portraits of workers underscores the present that is on the verge of turning into the past (as when you pose for a photograph). Human subjects are not completely still in their posture and always move a little, which make them oscillate between the apparent past and the present.



Figure 12. A portrait of Wang's family



Figure 13. A portrait of a family



Figure 14. A portrait of a female factory worker



Figure 15. A portrait of comrades

Philippa Lovatt (2012) in her analysis of *24 City* considers the temporality of these portraits as “now-time”—the filmed subjects’ embodied presence—instead of the past. In these shots, she pays attention to the lack of sonic markers that underscore industrial time, such as a clock ticking or machines operating, in favour of the sounds of the human subject. Lovatt (2012) notes, “each stray sound emitted by the body, such as a swallow, a sniff or a cough, is picked up in aural closeup...thus reinforcing this sense of embodied presentness” (p. 434-5). Although her observation is insightful in regards to certain shots, the sonic structure of portraits is not consistent throughout the film. For instance, the shot of a girl in the factory (figure 14) is accompanied by the sound of a heavy fan spinning. Some portraits are shown with non-diegetic background music, which erases *both* the industrial noise *and* the sound of human presence. These moments, as Lovatt suggests, may halt the rhetoric of official discourse of progress and invite the viewers to reflect on the now. But if the present tense in these shots is indeed the “now-time,” it is the “now-time” that is inevitably to become history and historical record.

In his interview with Andrew (2009), Jia further points out the *ritualistic* function of the apparent “stillness”. Jia claims that he had people sit in front of the camera and let the camera run from a couple of minutes up to fifty minutes, in order for him to look for the subtle changes of expression and to display the workers’ interiority. This search for interiority through silence “later became a ritual in our shooting. For me these portraits are not just people’s faces nor do some form complementary to their narration, nor even a mere ritual. For through that ritual we sense that many lives have been ignored, ordinary people’s lives ignored. We hope that through time, through silence, and through this ritual, the film can help these people achieve some recognition.” (Andrew, 2009, p.82)

Throughout the film, these workers, whose life experience or memory may disappear from the public arena with the demolition of the factory, “recollect” their memory and would be remembered as an integral part of the old community that has already been in the process of transformation. Catherine Bell (1997) notes in her discussion of Durkheim that he saw “ritual as the means by which individuals are brought together as a collective group” (p.25).

Yomi Braester (2010) notes, “in portraying the city as scarred by demolition, films unearth the traumas of urban development and give the wounds a visual form. In recording the erased architectural placeholders of memory, films become monuments to that loss” (p.227). Jia’s film could be aligned with such a movement, but I hope to show how his aesthetics further forges another connection; with the practice of modernist filmmaking, which idealizes the role of workers within the newly formed socialist society, a role is significantly altered and reconfigured, with the advent of the post-socialist economy in China.

Conclusion

In this paper, I hope to make various connections between the two films in focus, and the modernist aesthetic manifest in city symphonies of the 1920s. The speed, acceleration, and energy in modern city films have disappeared, and are replaced in contemporary city films (the ones that I have studied here) by a slow-paced, contemplation, and a cinematic attempt to suspend progress. What I aim to show here is the constructive vs. remedial role of the cinematic medium foregrounded in the modernist filmmaking and contemporary post-socialist filmmaking, respectively, and their relationship to the cities, both rising and collapsing, and their impact on the human subjects. If film techniques such as backward motion, and the mixed aesthetic of still photography and cinema, are used to show off the capacity/specificity of the cinematic medium as a part of modernity that celebrate, similar cinematic techniques are

employed to underscore the gap between the modernity aspired for, and reconfigured in, post-socialist China.

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Contested identities: exploring the cultural, historical and political complexities of the ‘three Chinas’

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Abstract

When facing the political, historical and cultural complexities of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, problematic issues arise in relation to understanding the sorts of national/cultural identities that might be projected by them. With regard to these three Chinese language cinemas, a traditional national cinema approach focussing predominantly upon nation-state as a source of meaning would provide only a limited understanding of the meanings generated. This article, however, draws on what Benedict Anderson (1991) put forward as the theory of ‘Imagined Communities’ which assumes a large body of people regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’ (and here we interpret this term broadly and beyond understandings of geographical borders and political systems) through a variety of historical legacies, cultural memories and acts of consumption. In this article we hold the assumption that there is a shared cultural meaning (namely ‘Chineseness’) that extends across the three Chinese language cinemas and consider cultural affinity as greater than national and political boundaries.

Keywords: National cinema, Three Chinas, Chineseness, cultural affinity

Introduction: ‘three Chinas’ and the Problematic of ‘the National’

Over the last two decades, Chinese language film studies (and here we refer to studies of not just mainland Chinese cinema but also of Hong Kong and Taiwan) have become the focus of intense interest in academia in both China and the West. The term Chinese cinema or Chinese national cinema both seem to be problematic when facing the ideological and political differences in the governments of the three areas. For example, there is a lot of discourse within Taiwan regarding the use of the terms *Zhonghua*, *Zhongguo* and *Zhongwen* and which terms are most appropriate to refer to Taiwan. In this article, the term Chinese language cinemas, is not a political claim. As a linguistic category instead of a national category, Chinese language cinemas (including both Mandarin and regional dialects such as Cantonese in Hong Kong and Hokkien and Minnan in Taiwan etc.) should be considered a broader term to refer to the cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The political separation (and of course the re-integration of Hong Kong in 1997 as a Special Administrative Region of China) of the three cinemas has troubled film scholars for years. For some, the history of the separation of film industries in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan has created “quite distinctive national cinemas within each territory” (Yueh, 1998: 74) and, on the whole, the study of Chinese language cinemas has been conducted and organized by means of geographical/political distinction and the notion of ‘three Chinas’ (Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) has dominated in relation to studies of national cinema. This geographical determinism limits and, to some extent denies, the Chinese cultural tradition within the three cinemas. This article, however, draws on what Benedict Anderson (1991) put forward as the theory of ‘Imagined Communities’ which assumes a large body of people regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’ (and here I interpret this term broadly and beyond understandings of geographical borders and political systems) through a variety of historical legacies, cultural memories and acts of consumption. Cultural identity, as Stuart Hall (2004) suggests, is situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation. Thus signifiers of Chinese traditional culture can be considered as a shared culture and history that permeate all three cinemas in their different ways.

Such a model does not mean that this article denies the cultural specificities of three Chinese language cinemas. For example, in Mainland China, the Fifth Generation’s filmmakers (such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige etc.) have always been obsessed with the Cultural Revolution since 1980s. Interestingly, in the context of post-Olympics Chinese language cinemas, Zhang Yimou’s new film *Coming Home* (2014) is again a tragic romance set in the Cultural Revolution. The term *Post-Olympics Chinese language Cinema* originated from “Post-Olympics Chinese Cinema Symposium” hosted by Bader International Study Centre, Queens University between December 10 and 11 2013. The implication of the film’s title *Coming Home* (*Gui Lai* as its Chinese original title means *return*) might well signify Zhang’s *Gui Lai* (return) to his obsession with the Cultural Revolution. The complexity of Hong Kong in terms of national/cultural identity can be seen to be a product of influences from China, Britain and its own Cantonese ‘nativeness’. In Taiwan, in particular under the president Chen Shui-bian between 2000 and 2008, part of the movement toward national and political autonomy was to promote cultural distinctiveness (namely ‘Taiwanese-ness’), and so there has been a promotion of the goddess Matsu, promotion of aboriginal studies, and aggressive promotion of the various Taiwanese languages etc., with the objective to promote the idea that Taiwanese culture is separate and distinct from that of Mainland China. While much of that rift has been diminished under the current KMT (Kuomintang, Chinese Nationalist Party) administration, much of those sentiments still exist within the population.

One of the most recent surveys regarding the national and pan-national identification in Taiwan and Hong Kong conducted by Frank Liu and Francis Lee (2013) confirms that many Taiwanese

citizens prefer to identify themselves as Taiwanese instead of Chinese. The same awareness of self-identification between being ‘Chinese’ or ‘Hong Kongese’ exists among Hong Kong citizens. “Faced with the rise of the PRC’s economic and political power, influenced by the ROC legacy, and having experienced decades of democratization, Taiwanese society has nurtured multiple country and national identifications. Similarly in Hong Kong, a political entity with unique colonial experiences and an independent civil identity, society also faces challenges regarding (re)identifying with the PRC” (Liu and Lee 2013: 1131). Especially in Taiwan, while many within Taiwan share a Chinese cultural heritage (predominantly those who are descended from KMT migrants of 1948), there is a large and vocal group that deny Chinese cultural heritage considering themselves to be distinctly culturally Taiwanese Hokklo, aboriginal or other local identities that have a parallel but separate history with the Mainland. For many in Taiwan, particularly those of the Pan Green Coalition of the Democratic Progressive Party, there is a sense of parallel history, but a history which equally encompasses its Portuguese and Japanese occupations and cultural legacies.

In a post-colonial context it is almost impossible to define what exactly constitutes a nation. When facing the political, historical and cultural complexities of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, a traditional national cinema approach focussing predominantly upon nation-state as a source of meaning becomes problematic. Therefore I am replacing a national cinema framework with a post-national methodology that unifies through cultural signifiers rather than through political or national ones. One of the central benefits of the article is that it is possible to argue that the cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan share and portray a rich cultural heritage in their films despite difficulties and antagonisms that exist in the political relations between them. One way that we will try to approach this problem is by looking for signifiers of Chinese traditional culture and the ways that they might manifest themselves across the three cinemas. In doing so we will place particular emphasis on the connections between the three Chinese language cinemas in terms of Chinese cultures and traditions. We hold the assumption that there is a shared cultural meaning (cultural affinity) that extends across three Chinese language cinemas and I use the term ‘Chineseness’ to refer to expressions of shared cultural, historical and philosophical continuity across especially the three New Wave cinemas.

Conceiving National Cinema: National Identity and Political Manipulation

Prior to the 1980s critical writing on cinema adopted common-sense notions of national cinema. The idea of national cinema has long informed the promotion of non-Hollywood cinemas (Crofts, 1998: 385). The dominance of Hollywood meant that as far back as the 1920s and 1930s, France and Germany formed their national cinemas almost in ideological opposition to Hollywood. In her book *French National Cinema*, Susan Hayward (1993: 5) explains that by the 1920s calls were being made in France for “a truly national cinema as a defense against the American hegemony, all of which (in the implicit concern for the well-being of cinema) points to a historicism and narcissism of sorts”.

It was not until 1989 that Andrew Higson defined *The Concept of National Cinema* in a broader sense: he suggests that national cinema should be defined not only in terms of “the films produced by and within a particular nation state” (Higson, 2002: 132-142), but also in terms of distribution and exhibition, audiences, and critical and cultural discourses. This is one of the first general considerations of national cinema. Higson (2002) indicates that national cinema should not only be considered in relation to where films are made but more especially in relation to what kind of cultural identity they project and how they are consumed globally. In terms of national cinema, ‘Chineseness’ becomes a form of cultural capital that is shaped

through transnational discourses that are negotiated in history. Ideas about degrees of authenticity as Chinese, which are seen as derived from links to territory and knowledge of ‘traditional’ Chinese cultures such as Confucianism and Taoism, have become a basis through which diaspora Chinese define themselves in relation to one another.

Facing the complexities of the three Chinese language cinemas, Zhang Yingjin (2004) feels that ‘the National’ is difficult to define and considers nationalism, instead of any particular cultural or artistic trait, as the most dominant characteristic of Chinese cinema. The political nature of nationalism cannot be disputed whether it is overtly expressed in film projects or not. The concept of nationality is similarly loaded. In the era of globalization, the studies of national cinema have been facing complexities brought by transnational cultural and capital flow. The term ‘transnational Chinese cinema’ in film studies has appeared to be popular since late 1990s. For many (Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, 1997), the ‘transnational’ becomes a tool for them to approach the complex connections among three Chinese language cinemas and Chinese diasporic filmmaking in the era of globalization. However, as Chris Berry and Mary Faquhar point out that Hong Kong was “never a nation-state”. Though diplomatically Taiwan possesses a ‘quasi-national’ status, it has never declared its independence and it is still not an official member of the United Nations at the international stage. Berry’s ‘Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies’ (2011) is a key document for conceptualising the term ‘transnational’ in the Chinese case. By referring to Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim (2010), Berry (2011: 9) articulates the three patterns regarding the usage of the term ‘transnational’ among which the second pattern “focuses on cultural formations that sustain cinemas that exceed the borders of individual nation-states or operate at a more local level within them; for example, Arab-language cinemas, Chinese language cinemas”. Although focusing on the multiple and conflicting meanings of the term ‘transnational’ with reference to internationality and globalization, Berry (2011: 14) does not deny that cultural affinity is a larger force that shapes ‘the national’ in three Chinese language cinemas in certain ways. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemsen (2006) stress the importance of the studies of national cinema and the need to continually revise the theories/concepts of national cinema. I need to further clarify the term ‘the national’. Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) is perhaps the most-cited theory of nationalism. By nationalism, Anderson argues how people in different parts of a territory who have never seen each other conceive of themselves as an intimate community, which in fact, is an imagined identity. Anderson (1991: 4) claims that: “... nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind”.

Consequently this ‘Imaged Community’ functions as a post-Enlightenment organizer of populations, affected by the huge migrations and diasporas resulting from post-Second World War processes of decolonization (Croft, 1998, 386-387). And the constructedness of ‘the National’, or “to construct the history of a nation or national cinema as coherent, unified, homogeneous, is to lend support to its erasure of difference and to the maintenance of a centrist and neo-conservative cultural politics” (Faulkner, 1994: 7). Faulkner’s assertion is useful in supporting this article’s arguments as it simplifies the complexities of Chinese cinemas when the article underpins a homogenous identity projected by three Chinese language cinemas.

However, this homogeneity cannot exclude the differentiation of the three cinemas in terms of cultural specificities, as each of them possesses different political and historical experiences. According to Hall (2004), there are at least two senses of identity: identity as being (which offers a sense of unity and commonality) and identity as becoming (or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in our identity formation). “The first position

defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 2004: 387). This is particularly useful for the article when highlighting the role of Chinese culture and traditions among Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hall (2004) also points out the heterogeneity of identity. His assertion helps to support the cultural specificities of each of the three Chinese language cinemas while arguing their homogeneity and heterogeneity in terms of cultural/national identity. In his *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, Hall (2004: 386) states: “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” This critical discourse may be well applied to the Chinese case where three cinemas are geographically and politically separated but which retain strong cultural connections.

The role of culture in the constructedness of identity in the Chinese case is similar to Hayward’s (1993) argument about French National Cinema. In her study of *French National Cinema*, Hayward states that: “In response to how France was perceived from outside ... it will be useful to retain ... the essential notions of nation as myth and nation as difference and continuity as well as the notion of the enunciative role of ideology” (Hayward, 1993: 5). Hayward emphasizes the role of national culture in the constructedness of national identity. Nation-ness is characterized by its own myth and allegory. It is clear that culture plays an important role in the formation of nation. Arjun Appadurai (1996) highlights the role of culture in the production of nationhood, and it is here that cinema occupies an important position as a mass medium: “Modern nationalisms involve communities of citizens in the territorial defined nation-state who share the collective experience, not of face-to-face contact or common subordination to a royal person, but of reading books, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, and other modern texts together” (Appadurai, 1996: 161).

Anderson (1991:18) calls these collective experiences “print capitalism” and “electronic capitalism”. However, recently Higson (2006) problematises Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined community’ by making the following statement: “The ‘imagined community’ argument thus sometimes seems unable to acknowledge the cultural difference and diversity that invariably marks both the inhabitants of a particular nation-state and members of more geographically dispersed ‘national’ communities” (Higson, 2006: 18). Higson’s statement is also true in the case of the three Chinese language cinemas. From this perspective, while exploring the ‘Chineseness’ represented across the three Chinese language cinemas, like both Hall (2004) and Higson (2006)’s arguments, we also acknowledge the discontinuity and differentiation of cultural identity in the Chinese case where politics has played an important role, especially for Taiwan which is still politically separated from Mainland China. As Schubert (2004: 534) points out, Taiwanese political party system “is conceived of as ideologically divided into pro-independence (“pan-green”) and pro-unification (“pan-blue”) camps that support two diverging concepts of nationalism, one Taiwanese and one Chinese”. A survey conducted by Yun-han Chu (2004) regarding Taiwan’s national identity—independence or unification, also shows that strong ideological differentiations exist among Taiwanese public.

Although Hong Kong and Taiwan have been either geographically or politically separated from Chinese mainland for years, the collective experience remains through the influence of Chinese traditional culture. For example, In Hong Kong cinema, the theme of Confucian ethics has not only constantly appeared in the Shaw Brothers’ productions, but it has also dominated most

Hong Kong martial arts and action films, in which protagonists are always bonded with family and brotherhood, such as John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986, 1987) and *The Killer* (1990). According to Confucianism, every social role should strictly abide to his behavioral rules. The representation of Confucianism in Hong Kong cinema becomes evident for the continuity of Chinese traditions and culture in this former British colony. Among the productions of the Shaw Brothers, one typical film of traditional familial ethic is *The Magic Lamp* (Wu Jiangxiang, 1964). The story is popular among Chinese. It is about Chen Xiang who saves his mother by overcoming the toughest difficulties and fighting against evils. This film obviously follows the Confucian code regarding a son's filial piety. Another film, which should be mentioned here, is *My Young Auntie* (Liu Jiangliang, 1980). In this comedy a young lady becomes the aunt of an old man's nephews and at the same time, she has to come to terms with her social position on many levels as the old man's nephews who are also almost the same age as her. As emphasized by Confucianism, young people must respect eldership and eldership must be respectful. Although they are of almost same age, still they must follow the rules according to their positions in a Confucian family hierarchy. Thus comedies happen frequently in this film.

For Taiwanese cinema, the influence of Chinese traditional culture, philosophy and morality is clearly evident in films such as *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, 1993). At the beginning of the film, the parents who represent the dominance of Chinese traditional culture come to New York. Within such a Confucian familial hierarchy, Weitong and Simon, while representing Western culture, show great respect for the parents. However, after the encounter of the two cultures both sides have to make a compromise in order to facilitate an enduring relationship. Ang Lee's control of characters is also influenced by the philosophy of 'the golden mean' of Confucianism which highlights the need to be moderate. His uniqueness lies in the way this philosophy is represented cinematically. In his cinema, he combines more sensitive Chinese cultural characteristics, such as deepness, mystery and tenderness, with freedom and individualism of the West. The narrative, as in many of his films, such as *Pushing Hands* (1991), *Eat Drink Men Women* (1994), possesses the style of Chinese traditional literary narratives: ambiguity, refinement and obscurity.

The Encounter between Tradition, Modernity and Politics

Since the 1980s, three New Wave cinemas emerged in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The history of the New Wave in film scholarship (dating from post WWII Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave), is essentially linked to modernity. As John Orr (1993: 6) states "...the neo-modern moment has its origin in the national cinemas of Western Europe and the United States where it engages with Western capitalist modernity". In terms of national cinemas, European art cinemas differ from others through their portrayal of specific class formations. In particular as Ginette Vincendeau (2001) suggests the role of "Heritage Cinema" is to largely query the life-worlds of the upper middle classes. However, the three Chinese language cinemas that I am investigating have arisen out of the clash between the traditional and the modern, between myth and religion on the one hand and political ideologies on the other. Out of the socio-political complexities and geographical separations of these three areas, history, tradition and continuity provide the links in terms of a shared cultural identity across them. Without this key recognition, the whole discourse of cinema and modernity becomes vacuous (Orr, 1993). The great paradox of film and modernization is that the New Wave cinemas in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan often deal with questions, if not always representations, of 'the past'. Any examination of the identity/identities of the three New Wave cinemas in our study must also consider notions of tradition, religion and religious-based philosophies and politics. Thus in approaching ideas of 'national identity' it is profitable to

begin with the concept of ‘tradition’ as we would argue that the concept of national identity as projected by the cinemas that we are investigating are closely associated with concepts of tradition and issues to do with the past.

Traditions are usually regarded as practices, customs, or stories that are memorized and passed down from generation to generation (forming a rich part of oral history and oral culture from societies where the knowledge and means to write were not widespread). However, Eric Hobsbawm (2012: 1) states that “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented”. According to Hobsbawm (2012), some traditions were deliberately invented for one reason or another, often to highlight or enhance the importance of certain institutions. Traditions may also be changed to suit the needs of the day, and the changes can become accepted as a part of the ancient tradition. He states: “Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 2012: 1).

This assumption regarding ‘tradition’ is important to this article because the understanding of the manipulated nature of ‘tradition’ will help us better understand the shared heritage, practices, and filmmakers’ nostalgia that are manifest within films made in different geographical locations. For example, *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000) invented a kind of ‘new Orientalism’ bringing together allegories and symbols with deep Chinese cultural connotations such as Shanghai dialect, Chinese feminine dress *Cheong-sam*, with nostalgia for 1960’s Hong Kong. This nostalgia is also manifest in Taiwanese New Cinema with a different cultural context. There is an interesting plot in *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsian, 1986) when the fishing boat from Mainland China gets lost and lands on Golden Gate (Taiwan’s territory), in which the fishermen on the boat are received by the Taiwanese army of Golden Gate. These mainland Chinese are afraid of the Taiwanese army but the Taiwanese army warmly welcomes them with an impassioned reception. The army gives the fishermen’s family gifts and in a long farewell scene the army emotionally watches the fishing boat leaving Taiwan. This sequence seems to suggest that the other side of the Taiwan Strait, where the Chinese mainland is situated, is the native land of many Taiwanese people. There is a deep-rooted connection between people on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. This may be viewed as Hou Hsiao-hsian’s cultural feeling towards Mainland China. It is related to his personal diasporic experience and it is also the representation of an emotional longing of many Taiwanese of Chinese origin for Mainland China. For many Taiwanese, Chinese traditions and culture seem to be the memories of their childhood which may fade with years but which are still deeply rooted in their heart. If KMT has attempted to construct Taiwan as a ‘legitimate China’ that is in competition with the People’s Republic of China, Hou sets out to challenge this officialdom by strengthening the remembrance of Chinese mainland as a collective nostalgia.

However, it is equally important to be aware of the fact that Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan have different motivators for nostalgia based on their own socio-political specificities: Hong Kong and Taiwan were both exiled from the Mainland for a long time, which would result in a different motivator for recalling the past that they had lost continuity to. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, many Hong Kong martial arts films looked back to events in Chinese history, especially turbulent historical periods such as the Japanese occupation in the 1930s and Chinese civil war in the 1940s. In these films, the stories of the past illustrated the complicated relationship between individual and nation in terms of fate and destiny. They also praised

loyalty and patriotism. These films, such as *Fist of Fury* (Luo Wei, 1972), *The Way of the Dragon* (Bruce Lee, 1972), touched national memory and cultural emotions and thus they achieved great success in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. Contrastively, Mainland China went through the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, which was not shared by Hong Kong and Taiwan, and so their post revolution films similarly were impelled by a motivation to ‘rediscover’ the past, such as the films of the Fifth Generation’s Filmmakers: *The Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) and *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1987) etc., a motivation which was not shared by Hong Kong or Taiwan.

When film, both a western technology and an exotic thing for Chinese people, was introduced to Mainland China about one hundred years ago, the idea of film as a medium was also influenced by Chinese traditional thinking. Here our starting point is the idea that because of their shared cultural histories that forms of ‘Chineseness’ will be manifest and represented in the three cinemas constituting at least one dimension of ‘national identity’ (but not necessarily in a unified or homogenous way). Here the term ‘Chineseness’ refers to those historically recognized cultural factors/elements such as the philosophies and belief systems stemming from Confucianism and Taoism and also aspects of folklore, customs, allegories and symbolic cultural emblems as typified by the existence of the martial arts hero across the three cinemas and in many of the transnational films of directors of Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese origin.

The influence of Confucianism and Taoism is represented not only in Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese filmmaking practices (in the case of the latter two in a more complex way because of various colonial influences, such as British, Japanese and Dutch colonial experience) but also as a consistent frame of reference. Chinese traditional philosophy is based on the syncretism of heaven and human beings (heaven here refers to the universe/nature). This philosophical approach makes heaven the object of perception and human beings as the subject of perception. This philosophy provides the backbone of recognised social rules within Chinese cultures. Expressed as ‘harmony’ in Taoist philosophy and ‘the Golden Mean’ in Confucianism, Confucianism and Taoism accentuate the interdependent relationships between nature and humanity. In doing so, this neutralizes the conflict between subject and object, and between human beings and nature. This epistemological basis leads to a preoccupation with reflections on the human condition and the experiences of sadness and joy.

In the article when trying to investigate the presence of Chinese traditional culture and philosophies on filmmaking in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan it is also hard to pin down what Chinese traditional cultures are in an exact sense. On the one hand, there is a sense of the ‘original essence’ of Chinese philosophies and approaches to life (outlined briefly above in terms of ways of thinking, cultural beliefs and traditions). On the other hand, there is also an embodiment of the specific historical, political and social contexts in which such belief systems are created. We are seeking here to present an understanding of Chinese culture that sees it as complex in terms of its connection to and dislocation from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan. This leads me in turn to explore issues such as the relationship between modernity, cultural identities and traditional ways of thinking/belief systems.

The notion of traditional culture as an ‘original essence’ is especially interesting when explored in relation to three national/geographical identities that are distinct but also share strong cultural roots. For instance, for five thousand years the majority of the Chinese populations (mainland Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese) have been made up of peasants, which led to the culture of *tudi* (土地). The Chinese term *tudi* may be translated as earth/land in English.

However, the term embodies a more profound meaning in a Chinese context. It refers to the agricultural civilization which is traditionally considered as the principal part of Chinese civilizations. *Tudi*, or earth, is what has nourished Chinese people for centuries. From this perspective, *tudi* also takes on a similar role to that of *terroir* in French civilization which symbolizes a sense of place/belonging. Unsurprisingly *tudi* is highly venerated and it possesses paramount spiritual position among Chinese people. Symbolically *tudi* is both the mother and the home for Chinese people. Its influence can be seen at the heart of Confucianism/Taoism and the ways that it has shaped Chinese societies for over two thousand years. Confucius (1996: 45) says: “while father and mother are alive, a good son does not wander far afield”. Because *tudi* may be considered as the origin of Chinese civilization its influence on filmmaking can be seen in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (particularly in the films of the Fifth Generation in Mainland China, the Taiwanese New Cinema and Hong Kong New Wave cinema in the 1980s). It is no accident that the title of the first internationally acclaimed film of the Fifth Generation, *Huang Tudi* (*Yellow Earth*, Kaige Chen, 1984), signals a post-cultural revolution reflection on identity based on a return to ‘countryside’. As Chow notes: “...reflecting on ‘culture’ inevitable involves the rethinking of origins—the ‘pasts’ that give rise to the present moment; the narratives, myths, rituals, customs, and practices that account for how a people becomes what it is” (Chow, 1995: 174).

Yellow Earth is the first internationally acclaimed film for the Fifth Generation and has received widespread academic attention. The film is set in 1930s’ Shanxi, which is located in Western China where the yellow soil forms a distinctive geographical feature. As mentioned earlier, Chinese civilization is founded on agriculture. Yellow earth (*tudi*) is also symbolic of the home or the mother for Chinese people and Chinese civilization as a whole. The most distinctive success of *Yellow Earth* is undoubtedly Zhang Yimou’s cinematography. This film made Zhang’s reputation as the best cameraman in China. Graduating from the Cinematography Department of the Beijing Film Academy in the same year as Chen, Zhang’s cinematographic style is unique in Chinese cinema and this gave the film *Yellow Earth* a significant character through its artistic composition. Again Taoist painting has influenced Zhang’s cinematography but his style also connected the characteristics of both Eastern and Western aesthetics in his cinematography. For Esther C. M. Yau (2006: 202), “the static views of distant ravines and slopes of the Loess Plateau resemble a Chinese scroll-painting of the Changan School”. In fact, the vast landscape and the yellow earth also symbolise the home and mother of Chinese people and Chinese civilization. It is on such ‘poor’ and vast yellow earth that Chinese people struggled with their fate in the post-Cultural Revolution period. Indeed, the effect of this collaborative aesthetic achieved with Zhang’s elaborate cinematography visually presents a metaphor for the socio-political context of this period.

In Taiwan, the direct reflection of *tudi* may experience a certain transition or variation. The same happened in Hong Kong cinema since it is more a commercial cinema, especially post-1960s. However, the ideology of *tudi* is not excluded to its martial arts films and gangster cinema, which is transformed into the protection of ‘homeland’ and worship of community. The notion of *bao jia wei guo* (to protect our homes and defend our country) has been paramount to Chinese people since ancient times. Among many martial arts films, protagonists constantly feature as a national hero against foreign aggression. Huang Feihong in *Once Upon a Time in China* (Tsui Hark, 1991) and its sequels can perhaps be regarded as one of the most patriotic characters. The notion of *tudi* (here an unseparated unity of both home and country) and the poetical justice are two main themes in the films of Bruce Lee as well as the *Once Upon a Time in China* series. Both Bruce Lee’s characters and the character Huang Feihong show their Confucian morality: wisdom, kindness, braveness, loyalty and forgiveness. These

films also illustrated a spiritual world of Confucianism: Kung Fu is not a resort for conquering others and gaining power or profit. It is in fact a way for cultivating one's morality, self-dependence and practicing poetical justice when necessary.

More pervasive than a particular relationship to the earth is perhaps the dominance of the spiritual and ethical framework for living that is supplied by Confucianism and Taoism which constitute, like Hellenism, Hebraism and Germanic tradition in the West, the core of Chinese culture. They have shaped Chinese societies for over two thousand years and have become the core of Chinese civilization. The influence of Confucianism and Taoism also shaped many Eastern Asian countries such as Japan, Singapore and South Korea. As Mijun Park and Catherine Chesla state: "Confucianism is not merely a Chinese philosophy. As with other great ancient philosophies, such as Buddhism and Daoism, Confucianism was introduced to EA countries and deeply influenced the formation of every aspect of life. Confucianism was the philosophic ground of much of the culture in East and Southeast Asia" (Park and Chesla, 2007: 297).

To understand the role of Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese civilization will help us better understand how Chinese and nations of Chinese origin became what they are. If China does not have its own religion (Buddhism finds its origin in India), then Confucianism and Taoism, the two philosophical schools can be viewed as two 'religions' since ancient times in China. The Confucian ideology of order (more from a moral perspective) plays an important role in the formation of Chinese society and family, and it is important for us to understand the theme of family, father-son relationship from a Confucian perspective in the films of the three Chinese language cinemas.

Taoism also has a significant influence in Chinese thinking. For Taoism, or Tao, the basic idea is that behind all material things and all the change in the world there lies one fundamental, universal principle: 'the Way' or Tao. "The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying way; The names that can be named are not unvarying names. It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang; The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind (Lao Tzu, 1997: 3)". The purpose of human life, then, is to live life according to Tao, which requires passivity, calm, non-striving, humility, and lack of planning, for to plan is to go against the Tao. Different to Taoism, Confucianism emphasizes the way of living in society. If Taoism can be viewed as the way of living in harmony with nature, then Confucianism is the way of residing within society. Confucianism emphasizes disciplines, beliefs and virtues such as loyalty, brotherhood love and filial piety. These Confucian codes have been found useful by Chinese emperors for their feudal governance and it has always been adopted by feudal regimes as the main spiritual belief in Chinese history for more than two thousand years.

The four cardinal virtues of Confucianism are filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, and trust; and the Taoist philosophy of harmony between nature and humanity are paramount in Chinese cultures. The codes of Confucianism and Taoism have shaped and constituted Chinese cultural/national identity in the cinemas of the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, these cultural codes persisting as mythic symbols of national identity and national narratives. Thus in the formation of 'the National' in the three Chinese language cinemas we are investigating, the main tenet/beliefs of Confucianism and Taoism take central place. Despite this centrality, Confucianism and Taoism are not one single unified concept but a series of ancient traditions and approaches that, as I will argue, can endure across geographical and political separations.

Confucian and Taoist ideologies also act as a cultural core for the aesthetics of Chinese films. This will also be an important element for our arguments regarding the cultural identity of the three Chinese language cinemas and the authorial signatures of certain auteur directors. From an aesthetic perspective, Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar (1999) have explored the relationship between Chinese painting and Chinese films. They note: “sinicization was also applied to the image, with a certain aesthetic decorative style, where the basic socialist-realist style was stuccoed over with Chinese motifs” (Berry and Farquhar, 1999: 83). However, what lies behind Chinese painting is the influence of Chinese traditional culture and what has shaped the aesthetic techniques of Chinese painting includes more profound cultural significances (that is, those that are deeper than the level of technique).

Without the knowledge of Chinese traditional culture, and acknowledging its interaction with modernity in specific historical context, we fail to interpret ‘the National’ with enough cultural significance. If language is well established as a carrier of culture, then a national cinema can be seen as a new carrier of national culture/identity with the medium of film becoming one of the most immediate and popular ways for people to encounter another ‘country’ in the age of globalization. In the case of Chinese language cinemas very few Western scholars and even fewer Western audiences speak Mandarin and an important aspect of meaning is lost in translation.

The quality of the acting is frequently noted as suffering in dubbed films, as the vocal qualities, tones, and rhythms of specific languages, combined with the gestures and facial expressions that mark national characters and acting styles, become literally lost in translation. (Betz, 2009: 50)

This is even more complicated with Hong Kong and Chinese mainland cinema. During the shooting, Hong Kong often uses stars who speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. The final edit will then be dubbed into both Cantonese and Mandarin for two releases in the two areas. For example, Tony Leung (Hong Kong born movie star) would be acting in Cantonese, whereas Jet Li (from Mainland China) would be acting in Mandarin. This means that in both languages, the lips rarely synchronize with the spoken words, as some actors will be speaking in one language and others in the other. Chinese mainland cinema is more complicated, as until very recently films were not allowed to use synchronous sound and all dialogue was recorded and dubbed in post-production, which again, often caused the vocal movements to fall out of synchronization.

For viewers who are not familiar with Chinese traditional philosophies then further nuances of cultural meaning are easily overlooked. However, our emphasis of Chinese traditional culture does not deny modernity in the three countries whose cinemas we are investigating. By the term ‘modernity’, we are speaking of modernity both in and outside of cinema: the modernity in Chinese cinemas and the modernity in Chinese societies. Yau (2006: 212) offers a formulation of China’s relationship to modernity, noting that: “Since the nineteenth century, major historical events in China (wars, national calamities, revolutions, etc) have made four topics crucial to national consciousness – feudalism, subsistence, socialism and modernisation – and discourses are prompted in relation to them in numerous literary and cultural text”.

Although Hong Kong and Taiwan had popular film industries since 1960s, mainland Chinese Cinema, Hong Kong cinema and Taiwanese cinema all underwent their *modernization* in the 1980s which are characterized by the three film movements: the Fifth Generation, Hong Kong

New Wave Cinema and Taiwanese New Cinema. In cross-cultural research, the impact of modernity (and its adjunct globalization) has had on the cultural traditions of Confucianism and Taoism is undeniable. Since 1949, Chinese traditional cultural values in Mainland China have encountered Marxism and socialism, more specifically, Maoism. In fact this encounter has fundamentally shaped Chinese minds and societies in Chinese mainland and though more indirectly (certainly until the re-incorporation of Hong Kong into the People's Republic of China in 1997) that also of Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, the anxiety for Hong Kong's return to Mainland China in 1997 has not only affected individuals' mind in Hong Kong but became a kind of collective cloud of depression hovering over the heads of Hongkongnese during the run-up to being handed back to the Chinese administration. Consequently many films of Hong Kong between 1980s and 1990s have inevitably been read as anxiety for its political 'transaction' in 1997, such as the English title of John Woo's *Ying Xiong Ben Se*, which was translated into *A Better Tomorrow* with obvious political implications for Hong Kong's future.

Between 1966 and 1976 Mainland China's economy was heavily damaged by the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution. When it came to an end in 1976, the CCP realised that China's economy was on the verge of collapse. In 1978 they launched the economic 'Opening Policy' and took economy as the core of the country, with the determination of developing economy by all means. Chairman Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the Second generation of the CCP, made the famous remark regarding the discussions of socialism and capitalism: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice" (Strother, 2006: 36). Although Chinese capitalism was initially developed in China since 1840s following the Opium War and reached its peak between 1927 and 1949 before the establishment of the PRC, it has never been fully developed pre 1949 because of China's political complexities. Capitalism was also completely eliminated between 1949 and 1976 due to the rigid communist/Maoist ideology. Thus Deng's black/white cat remark after the Cultural Revolution was quickly seized by the West for more sensitive political implication. On 6th January 1986, Deng appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine as the Man of the Year. Ever since the 'Opening Policy' advocated by Deng, capitalism and Western secularism have interacted with Maoism, communism and Chinese traditional cultures, and the representations of these influences on Chinese cinemas are worthy of further exploration.

Following the end of the ten-year Cultural Revolution in 1976, a cultural movement of searching for roots was initiated in cinema and literature. For many who experienced the loss of faith and ideology, the spiritual vacuum that resulted converged with the emergent commercialism in the 1980s. In response to this, Richard Madsen (1998) describes the situation in post-Cultural Revolution China as follows:

The Cultural Revolution destroyed the religious aura that Mao had created around the Communist movement...even as the state withdrew from its religious pretension, though, the senseless violence of the Cultural Revolution had left the Chinese people with more profound questions than ever before about the ultimate meaning of life. In this moral vacuum, many Chinese were predisposed to look to traditional religion to make sense of the tragedies of history and to sustain new hope for the future. (Madsen, 1998: 39)

In *Red Sorghum* 'my grandma' avoids her arranged marriage by the use of her active sexuality. By having sex with 'my grandpa' in a red sorghum field her life takes a different turn. The bold expression of their sexual act is adventurous in mainland Chinese cinema in the 1980s and

would seem to deliberately suggest the idea of potency and autonomy. This is both sexual and political in terms of the power to break social, moral constraints and with feudal (and communist) society. Zhang directly attacks feudal ideology in this film and indirectly also communist ideology and, in so doing, he also generates a specific idea of nation that is not in line with a political version of feudalism and communism which is current in contemporary China. He draws on notions of loyalty and the collective memory of the Japanese invasion in the 1930s. At the end of the film, when facing the invasion of a foreign enemy, 'my grandma' and the villagers where she lives sacrifice their own lives against Japanese for the sake of the country. The ending ties in with loyalty to the communist state but also expressed the emphasis in Confucianism of loyalty and patriotism to *tudi*. This is an obligation that takes precedence over all other moral obligations. In the film 'my grandpa and my grandma' win the trust of villagers and work hard to turn the wine workshop into prosperity before the Japanese invasion. This is an endeavor demanded by Confucianism. The theme of cultivation lies at the heart of Chinese civilization. As a key film of the Fifth Generation, *Red Sorghum* has a vital role in projecting a complex understanding of past and present mainland Chinese cultural identity.

Conclusion

With special focus on the new wave movement in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s, the article sets up a theoretical framework for the argument that 'Chineseness'/Chinese traditional cultural influences constitute at least one dimension of the shared identity across the 'three Chinas'. The article suggests that there are commonalities of cultures based on traditional Chinese philosophies which surpass their territorial boundaries but which also produce distinctive projections of what Chinese cultural specificities might be in a modern context.

In the case of all three cinemas that we are investigating, political intervention is an enormous influence in the constructedness of their nation-states. Regarding the cultural specificities of the three Chinese language cinemas, there is no way to escape an emphasis on the role of politics and political ideologies in the studies of the 'three Chinas'. This political or government connection is, of course, not that unusual in the formation and shaping of national cinemas. French cinema, for instance is a good case of illustrating this. Like in many other nations, there has been strong government involvement in the film industry in France. The Centre National de la Cinématographie was established in order to serve the need of the state to create a national cinema in 1946 (Hayward, 1993). In the era of globalization, Berry (2011, 12) points out that in a transnational context "corporations have greater relative autonomy from the state in regard to at least the economy and can operate economically across state borders more easily." Emilie Yue-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis (2008, 37-51) propose the term 'hype-national' to describe the 'transnational' in three Chinese language cinemas by emphasizing the roles and functions of the government-owned China Film Group, which, according to them, seeks to implement national consolidation and transnational reach within the three areas.

There is a fundamental question: what particular national identity a national cinema intends to project with the government intervention and nationalism ideologies in a certain historical period? In the Chinese case, the role of the political ideology has played an important role in the construction of national identity since 1949 both in Mainland China, Taiwan and to a lesser extent Hong Kong. The triumph of Communism and Maoism in Mainland China and the retreat of KMT to Taiwan initiated political competition as each tried to construct itself as the legitimate site of China. After the Second World War (especially the Japanese occupation), nationalist ideology was also spread and represented in Hong Kong cinema. As mentioned, this is seen in Hong Kong martial arts films (such as Bruce Lee's films) which were popular both

in the East and the West since 1970s. Thus, national image and national identities shifted according to government interventions and their financial backing as well as different prevalent nationalist ideologies. As Hayward (1993: 6) indicates: “shifts according to which particular nation is being referred to because the concept of a nation’s cinema will change according to a nation’s ideology”. This point of view is similar to Higson’s argument (2002: 132-142): “the concept of a national cinema has almost invariably been mobilized as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance; a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of (usually) Hollywood’s international domination”. This is especially the case in Chinese mainland cinema and Taiwanese cinema post-1949 when both competed to construct themselves as the legitimate site for a Chinese nation-state. For Hong Kong, being a British colony for one hundred and fifty seven years, cinema has also been a particular site for the articulation of identity in a colonial context. Such political intervention in the constructedness of national identity deserves to be further explored in the contexts of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, Government intervention and especially the influences of a Communist ideology are of great importance to the projected national identity in mainland Chinese cinema after 1949.

While allowing for their own political histories and identities the article opens up a debate on, and provides an alternative way, for seeing Taiwan and Hong Kong as ‘*Chinese*’. By replacing a traditional national cinema framework with a post-national and culturally based methodology, the article considers cultural affinity as greater than national and political boundaries, and provides an alternative way for seeing the three areas to continue to have contested political identities, while sharing a singular cultural identity.

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Sounds, Swords and Forests: An Exploration into the Representations of Music and Martial Arts in Contemporary Kung Fu Films

Brent Keogh

Abstract

In the Wu Xia film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002), Jet Li's character Nameless ponders mid-combat the connection between the martial arts and music, stating that both wrestle with 'complex chords and rare melodies'. There have been various articulations of the Chinese equivalents to the Medieval Quadrivium, whereby the cultured person is expected to be competent in a select number of artistic and intellectual disciplines. Rather than the four disciplines of this particularly western approach, several Chinese equivalents have been based on the number five, a significant number featured in the I Ching, whose articulation of the Five Elements (Fire, Metal, Wood, Water and Earth) can be found throughout traditional Chinese medicine, cosmology, and martial arts. One such articulation expects the cultured martial artist to be competent in the disciplines of calligraphy, music, healing (acupuncture, Chinese medicine), cosmology, and of course, kung fu. My interest in this article is to explore the ways in which the philosophical connections between music and martial arts have been represented and articulated in contemporary kung fu films.

Keywords: Martial arts cinema, music, Kung Fu, interdisciplinary arts practice

Introduction:

The desire to articulate a synthesis between what may be conceived of as the disciplines of the body and those of the mind, attaining to an imagined ideal of the complete human through complementary artistic and physical disciplines, has been expressed in a variety of cultural contexts. In Ancient Greece for example, this ideal is expressed through the concept of *arete* (Levine 1984, p. 213). In some societies at certain points in time, the disciplines of the body were separated from the disciplines of the mind, such as the 6th century idea of the Trivium, where the complete person was educated in logic, grammar and rhetoric, or the Pythagorean Quadrivium - arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Levine 1984, p. 214). In this article, I wish to take these ideas of the complete individual as it has been expressed in Chinese philosophy (particularly Confucian ideas), and explore its articulation in contemporary kung fu films.

I should acknowledge at the beginning of this article that my approach to this topic is as a musician and martial arts practitioner, an interest fuelled by practical and personal concerns as to how these disciplines have been framed in complementary discourses of human learning. As a musician, I have been a student of Egyptian *oud* player and Australian Record Industry Awardee (ARIA) Joseph Tawadros since 2009, and I have been studying various martial arts since 2002, focusing in Yong Chun Pai (Southern mainland style of Wing Chun) under Sifu John Brixey since 2010 (Brixey 2013). During lessons with my Sifu, it is common that musical analogies are used in order to explain martial concepts and applications. I discovered that in some contemporary martial arts manuals, competence in a range of artistic practices as well as the martial arts, are still encouraged. For example, one Qigong Master instructs his students, ‘in my Qigong, martial arts, Chinese astrology, music and calligraphy practice, I remember what my masters told me, ‘No rush. Slow down. Take your time.’” (Wu 2006, p. 5)

For Sinologists, it would come as no surprise to find a martial artist competent in a range of artistic and scholastic disciplines, including the study of music. Levine (1984, p. 216) has noted that the development of the education curriculums from the Chou (or Zhou) Dynasty (1027 to 221 B.C.) onwards often involved the study of music in addition to martial training. Levine writes that the educational aims to create the cultivated person in the Chou Dynasty involved competency in six subjects: rituals, music, archery, charioteering, writing and mathematics (Levine 1984, p. 216). In this article, it is not my purpose to affirm or justify any one of these configurations concerning the complete individual; rather I wish to explore how these ideas, particularly as they relate to the complementary relationships between music (in particular) and the arts (more generally), with the Chinese martial arts as it is represented in film.

As a western consumer of Chinese martial arts films, it should be acknowledged that this study is part of a much broader process of intricate, asymmetrical and complex global cultural flows between diverse territories. I do not have the space here to recount the subtleties of the debates concerning the cultural aspects of globalization (for further discussion see Isar 2012; Wu and Chan 2007), however for the purposes of this paper I embrace the position forwarded by scholars such as Chan and Wu (2007, p. 195) who position martial arts films as part of the counter-flows from ‘East’ to ‘West’.

Additionally, as a western consumer, I am reliant on the translations provided in the subtitles of many of the films used in this analysis. Of course the lack of linguistic capability in Mandarin or Cantonese is a limitation in this analysis; however, rather than attempting to accurately represent the subject position of a consumer with those capabilities, this paper is more reflective of the kind of subject position and hermeneutical readings performed by

growing numbers of western audiences for Chinese film. The advantage I have writing in this moment, is that many of the actors themselves, directors, and the people employed in the production process, also do not have the cultural capital and linguistic competencies one might expect (see Wu and Chan 2007, pp. 201-202). These film texts are increasingly being produced through inter-cultural processes for transnational audiences and thus require a critical approach that engages with the nuances and complexities of global/local circulations.

In this paper therefore, I shall explore the representation of the arts and the martial artist in four sections: firstly, the representation of the complementarity of martial arts with other artistic disciplines; secondly, the connection between arts and the cultivation of a virtuous character; thirdly, the connection between villainy, the arts and the martial artist; and finally, the effects of modernity and representations of complementarity. In considering a wide range of martial arts films, here I argue that there is a distinction between the representation of the relationship between the arts and the martial arts in mythical and historical/epic characters, as opposed to films set from the time of modernity. The former case appears to revel in the idealism of the martial artist as artist, while artistic practice for the latter is absent, where the disjuncture of sound from sound source brought about by the machines of modernity (Feld 1994) are reflected in the cultural disjunctures between artist and martial artist.

Hard Work Over Time To Accomplish Skill

‘Let the character be formed by the poets; established by the laws of right behaviour; and perfected with music.’ Confucius, *Analects*, 8/8. (Confucius 1995, p. 42). This quotation from Confucius reflects his high view of music in the completion of one’s character. Steben (2010, p. 2) explains that for Confucius, noble and spiritual music was seen to be able to complete a person’s character due to its ability to draw the mind to a point of ‘tranquil inwardly-centred absorption, opening the heart to deep transformative spiritual energies’. Steben notes here that the laws of ‘right behaviour,’ (or in the translation he was using, ‘ritualized action’) can also be seen as ritualized movement, including dance. It is possible to see how this maxim may be applied to the martial arts as a form of ritualized movement. The first theme that I wish to explore in this article is the idea that artistic pursuit is complementary with the martial arts in the formation of the complete individual. In martial arts film, this idea is often expressed by demonstrating complementarity between martial and artistic disciplines. It is also expressed by demonstrating that the master of a martial art is also competent in other scholastic and artistic disciplines.

In the film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002), music and martial arts are depicted as disciplines with shared principles and teleologies. Early in the film, Nameless (Jet Li) performs his first re-telling of his efforts to subdue the assassins threatening the Qin Emperor. Nameless, armed with sword, duels with the assassin Sky (Donnie Yen), armed with spear. The battle is conducted as a battle amongst two equally skilled martial artists. Their first encounter results in a draw, at which point the visual cuts to an old blind man making his way through the chess house with a *guqin* wrapped under his arm. Nameless pays the old man and asks him to play a tune for the combatants. The old man begins playing, while the combatants regroup and formulate their battle plans in the depths of their minds. The narrative voice of ‘Nameless’ informs the Emperor: “Music and Martial Arts share the same principles: both wrestle with complex chords and rare melodies” (Yimou, 2002).

Music here is seen to be complementary to the mental preparation needed to formulate their battle strategy. Beginning slowly, the music matches the movements of the combatants, fighting in the depths of each other’s minds. As the combatants’ fight intensifies, so does the

music. This intensity reaches a peak at which the old man's plucking breaks the strings of the *guqin*, and the dream fight vanishes. Nameless launches at Sky and defeats him swiftly.

In this momentary pause in the battle, there are three elements in Nameless's reflection that are worthy of note. Firstly, the comparison between music and martial arts here reveals that both disciplines require some form of struggle and hard work. Expertise in either discipline cannot be achieved without sustained and focused effort. Secondly, these disciplines are characterised by complexity and rarity. Even a cursory glance at the world's music cultures demonstrates the huge variety and complexity of humanly organised sounds (see for example Titon 2009). In addition to familiar structures, the creative impetus in many sonic cultures drives people to search out those rare melodies; the rarest and most beautiful are sounds unheard (Rowell 1984, p. 74). The 'chords' mentioned here also resonate with the vertical and horizontal structures of play in the martial arts, the complexities of movements, damage and repair, and the architecture of bodies involved. Like music, the martial arts have often been characterised by the search and development of new moves, styles, expressions, that reflect both the creative impulse of its practitioners and the necessity to gain an advantage over one's opponent. Thirdly, there is an implied sense of teleology and purpose in this statement; that one struggles with the complexities and rarities of these disciplines for a purpose, an end goal, some form of attainment or pursuit.

This goal is more clearly articulated in *Forbidden Kingdom* (Minkoff, 2008) starring Jet Li and Jackie Chan. Chan's character Lu Kang and Jet Li's character, who is simply referred to as Monk, are presiding over the training of The Seeker – American born Jason Tripetakis. This name is derived from Buddhist master Tripetika from the Monkey King story (Ting 1988, p. 19), who has been transported through time and space to return the sacred staff of the Monkey King. Lu Kang explains the nature and teleology of kung fu:

Kung fu: hard work over time to accomplish skill. A painter can have kung fu, or the butcher who cuts meat every day with such skill that his knife never touches bone.... A musician can have kung fu, or the poet who paints pictures with words. Formless, nameless, the true master dwells within (Minkoff, 2008).

Lu Kang's definition of kung fu presents a much broader application of the term than simply referring to the martial disciplines. It is a level of accomplishment and mastery that can be achieved in almost any form of work or cultivation.

The accomplishment of the martial adept is often demonstrated in martial arts films through their accomplishment in another field of artistic and scholastic endeavour, including music. Calligraphy as an artistic discipline historically has a close relationship with both music and the martial arts. Stock (2009, p. 396) has noted that the performance techniques of the *guqin* (or *qin*) and the specific forms of notation used were directly derived from the brush strokes of calligraphy. Stock further draws connections between these arts forms with respect to their shared philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities (ibid.). Calligraphy also has a strong history of association with the martial arts and martial practitioners (see for example Oh and Ching 2012, pp. 39-46), thus in addition to music, proficiency in calligraphy is often used to suggest martial prowess. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000), Michelle Yeoh's character Shu Lien is subtly interrogating the female protagonist Jen, played by Zhang Ziyi, who has been suspected of stealing the Green Destiny Sword. Shu Lien visits Jen as she is in her father's house practicing calligraphy, and she comments:

I never noticed that my name looks like the word for sword. You write gracefully. Calligraphy is so similar to swordplay (Lee, 2000).

The connection of swordplay and calligraphy is more overtly displayed in the film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002). In this film, Nameless goes in search of the two assassins Broken Sword and Flying Snow, who have taken refuge in a calligraphy school in the state of Zhou. Nameless's strategy is to discover the true source of Broken Sword's skill with the *jian* (sword) in order that he may defeat him in battle; Nameless believes this secret is contained in his calligraphy. Nameless manages to coax this secret out of Broken Sword by requesting a rare variation of the Chinese character for sword. This scroll becomes a pivotal and powerful symbol in the movie, ultimately directing the fate and lives of the people of China.

As with calligraphy, proficiency in dance is also used to suggest martial ability. In *House of Flying Daggers* (Yimou, 2004), Mei (Ziyi Zhang) is first introduced as a blind, but gifted dancer in the visually stunning Peony Pavillion. She begins by singing and dancing for Jin (Takeshi Kaneshiro). An ensemble of *pipa* and *erhu* musicians is ushered into the room to accompany Mei. When the song is finished, Jin attempts to take advantage of Mei by force, but is interrupted by the local police who arrest him. The police captain Liu (Andy Lau) arrests Mei, but is persuaded by the matron of the Peony Pavillion to witness her rare ability as a dancer. The scene is lavishly prepared, additional musicians (particularly percussionists) are introduced, and all the guests and the women of the Peony Pavillion gather to the balconies in order to savour the event. The captain instigates the 'echo' game by flicking stones at a set of freestanding drums that have been arranged in a circle around Mei. As the game plays out, she performs with great skill and accuracy. The game intensifies as the captain launches the entire bowl of stones at the drums. She responds by hitting each drum with her 'flying sleeves', and the true nature of her athleticism is fully realised. As the time between hits is shortened, the drumbeats become louder and denser, and her flowing sleeves like snakes flash mesmerizingly before the Captain, take hold of his sword from out of its sheath and attack him. It is at this climax of music and dance that the hidden martial skill of this blind performer is finally revealed.

Music, Martial Arts and Virtue

'Virtue is the strong stem of human nature and music is the blossoming of virtue.' Confucius, *Li Ki*, 17/2/21. (Confucius, cited in Dawson, 2005, p. 255). In Confucian thought, the ideal of the complete person (in this case, the martial adept) is strongly connected to ideas of what it is to be virtuous. This idea is often utilised to establish the virtue of martial arts characters in film. In the film *Iron Monkey* (Woo-Ping, 1993), the virtuous character of protagonist Dr. Yang (Yu Rong Guang) is represented in the memory of Miss Orchid (Jean Wang), as she remembers him redeeming her from a life of prostitution. The memory segues to the present day, as she looks out on a solitary Dr Yang playing *erhu*, while his voice recites a poem emphasizing the virtue of the health practitioner. Competency in music, martial arts, and knowledge of the healing arts coalesce to form the firm foundations of the virtue of this 'Robin Hood-like' character.

In the films *The Battle for Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009), music and the arts were used as a means of distinguishing between the virtue of the Southern army viceroy Zhou Yu (Tony Leung) and the invading General Cao Cao (Zhang Feng Yi). His virtue is revealed through music when the viewer is first introduced to Zhou Yu presiding over the training of his forces. Amid the noise of soldiers training, Zhou Yu's keen ears detect someone playing the flute nearby. He commands the training to stop and he leaves to investigate. Zhou Yu comes face to face with

the musician – a small boy, sitting up on a hill. The commanding viceroy gestures with his hand and demands the boy hand over the flute. Zhou Yu pulls out a knife that he acquires from an old man standing with the boy. The virtue, or lack thereof of Zhou Yu's character is determined in this moment, where the face of the old man and the boy are filled with dread over what Zhou Yu might do with the knife and the boy. Instead, Zhou Yu uses the knife to carve out the mouthpiece of the flute to facilitate the clearer articulation of the pitch of the instrument and hands the flute back to the young boy. The young boy begins playing (this time the pitch is significantly improved), and the image of Zhou Yu is blended with images of the picture-esque Southlands and the Yangze river – whose beauty, people and lands Zhou Yu will very soon be defending. The strategist Zhuge Liang, the subtitles of the film translate the character's name as 'Kongming', shows admiration for Zhou Yu and the army of the Southlands, praising them that 'these soldiers can fight and appreciate music' (Woo, 2008/2009).

In the very next scene, Zhou Yu is featured playing the *guqin*. The height of Zhou Yu's virtue and completeness with regards to music and martial strategy occurs in this moment. In this scene, he avoids making the crucial decision as to whether he will join forces with Liu Bei and fight Cao Cao's invading army. Though pressed to discuss matters of war, he dismisses this discussion, opting instead to engage in a musical dialogue with the military strategist Zhuge Liang. In this encounter, Zhou Yu invites Zhuge Liang to engage in a dialogue on the *guqin*, and assumes that Zhuge Liang is also learned in music. Through a series of close-ups, the individuals communicate without words their intentions for battle. It is through this musical dialogue that Zhou Yu agrees to form an alliance with Liu Bei. Zhuge Liang comments after this encounter, that 'his (Zhou Yu) answer is in his music' (Woo, 2008/2009). Zhou Yu's wife Xiaoqiao (Lin Chi-ling), an artist in her own right, is also depicted as perceiving the weighty implications of this encounter; that her husband has decided to pursue a course of war in defence of the Southlands.

Another musical dialogue between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang reveals both the power of music to communicate the unspeakable depths of emotion and their virtuous concern for Xiaoqiao. Xiaoqiao has secretly left the safety of the Southlands encampment in an attempt to stall the launch of Cao Cao's military campaign. The frenetic dialogue on the *guqin* between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang expresses their righteous fear for Xiaoqiao, who has made herself vulnerable and exposed before a ferocious opponent. The musical dialogue in this instance allows Zhou Yu in particular to emotionally express his fears for his wife, a fragility that cannot be expressed in any other context from this Viceroy of the Southlands army.

Like music, calligraphy is also utilised to express the virtue of the martial artist in film. In the film *Hero* (Yimou, 2002), the ultimate virtue that a martial artist should be aspiring towards is reflected and perceived through calligraphy. The scroll commissioned of Broken Sword by Nameless becomes a focal point of the movie, a hinge upon which the narrative course turns. When the scroll is revealed in the palace of the Emperor of Qin, the Emperor asks Nameless whether he can understand the true meaning and therefore the source of Broken Sword's martial skill. In the course of their dialogue, Nameless admits that he does not fully perceive the meaning of the scroll. At the climax of the film, where Nameless prepares to implement his unstoppable lethal technique, the Emperor perceives the true meaning of the scroll. It is upon meditation on this scroll that the Emperor of Qin's life is spared by Nameless, as he perceives the highest ideal of the warrior embodied in Broken Sword – that is, when the 'sword disappears altogether...[and] the desire to kill no longer exists. Only peace remains' (Yimou, 2002).

Music, Martial Arts and Villany

A man who is not virtuous, what has he to do with the music of the temple? Confucius, *Analects*, 3/3. (Confucius, 1995, p. 11). The idea of virtue in connection to music appears to be so strong that it has been articulated in many different cultural and temporal contexts. The sentiment in Confucius' hypothetical question here is also expressed in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, where Lorenzo corrects Jessica's melancholy at the sound of music:

The man that hath no music in himself, nor is moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; the motions of his spirit are dull as night, and his affections dark as Erebus let no such man be trusted (The Complete Works of Shakespeare, 1958, p. 206).

However, while the connection between music and martial arts is often depicted in terms of completeness and virtue, there are times when this connection is actually made with regards to the villain in the film. In *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004), a pair of blind, hired killers are enlisted to quell some local (and competent) resistance to the Axe Gang. As they are being interviewed for the job, the killers are asked:

(Gangster) So you're the top killers now?
(Assassin 1) Strictly speaking, we're musicians. [Recites Poem] *A song that wrenches the heart, O where do I find a knowing ear?* (Chow, 2004)

The potency of these assassins is not so much in their martial prowess, but in the deadly power of their music. In order to assassinate their victims, the killers perform music on the *guzheng*. In the course of the performance, a vast array of swords, bullets, and fists fly out of instrument. This reaches a crescendo when an army of dead, pirate-looking soldiers are launched out of the instrument at their martial foes.

In the more historically situated film *Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon* (Lee, 2009), music is also strongly connected with the villain. Here it is the daughter of the great military General Cao Cao, Cao Ying (Maggie Q), who's martial and military prowess is depicted through her mastery of the *pipa*. Her playing is at times subtle, at times furious, and provides a sonic narrative to the ebb and flow of battle. In the standoff between Cao Ying and Zhou Zilong (Andy Lau) she loses the fight. As she regains her position at the head of the army, her *pipa* is immediately returned to her. In the final battle scene of the film, the *pipa* is pictured and heard more prominently than the sounds of the drums of war, and provides the soundtrack to the commencement of battle. The ruthlessness with which Cao Ying's character is portrayed in this film is vastly different to the graciousness of a character such as Zhou Yu in *The Battle for Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009), and so music here cannot be a representation of moral virtue. Instead, it seems more likely that the *pipa* functions as a symbol of her mastery of military strategy, of martial skill, and as a means to focus her formidable mind as a military commander.

The villainy of Cao Cao in the *Battle of Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009) is the embodiment of the Confucius citation above. Cao Cao is a military commander *without* music. The representation of artistic practice with Cao Cao is always depicted as marred by his lack of moral character. When he recites poetry, it is self-aggrandising; it is about conquest in the pursuit of self-interest. Sixty minutes into the film, the virtuous Zhou Yu is contrasted with the corrupted Cao Cao. Zhou Yu is pictured practicing his sword form; Xiaoqiao is practicing the tea ceremony and recites from the Art of War, while *guzhen* music plays in the background. Cao Cao in contrast

is pictured boasting of his inevitable victory of Zhou Yu and plans to use an outbreak of typhoid to his advantage against the Southern armies. In a revealing dialogue between Zhou Yu and his wife Xiaoqiao (Lin Chi-Ling), Xiaoqiao longingly wishes they could invite Cao Cao over for tea, ‘forget the war and just enjoy the scenery’ to which Zhou Yu replies, ‘I doubt he appreciates the art of tea’ (Woo, 2008/2009). It is his lack of appreciation of the art of tea, and his misplaced desire for Zhou Yu’s wife that in the end costs Cao Cao the victory at Red Cliff.

The modern martial artist: a (wo)man without music?

Several martial arts movies set from the early 20th century to the present, seem to demonstrate a shift in the perception of the relationship between the martial artist and the arts. The impacts of modernity, colonialism, trade, Western influence and technological change seems to have impacted on the perception of the complementarity of the arts with the martial arts, and it is this theme that I wish to explore here.

Though removed somewhat from the subject area of Chinese film, the absence of the arts in the life of the martial artist is particularly evident in Hollywood style action movies. In some of Jet Li’s more popular films such as *Kiss of the Dragon* (Nahon, 2001), *Romeo Must Die* (Bartkowiak 2000), and *Cradle to the Grave* (Bartkowiak 2003), competency in music and the arts is absent in connection to the martial artist. Similarly, in *The One* (Wong, 2001) starring Jet Li as both villain and hero, there is no connection made between the martial artist and the arts. While the final battle is an homage to the legendary confrontation between two great martial arts masters - Tung Hai-ch’uan and Kuo Yun-shen of the internal martial arts of Pa Kua and Hsing-I respectively (Smith 1967: 15-16) - neither character is depicted as competent in the arts.

This disjuncture between the modern martial artist with the arts is often present in movies set in China in the early part of the 20th Century. The successful series of films concerning the life of Wing Chun Grandmaster Ip Man (*Grandmaster Ip Man*, Wilson, 2008; *Ip Man 2*, Wilson, 2010; *Ip Man – The Legend is Born*, Yau, 2010) present examples of the absence of the arts in connection the martial artist. In these films, Ip Man is depicted as a man of virtue, who embraces the Confucian ideals of benevolence, resists the Japanese occupation of China, seeks the honour of China, and prioritises and protects his family and students. Despite these virtues, he is not depicted as competent in any of the other artistic disciplines previously mentioned. He does observe ritual, particularly the rituals associated with the martial schools and funeral rituals; but those traditional artistic pursuits are not evident in these representations of his life.

Similarly, in Wong Kai Wai’s (2013) depiction of Ip Man, music and the arts are more or less absent. In this film, Ip Man appears to indulge his wife’s love of Chinese Opera, however, he is not himself depicted as a practitioner of any of the arts previously mentioned. In this film, Chinese Opera is utilised as a metaphor for life, but is also used to articulate the anxieties of Ip Man’s (Tony Leung) rival Gong Er (Ziyi Zhang). The dialogue between these two martial artists presents a very different view of the relationship between music and the martial arts. As they attend a performance of Chinese opera, Gong Er states;

Gong Er: No instrument is as beautiful as the voice. Words always sound better sung.

Ip Man: Has Miss Gong studied Opera?

Gong Er: Just the basics. Back then, if I had put my mind to it, I’d be an Opera star...

Ip Man: You have performed well in the opera of life. You have both timing and skill. Unfortunately, you never saw your role.

Gong Er: I had no idea you watched me like an Opera. This opera of mine, applauded or not, will play on to the end (Wai 2013).

In this scene between Ip Man and Gong Er, the relationship between music and the martial arts is not depicted as one of complementarity, or virtue, or villainy; here it represents for her a fork in the road, nostalgia for a life that might have been. Gong Er's life has been characterised by the disjunctures of the Japanese occupation of China, opium addiction, and by the desire to seek revenge against her father's killer.

Ip Man is in some ways emblematic of a martial arts master living in an age of modernity (Wilson 2008, 2010; Yau 2010). The technologies of war have developed beyond the sword and the bow; now it is the Japanese tanks and firearms that threaten the honour and quality of life for the Chinese. The technologies of music themselves have also developed. In Yau's (2010) biopic of the young Ip Man, the only time music features as a prominent motif in Ip Man's life is when he meets his future wife in a market place, listening to a gramophone recording of Greensleaves. The contrast between this musical encounter and the previous examples I have been discussing are evident; sound in this moment is not created by the musician/martial artist – it has become disembodied through an act of schizophonia (Feld 1994), and afforded the possibility of new social life through the mobility of the record. Furthermore, this is Western music – a symbol of colonial disjunctures, of Western values and influence, operating at period of instability in China's history.

Conclusion

The makers of contemporary martial arts films appear to have played with the various philosophical and historical configurations of the connection between martial arts and artistic endeavours. In general, it appears that this connection is more strongly associated with mythical or historical figures as opposed to contemporary ones. The observations that I have made in this paper however are not to be considered comprehensive, but descriptive of certain representations of the martial artist with respect to the arts, as it is being expressed in contemporary film.

I have observed that this complementarity has been represented in a variety of ways, across different genres and narrative contexts. Firstly, it appears that some films have expressed the Confucian idea that an artistic endeavour such as music demonstrates completeness in an individual. The idea of completeness is very closely tied to that of virtue, in that the complete martial artist and arts practitioner is very often a virtuous person as well. A range of artistic endeavours – from dancing, to tea ceremony, to calligraphy, and music – have been used in connection with martial prowess.

Conversely, proficiency in an artistic discipline has been utilised to demonstrate some form of villainy. The connection of music to villainy is diametrically opposed to Confucian ideals, but nevertheless provides for interesting character development. Variations on this theme have included depicting the villain playing a musical instrument, or in the case of *The Battle for Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008/2009), where the villain has no appreciation of the arts whatsoever. *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004) has perhaps the most humorous (and ridiculous) association of music with the villain, where the power of music is exaggerated to the point of becoming itself a lethal weapon.

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations from this comparative study is the lack of artistic practice associated with the modern martial artist. It is very possible that films such as

The Battle for Red Cliff (Woo, 2008/2009) and other such films highlighting the glories and tragedies of China's history, present a romantic view of the martial artist, one who is in tune with the natural world, has attained scholarly and artistic pursuits, wisdom, virtue and completeness. Irrespective of the veracity of such depictions, the contrast between the idealic warrior of the past and the warrior of the present is notable. Why is it that the modern martial artist is without music? Is it that he/she has lost a vital aspect of the disciplines contributing to the complete individual? Is it that time and technology has so compressed human existence in modernity that it has successfully squeezed out everything that is unnecessary to survival in the modern world? Or perhaps, the invention of recording technologies has contributed not only to a split of sounds from musicians, but a split in the imaginary and perception of what it is to be a martial artist? This is not to say that contemporary martial artists do not pursue artistic disciplines in addition to their martial training; what is most significant here is the contrast between cinematic representations of complementarity in older and mythical characters, as opposed to disjuncture and absence in characters of modernity. It is as though these complimentary disciplines, which were once so entwined, are now only a thing of legend, a pursuit of the great masters of the past, but unattainable in the present.

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Sentimentalism in *Under the Hawthorn Tree*

Jing Meng

Abstract

In Chinese films, the nostalgic mode has long ago permeated the representations of the Cultural Revolution, a period often associated with trauma and violence. Nostalgia for the socialist past indicates a resistance to and a critique of the materialism and deteriorated morality brought about by the capitalist modernity and globalization, and moreover, this longing for the past also resonates with the re-evaluation of the Cultural Revolution in the intellectual discourse regarding China's modernization drive. However, while nostalgia harbours the potential for being a critique of the modernity, it also bears the inclination to be criticized. On the one hand, nostalgia derives from the fragments and materiality of the past, and functions as a resistance to the singular modernity and contemporary consumer culture. On the other hand, this sentimentalism of nostalgia might also be fetishized and commodified, falling in the same trap from which it tries to escape. This paper will analyse in detail a recent Chinese film, *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, directed by Zhang Yimou and set in the Cultural Revolution, and use it as an example to further illustrate and explore the conundrum of nostalgia as has been delineated above. In the film's representation and its promotion, nostalgia and the sentimental are constructed and positioned as the redemption of contemporary materialism and an alternative to the visual spectacles of the blockbuster films. However, at the same time, the film fetishizes nostalgia, or purity, in the female body and commodifies it as a rare good.

Keywords: Nostalgia, cultural revolution, sentimentalism, fetishism, purity, female body.

Introduction

In parallel with globalization and economic development, there also surfaces the conundrum of nostalgia, an unremitting longing for the past. As Cook (2005, p.4) has observed, the past three decades have witnessed a substantial increase in nostalgic memory films. The nostalgic films are often suffused with a sense of melancholy and iconoclastic cultural references, such as cheongsam in *In the Mood for Love* (*Huayang nianhua*, 2000). In the nostalgic mode, the past is often glimpsed in fragments, such as retro dresses, worn drapes and mottled mirrors, which become a synecdoche of the past. It is through the part that the whole is conjured up and touches the heart; Hillenbrand (2010, p.392, 398) argues that the fragmentary, imperfect and incomplete character of the past can be transferred, through aesthetics works, into pre-conditions for nostalgia, which will enable a kind of “working through” and “a rapprochement with modernity”, by accepting the past and its trauma. While the fragmentation and materiality of nostalgia facilitate imagination and salvation by offering a rapprochement with the traumatic past, they also make nostalgia prone to be reduced to fetishism and an obsessive gaze.

In Chinese films, the nostalgic mode has long ago permeated the representations of the Cultural Revolution, a period often associated with trauma and violence. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (commonly referred to as the Cultural Revolution), a political movement dated from 1966 to 1976, was initiated to fight against revisionism and bourgeois ideology in the party and the state so as to consolidate a social system, and it had significantly affected the nation and its people. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, immediately after the Cultural Revolution, there emerged a wave of filmic representations of the traumatic experiences, such as *Troubled Laughter* (*Kunaoren de xiao*, 1979), *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (*Tianyunshan chuanqi*, 1980). Later, Chen Kaige's *King of the Children* (*Haizi wang*, 1987), *Farewell My Concubine* (*Bawang bieji*, 1993), Tian Zhangzhang's *The Blue Kite* (*Lan fengzhen*, 1993) and Zhang Yimou's *To live* (*Huo zhe*, 1994) represented the traumatic past as a lasting and circling pain and refused a catharsis ending, which marked a deviance from most of the previous films that adopted a trauma-redemption mode. The 1990s witnessed the rise of nostalgia for the socialist period amidst the deepening marketization in China, as the “Mao fever”, albums of revolutionary songs, and the Cultural Revolution restaurants mushroomed throughout the country. The “Mao fever” reached its peak in 1993, the centennial of Mao's birth, and boosted the re-consumption of products pertinent to Mao. For instance, the portraits of Mao in taxi cars, and “The Red Sun” cassette. Meanwhile, the Cultural Revolution restaurants decorated in a 1970s' style provided distinctive non-socialist venues for the memorialization of the past socialism (Hubbert, 2005; Lei, 2005; Barmé, 1999). The 1995 film *In the Heat of the Sun* provided alternative memories of the Cultural Revolution as a period of freedom and fantasy, and the film became a big hit of that year. Since 2000, a growing number of the Cultural Revolution-set films, such as *Balzac and the little Chinese seamstress* (*Baerzake he xiao caifeng*, 2002), *The Foliage* (*Mei ren cao*, 2004), *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (*Shanzhashu zhi lian*, 2010) have sustained this nostalgic trend in cinematic representations.

As Dai puts, the rising nostalgia in China's popular culture can be conceived as a retreat from a fast-changing, unstable society where people feel insecure, restless and somewhat disoriented and desperate, as “it builds a kind of imagined link between the individual and society, between history and the present reality, in order to provide a rationale for our contemporary struggle and to impart to us some sense of comfort and stability” (1997, p.159). In essence, this nostalgia derives from discontent with the present, and seeks an imagined shelter instead of a return. In China, the sentimentalism of nostalgia often dwells in certain periods of the past, such as the capitalist and semi-colonial Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s or the socialist past, which as Lu (2007) believes to have revealed imaginations about two competing visions of Chinese

modernity. Nostalgia for the socialist past indicates a resistance to and a critique of the booming materialism and deteriorated morality brought about by the capitalist modernity and globalization, and moreover, this longing for the past also resonates with the re-evaluation of the Cultural Revolution in the intellectual discourse regarding China's modernization drive. Discussions about the Cultural Revolution have thrived since the late 1990s, particular among the New Left intellectuals. Meanwhile, this trend is also evident among the overseas academics (Clark, 2008). Lu (2007) also argues, the surging nostalgia criticizes the booming materialism and widening social disparity, and shows rejection of "the homogenization of the world under a single capitalist model—call it globalization, Americanization or McDonaldization" (p.149). In addition, the values of the past—passion, idealism, endurance, self-sacrifice and egalitarianism, which are missing in contemporary society—are promoted as the moral redemption. Apart from being "a protest against the present", and an imagination of "an alternative Chinese modernity", Yang (2005) postulates that the nostalgic collective memories of the Cultural Revolution are resistance to previous mnemonic control (in order to form a historical foil and legitimize the rise of the Dengist new regime) immediately after the Cultural Revolution, and later the profit-driven marketization has liberated some spaces for these nostalgic utterances. However, if nostalgia for the socialist past is a rejection of contemporary materialism and marketization, to what extent, does it challenge the consumerism upon which its emergence and boom depend?

Moreover, being a firm part of the global nostalgia boom, the longings for the socialist past are, in essence, the resonance of rather than a resistance to the globalisation or the singular modernity. As Dai (1997) has observed the nostalgic undercurrent in China at the end of the twentieth century actually echoes the nostalgic vogue in the developed countries, a proof of "cultural integration", rather than challenging. In addition, after the 1981 Resolution that concluded the political movement to have been a mistake and disaster, further discussions about the Cultural Revolution have been shelved away in the official discourse for fear of undermining the present political power mechanism. This silence has in fact facilitated the nostalgia to fill in the vacuum of the political discourse. Hence, the flourishing nostalgic mode in the popular discourse has rescued the official discourse from aphasia, and in this sense, it is more a reconciliation than a resistance.

Therefore, while nostalgia harbours the potential for being a critique of the modernity, it also bears the inclination to be criticized. On the one hand, nostalgia derives from the fragments and materiality of the past, and functions as a resistance to the singular modernity and contemporary consumer culture. On the other hand, this sentimentalism of nostalgia might also be fetishized and commodified, falling in the same trap from which it tries to escape. This paper will analyse in detail a recent Chinese film, *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, directed by Zhang Yimou and set in the Cultural Revolution, and use it as an example to further illustrate and explore the conundrum of nostalgia as has been delineated above. In the film's representation and its promotion, nostalgia and the sentimental are constructed and positioned as the redemption of contemporary materialism and an alternative to the visual spectacles of the blockbuster films. However, at the same time, the film fetishizes nostalgia, or purity, in the female body and commodifies it as a rare good.

Personalised Nostalgia

Nostalgia is often deeply rooted in individual memories and personalised experiences. For instance, *In the Heat of the Sun* is based on personal memories of the director Jiang Wen, and *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is originally written as a semi-autobiography of the Chinese–French novelist and filmmaker Dai Sijie. The film *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, adapted

from a popular online novel, is based on a true story of a couple. The film depicts the romantic love between Jingqiu, a high school student who is sent down to the village to collect materials for textbooks, and Sun Jianxin (nicknamed Lao San), a geologist working in the village and who dies from leukaemia at the end. The individualised expressions are not only associated with sincerity and honesty, but also offer alternatives to the monolithic grand history. Furthermore, nostalgia begins to sprout right from the fertile soil of personal memories. This personalised history, often being eroticised at the same time, differs from the previous narratives of the past. As Dai (1997) posits, in the 1980s, “I” entails a grand narrative, emblematic of a group of “newborn” and “rising” people. However, in recent personalised history, it is “I” rather than “we” that dominates the narrative. This difference is best illustrated in a comparison of Zhang Yimou’s previous film *To Live* and *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. In *To Live*, the life story of Fugui and his family from the 1940s to the Cultural Revolution period is indeed a national allegory that hints at the circling of social and political traumas for the nation and its people. On the contrary, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* foregrounds personal feelings, while the nation and the grand theme fade in the background, as Zhang explains, “*To Live* confronts the era directly, portraying the tragedies in the grand epochs, whereas *Under the Hawthorn Tree* moves away from the historical background and picks up a secret corner to savour the love” (“Two Zhangs”, 2010). This secret savour of personal life in *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, according to Zhang, ushers a post-2000 narrative of the Cultural Revolution, a perspective that focuses on the individual: “erasing the political and historical background, the purity or innocence of that period [the Cultural Revolution] is something classical, [a theme] totally different from previous genres about the Cultural Revolution” (cited in Xia & Zhang, 2009).

In the film, the triumph of personalised history over grand historical narrative is also figuratively conveyed in the story of the hawthorn tree and its red blossoms. Unlike ordinary hawthorn tree, the legendary hawthorn tree in the village is said to bear red, instead of white, flowers, because it is nurtured by blood of the heroes who scarified their lives for the revolution during the Sino-Japanese War. However, this enigma is resolved at the end of the film when the camera zooms in for a close-up of the white blossoms. The zoom-in from a long take of the landscape to a close-up of the tiny flowers on the tree is a manifestation of the changing angle and narrative strategy from allegorical to personalised mode. Moreover, while red in the context of the Cultural Revolution connotes revolution and political rightness, the colour of white traditionally alludes to purity and innocence. Therefore, the white blossom at the end implies a deviance from the revolution enigma and its grand narrative while highlighting humanity. Just like the hawthorn tree that retrieves its white blossoms, personal life and feelings have retrieved their significance from revolutionary signifiers and national allegories in personalised history, as Zhang states,

In the past decades, films about the Cultural Revolution usually highlighted the iconoclastic symbols of the special era, whereas in *Under the Hawthorn Tree* it provides a novel point of view [deemphasising the historical background], only as a story that cannot afford the narrative of the grand trauma of the Cultural Revolution. (cited in Zhang, 2010)

Whilst these individualised memories in popular culture have diversified the discourses concerning the past, they also bring in the danger of cannibalising history through depoliticization, trivialization and privatization, rendering history “nothing more than a soap opera for evening consumption” (Lu, 2007, p.145). Nevertheless, another important dimension of these personal stories and perspectives is the fact that they have enabled the sprout of nostalgia. Nostalgia does not demand a reproduction of the past, but derives right from the

traces of the past and fragmented memories. Therefore, the quotidian life in which the intimate feelings are bedded becomes the precondition for the sentimentalism of nostalgia.

Nostalgia in Style

Films that dwell in nostalgia are often imbued with a melancholy tone that mourns for the passing of time, and thus the sentimental becomes a key element in the style of those nostalgic films. As Chow (2002) has noted in her analysis of *In the Mood for Love* and Zhang Yimou's *The Road Home* (*Wo de fuqin muqin*, 1999), the sentimentalism of nostalgia is embedded in the depiction of the everyday, albeit different anchors of the two films. *The Road Home* is set in the backdrop of the anti-rightist campaign in the later 1950s, a movement often regarded as a prelude to the Cultural Revolution, and the film is about a love story between a village girl and a sent-down teacher. Through a sentimental portrayal of the everyday, *The Road Home* conveys the redemptive power of everyday life and human endeavour (Chow, 2002). To great extent, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* follows in the tradition of *The Road Home*, highlighting the sentimental and the painstaking portrayal of the everyday. However, unlike *The Road Home*, which is more poetic in cinematography, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* adopts a plain style that reinforces the simplicity, the crux of the nostalgic feeling in the film, as Zhang remarks,

The Road Home has splendid colours: a girl in red running across the field covered with blooming flowers, and these strong visual effects [and movements] convey a poetic and picturesque feeling. *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is different, because it does not entail poetic feelings, but you can feel the purity and simplicity just like plain water. (cited in Dong, 2010)

In other words, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* relies on the plain depiction of the everyday, and reduces cinematic technologies to enhance the sense of unsophisticatedness. Without a dramatized plot or spectacular visual effects, the simple narrative style of the film *Under the Hawthorn Tree* and its representation of simple living during the Cultural Revolution aim to trigger longings for the plain life style. Simplicity and purity have become the core of the nostalgia in *Under the Hawthorn Tree*.

In a time when private affairs are still confined from public presence, Jingqiu and Lao San have to hide their relationship from others, and even in the private sphere, they are also self-restrained. However, the plain living imposed with restrictions has never deprived Jingqiu and Lao San of pleasures in the simplest and purest way. In the film, when Jingqiu and Lao San go on a date, they always keep a distance from each other as if they are strangers, as the director Zhang describes,

When they were acting the parts that take place in the public on the street, I told them that in that era, we had to love secretly and hide it underground.... It is not like the young people nowadays that they would boldly kiss in the public, which we now often see.... When they [Jingqiu and Lao San] walk on the street, they have to keep two to three meters away from each other and constantly look around. I told the actor and actress to look to the left and right while they walk, so on the screen this will show a kind of fear [of being seen by others]. I think this taste of “evasive love” is also very special. (“Interview with the crew”, 2010)

Drawing on his own experience during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang, whose father used to be in the Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Part) and thus had a bad family background, believes that since Jingqiu's family background is capitalist-roader, she must have a feeling of fear,

fragile and low self-esteem at the bottom of her heart, so she wants to hide herself (Ibid.). However, Lao San understands the girl and tries not to make her panic too much. In this sense, the evasive love actually shows consideration and caring, and embodies a special charm. In the present society when people have already got used to more extroverted ways of expressing their feelings, the self-restraining and evasive love specific in the Cultural Revolution are conceived as a good illustration of purity and caring. As Zhang has disclosed, the bad family background was a huge shadow for him, but when representing the evasive love, this unpleasant memory of the Cultural Revolution is transferred into a kind of nostalgia for pure love and simplicity, a vivid example to demonstrate how nostalgia is used and has enabled working through the trauma of the past. Barmé (1999) explains, the nostalgia boom in the 1990s China “may well have allowed people a chance to clear the way to the future without the pressures of earlier horrors constantly invading and overwhelming the present” (p.317).

Through the depictions of the delicate and subtle emotions, such as the evasive love, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* highlights the sentimental in its representation. Apart from this, the film is categorised in wenyi genre, or literally means “literary and art” film (*wenyi pian*), an alternative to the blockbusters that dominated the film market in China. As its producer Zhang Weiping says, “[films are] just like one’s diet, if you eat too much stewed pork, it is not healthy and you will miss pak choi and bean curd; and to me, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is the pak choi and bean curd, healthy and light” (“Interview with the crew”, 2010). Originally, Chinese wenyi films in the 1920s and 1930s were adapted from Hollywood melodramas, but the two genres were brewed and developed in different contexts and with distinctions. In her study of Chinese wenyi films, Yeh (2009) argues that Chinese wenyi films, from the inception, embrace humanity and aesthetic sophistication, and despite the fact that the genre has evolved into varied modes, such as socialist realism, romance and artistic pursuit, its sub-genres all highlight the depiction of the sentimental, which is also a heritage from Chinese novel genre of *Yuanyang hudie pai* (literally means *love birds and butterflies*). In this sense, by highlighting the sentimental and belonging to the wenyi genre, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* stands in contrast to the blockbusters of visual spectacles in the present film market. However, does this light dish really balance the “diet” of the film market by challenging the spectacular visual sensations, or is it just camouflaged to look like that?

In her study on sentimentalism, Chow (2007) believes that the sentimental, as a persistence and predominant affective mode of contemporary Chinese films, could be a more fruitful and productive discursive constellation, instead of just being emotional excess, because it “brings with it fundamental challenges to the cornerstones of Western progressive theoretical thinking”, and differs from the Western approach towards intellectual renewal and regeneration that emphasises on aesthetical and theoretical avant-gardism (p.14). In other words, the rising sentimentalism could be interpreted as an opposition to the institutional rationality, as well as to the flamboyant global visibility in the contemporary global film industry. Chow (2007) defines the sentimental as “the second, epistemic sense of visibility” which features a character of non-contemporaneity,

How do we come to terms with older—or increasingly estranged—forms of interpellations such as self-restraint, frugality, filial piety, compliance with collective obligations, inconspicuous consumption, modesty about exhibiting and thrusting oneself (including one’s body parts and sexual interests) forward as a cause in public, and so forth, wherein the key is not exactly—perhaps exactly not—becoming visible? (p.22)

However, Chow also warns that, the sentimental is materialised and “made palpable by visual objects such as filmic images but cannot in the end be reduced to them” (2007, p.23). Therefore, how will the sentimental, as a “second, epistemic sense of visibility”, challenge the “fetishistic imaging and magnification” of modernity and filmic visibility via the medium of film? Will this sentimentalism be reduced to another spectacle for incessant consumption?

Fetishized and Gendered Nostalgia

Apart from portraits of subtle emotions, the sentimentalism of nostalgia—purity and simplicity in the case of the film *Under the Hawthorn Tree*—is also visualised and fetishized in the image of the female protagonist, and commodified as a rare and desirable good in contemporary society. “The purest love story” is the key word for the promotion of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, and in addition to the representation of self-restraining and the evasive love, the purity is also embodied in the image. Zhang believes, the two clean and unsophisticated faces, “with plain decoration (*baozhuang*), make the two novel stars attractive”, and “the audience will also see youth and the past time represented by them” (cited in Xie, 2010). The nostalgia for the past is thus objectified in the appearance, particularly, in the female body.

Zhang’s casting audition for his leading actress, commonly known as the “Mou Girl”, for each of his film is often extensively covered in media and has been an important part of the promotion campaign and a selling point, with the anticipation that the selected actress will become a next super star, which has been exemplified by the successes of Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi, two most famous female stars that have received national and global attention after starring in Zhang’s films. Moreover, the actresses also become an incarnation of feminine beauty, yet from a male director’s (audience’s) gaze. In the case of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, the criterion for selecting the “Mou Girl” is essentially “pureness”, which is a key in the representation of the “purest love” and simpler living. Irritated during the casting audition, Zhang once commented that “there is no girl looks pure and innocent among those born after 1990”, which later triggered public discussions on the topic. In response to his previous remarks, Zhang further expresses his perception of purity and innocence:

I am not saying no, but few and difficult to find. To me, being pure and innocent is restricted within certain age group. Most of the high school students still look pure and innocent, but if a woman over forty claims herself to be pure and innocent, it is a little bit strange. In this information society, children receive more information in a faster way, so the feeling of pureness is easily lost once they get more information. (cited in Zheng, 2010)

In this sense, purity is being young and ignorant, and is objectified particular in the image of the high school student Zhou Dongyu, casting the female protagonist Jingqiu. In the film, one summer day Lao San buys a swimsuit for Jingqiu and invites her to swim in the river, but Jingqiu is too shy to wear the swimsuit. Under the encouragement of Lao San, Jingqiu puts on the swimsuit but wears a white blouse outside it. Jingqiu holds the blouse tightly while playing with water, and purity is conveyed through Jingqiu’s shyness and conservativeness. This image embodies and visualises purity, and it is also used in the film trailer and the poster. The plain style of the film poster—consisting of the two clean faces, the lush background landscape and the words “the purest lover story”—echoes its branding of simplicity. In the poster, Jingqiu looks melancholy in a white shirt with her head slightly bent, a little bit shy and a trace of fear, a state that Zhang calls the “evasive love”. This image—clean, simple, melancholy and fragile—discloses the fantasy of a pure girl, like a white flower bud, fresh and charming. This visualised purity, especially in the representation of the female protagonist, plays an important

role in the construction and promotion of the sentimentalism of nostalgia. In addition to youth, purity is also associated with being shy and introvert. Covered by the white blouse, the shyness and the evasiveness mystify the female body and facilitate imagination. Moreover, this shyness of Jingqiu also indicates her passiveness and “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey, 1975). In their relationship, Jingqiu is often passive, while Lao San plays the dominant role: he takes care of Jingqiu, sends her family the tight supplies and decides to leave Jingqiu when he knows he has got leukaemia. In addition, he, as a mentor, also enlightens Jingqiu. For instance, when Jingqiu worries about being sent down to work in the rural areas, Lao San tells the ignorant girl not to worry because the policy may change soon as he has sensed the changing political atmosphere (in the waning years of the Cultural Revolution). In this sense, Lao San is the desiring subject while Jingqiu is to be looked at and enlightened. This passiveness and repressed female desire and awareness, however, are branded as purity and innocence.

The producer of the film Zhang Weiping has said that the marketing strategy for *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is “to let the audience directly see the bride without those fancy dowries” (cited in Yang, 2010). By comparing both the actress and the film to a bride, it triggers curiosity and imagination, as in the traditional Chinese wedding a bride is covered by a red veil. The mysteriousness, on the other hand, reinforces an erotic gaze and imagination of the female body. Furthermore, this association with a bride also feminizes the film and its representation of the past: mysterious, melancholy (as the bride often cries with her parents to how her reluctance to leave home), and more importantly charming from a male gaze. Therefore, the sentimentalism of nostalgia is gendered. During the Cultural Revolution, femininity was distorted and women were desexualised as socialist workers (Meng and Dai, 2004; Rofel, 1999). In critique of the masculinisation of women in the socialist period, films in the 1980s try to restore the traditional feminine beauty, such as in *Sacrificed Youth* (*Qingchun ji*, 1985) and *Army Nurse* (*Nuer lou*, 1985). However, the 2006 film *The Road* (*Fangxiang zhilu*) departs from the construction of femininity in earlier Cultural Revolution-themed films, and portrays a woman who sticks to an unfeminine image even in the 1990s, which as Zeng (2009) puts, though ambivalent in the representation of female desire, shows a resistance to “contemporary consumer culture that objectifies and fetishizes women” (p.113).

Under the Hawthorn Tree also entails a similar critique. Nevertheless, despite reduced cinematographic techniques and a plain style, the fascination of gaze never diminishes; rather, it is objectified and magnified purely in the female body. In response to the difference between the images of Jingqiu conjured up in the original novel (both innocent and sexy) and in the film, Zhang expresses his opinion on how to visualise the sentimentalism:

Face is one of the most important parts in the medium of film. The face should look smart and touching, whereas in literatures, you can have a perfect imagination. Therefore I have to make changes, not according to our imagination, but according to the requirements of the big screen. (cited in Xie, 2010)

The faces, the feminine beauty in particular, should accord with the frame of the camera lenses and the gaze of the (male) audience. In this sense, purity and nostalgia is objectified, as Zhang further conveys:

Therefore you have to use the film camera to document it, magnify it, and it will become a feeling permeating throughout the film. I think it is more important than the story.... The most important thing is the disposition (*qizhi*).... I have documented the dispositions, the feeling of cleanness and innocence of these two new stars. We

believe it is not the plot that is touching, but, to most people, it is this kind of disposition that moved them, isn't it? (Ibid.)

If the sentimentalism arises as a critique of the bombast of spectacles and visibility, then in the case of the film *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, how would the nostalgia challenge the spectacular and fetishized imagery via the medium of film that contributes to this fetishism? Or will it just fail to escape the curse of fetishization and objectification? The representation of pureness and innocence in the film and its promotion discloses the mechanism of gendering the sentimentalism of nostalgia. Through visualisation and mystification of Jingqiu's body, nostalgia is invoked by the melancholy appearance, and it is up to people's imagination. In this sense, the female body becomes the object of nostalgia and for longing. This kind of objectification of nostalgia further questions its potential as a resistance to the materialism and as moral redemption.

Nostalgia as Moral Redemption

In the film trailer, the film is branded "the purest love story in history" and "a true story that makes people cry" (*yige zhenshi de gushi, rang qianwan ren gandong luolei*). If these quotes still address the past, then at the end of the trailer, it directly links the past to the present, as the caption reads, "in today's consumer society, to feel the lost innocence again" (*zai shangpin shehui de jintian, ganshou na jiuwei de chunzhen*). This has relocated the film back into the contemporary social context and highlighted the significance of purity for the present, justifying the sentimentalism of nostalgia, with emphasis on purity and simplicity, to be a desirable and rare asset. In a similar vein, the director Zhang Yimou also says, "in today's impetuous society, people need a film that washes to the utmost lead gorgeous (*xijin qianhua*) and is genuine and sincere (*qingzhen yiqie*)" (cited in Yang, 2010). The pure love portrayed in the film *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is perceived as a reflection on the rampant materialism and deteriorating morality of contemporary society.

It is never surprising that this kind of longings for innocence and simple life arise from the backdrop of increasingly blatant money-worship in the contemporary society. The materialism was also manifested in the dating reality TV programmes that mushroomed around 2010. A 22-year old female model and a participant of a popular dating reality TV show "If You are the One (*Feicheng wurao*)", commented that "I'd rather cry in a BMW than laugh on the back seat of a bicycle" in one of the episodes in April 2010, which later caused an uproar among the public. On 9 June 2010, The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) issued regulations, "The Circular of SARFT for Deepening the Regulation on Reality Dating TV programmes" and "The Circular of SARFT General Office for Strengthening Management of TV Programmes about Emotion Story", criticising and banning any immoral values such as money worship or materialism standards of marriage in these dating reality TV shows. The film *Under the Hawthorn Tree* was released amidst heated discussions on the declining morality and the materialism in love relationship, which facilitated the promotion of the films as a story about the lost pure love and justified it as the redemption of corrupted morality. Cui Yongyuan, a famous Chinese TV host has made similar comments regarding the significance of the pure love story in *Under the Hawthorn Tree* in his post on Weibo, a Chinese Twitter:

Jingqiu lost her lover, and we lost purity. We have discarded our nature while being indulged in industrial civilisation. We might suddenly realise our paleness and poverty when nothing left but being old and wealthy. I have seen Zhang Yimou's reflection and remembrance, which is of great value in an era when output and box office overshadow the ecological and cultural functions of films. (Cui, as cited in "Cui Yongyuan", 2010)

Purity and the longings for the simple love relationship are positioned as a critique of the materialism and degraded morality in present society, as well as a resistance to the consumerism. This has found its resonance in the film's audience, as a plethora of film reviews have shown. As *Under the Hawthorn Tree* solicit for a restoration of purity and simplicity and the anti-materialism and anti-market sentiments, however, to what extent, does the film and its representation impose challenges to the consumer culture? As a matter of fact, from above analysis of its representation and promotion, the sentimentalism of nostalgia in the film is objectified, gendered, and then branded as a rare good in the contemporary so as to boost the box office.

Conclusion

Throughout past decades, the Cultural Revolution has constantly been an important trope as well as a parameter for discussion on Chinese modernity and for addressing present concerns. Since the mid-1990s, there emerged a nostalgic mode in the popular discourses regarding the Cultural Revolution. Through personalised narratives, nostalgia for the socialist past suggests a protest against the contemporary consumerism. In a similar vein, the film *Under the Hawthorn Tree* portrays the purity and simplicity in the past, and highlights the sentimental through plain cinematic language. However, positioned as moral redemption of the materialism and a deviance from the bombast of visual spectacles of the commercial films, the sentimentalism of nostalgia in *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, is inevitably objectified in the female body, and thus becomes a gendered nostalgia and feminizes the past as a passive yet desirable good. Nostalgia is in essence ambivalent as it contains so many slippery inclinations, some "restorative" and some "reflective" (Boy, 2001). The sentimentalism of nostalgia encompasses potential for both imagination and fetishization, both resistance and reconciliation. The personalized and often eroticized narratives of the past, from which nostalgia derives, fill in the fissures of those authorized discourses. While being perceived as alternatives and resistances, the nostalgic narratives require a close scrutiny of their criticality.

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Changes Manifest: Time, Memory, and a Changing Hong Kong

Emma Tipson

Abstract

Ann Hui's *A Simple Life* (2011), the story of a caretaker's relationship to her middle class employers, in the director's hands, becomes an allegory for a changing society. Hong Kong, fifteen years after the return to the mainland, continues to have an uneasy relationship with increasing political and cultural Sino-centrism; a dis-ease which is manifest in the ageing character Ah-Tao, a figure whose struggles to preserve a localized Hong Kong culture are compounded by a stroke. Contrasting Ah Tao is the figure of Roger, played by Hong Kong cinema stalwart Andy Lau, whose job as a film producer, requires him to accept and accede to the demands of mainland financiers. Through Hui's mise-en-scene the director questions the cost of such acquiescence and regularly reminds the viewers, through the use of subtle inside jokes, humour and sundry cultural texts, of the former importance of Hong Kong local cinema and of its recent decline in autonomy. This paper examines the film as an allegory of change, anxiety and rupture to both Hong Kong and the contemporary Hong Kong film industry, contrasting the work to the director's pre-handover texts.

Keywords: Hong Kong, nationalism, transnationalism, localism, peripheralization

Ann Hui's film *A Simple Life*, (2011), is ostensibly a story of the exchange of roles between an aging caretaker and her long-time client. When Ah Tao, a maid who has worked for a family for sixty years suffers a stroke, it becomes the responsibility of her client to take care of her in her old age. But the film can also be seen as an allegory for post-handover Hong Kong, and provides Hui's reflections on the state of Hong Kong a decade after the handover of 1997. Hui, a woman in the male dominated Hong Kong Film industry, creates out of the character of Ah Tao a symbolic representation of her own circumstances as a director finding herself peripheralized by an industry with increased ties and strictures imposed by the mainland. Hui's voice as a filmmaker arises within the action of the film where the narrative events can be seen as allegorical of a once dominant film industry increasingly merged with or marginalized within the new Mainland controlled industry, and of her own unwilling move to the periphery of Chinese language cinema. Pre-handover films such as those made by Wong Kar-Wai reflected fantasies and anxieties of what the future re-integration with the mainland might hold. Kay Li discusses contemporary Hong Kong theatre and describes post hand-over theatre as a medium which "captures the city's response to the challenges of globalization through presenting global connectivity, by which I mean the different ways Hong Kong relates through its economy, people and culture to the world" (Li, 2007: 441). Indeed, Li makes connections between the circumstances of Hong Kong's re-incorporation to the mainland and the narrative content of theatre as allegorical of Hong Kong's post hand-over anxiety. "Hong Kong's relationship to globalization goes beyond global economic connections. Globalism intersects with the ultralocal, the national, and the (transnational) Chinese; the city's position is changing in the international framework, particularly because of the handover in 1997, or the resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong by the people's Republic of China" (441). Brian Hu, using Ackbar Abbas as an illustrative example, describes Abbas and others' approach to Hong Kong cinema as "a product of the island's postcolonial situation, and the ways in which culturally and politically, the 1997 handover to China affects its inhabitants and manifests itself in local film aesthetics" (Hu 2006, 407). Wong Kar-Wai's films tended to include allusions to deadlines as clocks, counting down minutes towards an uncertain future, or towards imagined catastrophic events. Hui, by comparison, deals with the realities of Hong Kong more than a decade after the handover of 1997. Patricia Erens makes a case for reading Hui's films as a site of contemplation of her role in the film industry and in the larger Hong Kong society in the main. Erens, writing on *Song of the Exile*, posits "Hui's work can be divided into three categories, although the boundaries are never as distinct as I am suggesting: genre films typical of the Hong Kong film industry; political dramas; and personal works" (Erens, 2000, 43). When writing about *Song of the Exile*, Erens describes the film as explicitly invested in the Hong Kong handover, stating:

The film sheds light on how the events surrounding the 1997 return of Hong Kong to mainland China served as a structuring subtext in a good deal of Hong Kong cinema. These events pervaded Hong Kong films, manifesting as a generalized sense of anxiety and ambivalence, and playing themselves out indirectly around issues of personal and cultural identity, beginning in the late 1980s" (2000: 44).

Such anxieties and ambivalences are similarly present in Hui's *A Simple Life* which expresses the director's frustrations with how the decline of the industry took its toll on her career as a filmmaker. As an already peripheralized member of the industry, Hui found her career moved even further into the margins after the handover, which resulted in the decline of the Hong Kong film industry as cinema production increasingly became consolidated with that of Beijing and with the ideologies of Mainland culture. Her peripheralization within the film industry, as well as that of her contemporaries, is the subtext of much of the humor of the film. The overall

tone of *A Simple Life*, as it in turns moves from touching to bitingly funny, directly contrasts much of Wong's earlier anxious, brooding pre-handover films. Ann Hui's *A Simple Life* is an observation of the consequences of the handover within the industry. Wong Kar-wai focused on dwelling upon the worst-case scenarios, whereas Hui's post-handover film discusses a reality that, while by no means ideal, is not nearly as traumatic as outlined in *Chungking Express* and 2046.

Much of Wong Kar-wai's celebrated career as a filmmaker spans the period just prior to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, and he, like many of his contemporaries, experienced a great deal of anxiety about what the handover would mean for Hong Kong and its film industry. Li reports:

Hong Kong's position after the 1997 handover was clearly defined in the official discourse between two sovereign nations – the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China – symbolized by the ceremony that took place at midnight on 1 July 1997. This event was highlighted by the lowering of the British flag and the hoisting of two flags: a large one of the People's Republic of China and a smaller one of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. (Li, 2007, 442)

Li argues that many texts in the handover period are a manifestation of the 'fantasies, dreams, and anxieties' (442) of the population, stating "After the handover, people tried to work out their identity in relation to the rapid development of interconnections between the city and the motherland on the one hand, and the ever increasing integration of Hong Kong into the world community on the other" (441-442). Li concludes, arguing that Hong Kong theatre, drawing on daily life and the cultural milieu, was performed for ordinary people and therefore "reflected the fantasies, dreams and anxieties of the latter and wrestled with the issues of the handover in the imaginary space of the stage" (Li, 443). This anxiety is frequently exhibited within the discourse of the films of Wong Kar-wai in the film *Chungking Express*. The film is divided into two sections where a few days in the lives of two police officers are shown. The first story involves a detective who is looking for drugs traffickers and the second involves a local beat cop who patrols the streets of a small urban neighbourhood. Wong expresses post-handover anxiety through the use of language in the two parts of the film. In the first story, the first protagonist He Qiwu, who is also known throughout the film simply as Cop 223, speaks Mandarin and is played by the actor Takeshi Kaneshiro, an actor of Japanese birth and heritage but who was raised in Taiwan. The character of Cop 223, as it quickly becomes apparent, speaks several languages and switches between them with ease as he linguistically navigates the streets of the diverse and global city of Hong Kong. Cop 223 then becomes a symbol for the global aspect of the city of Hong Kong, representing much of what makes it unique; a globalized identity dependent on international commodity exchange and a city rich in polyphonic discourse. However, despite He Qiwu's apparent preference for Mandarin (the narration is spoken in that dialect), the dialogue of the film is spoken almost entirely in Cantonese. Further, the character also uses Japanese and English to interact with the various immigrant communities of his territory. The first section of the film constructs Hong Kong as a culturally rich and linguistically diverse society. However, in the second story told in the film, which follows the life of a local beat cop, it becomes clear that Wong is concerned with also carving out a specifically Cantonese identity within Hong Kong; the same Cantonese identity that Ann Hui shows being lost with Ah Tao's death in her 2011 film 'A Simple Life'. The films' concerns are both equally about the global and the local identities. Li points out that "...Chinese identities also became salient issues accentuated by the handover" (Li, 442); after the change in ownership, and the influx of different people at different times during

China's turbulent history, Hong Kong had created a unique identity for itself that it was not eager to let go of in favour of some unfamiliar, unified greater Chinese identity after the handover.

In the second part of *Chungking Express* there is also a specific focus on the desire to leave Hong Kong- to go to the West, or to simply become a part of the global community. Cop 663, the second lovelorn police officer of the film, meets an airline attendant while on a flight to an unknown location, and begins a relationship with her. The woman who becomes obsessed with him, Faye, who talks incessantly about leaving for California, sabotages any hope for the renewal of that relationship by breaking and entering into Cop 663's apartment and, in between putting sleeping pills in his water, replacing his curtains, and vacuuming his sheets, deletes the messages the airline attendant leaves for him, effectively cutting off his metaphorical connection to the outside world. Faye then substitutes that connection with herself, by leaving and coming back as an airline attendant herself. The film ends somewhat ambiguously, with Faye offering Cop 663 a boarding pass to a flight, although audiences do not know to where, and it is unclear as to whether or not he accepts the offer or not. This can be seen to reflect Hong Kong's desires to remain a part of a global economy after it is rejoined with the somewhat isolationist China, and the fear of what the implications of rejoining the country will mean for the future of Hong Kong itself. Wong expresses the anxiety that the handover will result in an elimination of the diversity of Hong Kong, ironing out indigenous Cantonese identities and restricting access to the global market.

Wong Kar-wai's film *2046* also deals heavily in these concerns of the global and the local. *2046*, although made in 2004 and therefore containing a post-handover perspective, is a film about memory. More accurately, it is a film that explores the consequences of what happens after memory fails. The opening sequence specifically discusses secrets, and the narrator tells of a method for keeping secrets. He claims that carving a hole in a tree and whispering your secrets into it will ensure that the secret is kept, a sentiment which similarly appears in Wong's earlier film *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and which echoes *Chungking Express*'s first cop 223's declaration that he hopes that if memories must have an expiry date, that it would be only after a million years. The three films all echo the same fears that the Hong Kong identity is one that is destined to be forgotten, and the films become an attempt to preserve a specific culture and context – a cultural autonomy which is feared to be consigned to the past unless preserved through filmic devices. The film *2046* has an ephemeral feel to it, with a transient narrator and mysterious, hazily realized characters who travel into and out of the narrative and are forgotten and remembered randomly. The narrator, Chow Mo-wan, spends much of the action of the film being a self-described expert with women, declaring at one point that there were "lots of one night stands... nothing lasts forever" (Wong, '2046'). This sentiment of ephemerality seems to be the underlying theme of the entire film; Wong Kar-wai's anxieties about the future of Hong Kong just a few short years after the handover are transferred onto the text of a film that takes place in the 1960s- a major turning point in the economical and cultural history of Hong Kong, just as the 1997 handover was expected to be. While the focus of *Chungking Express* explored anxieties regarding the consequences of actual economical and cultural changes, *2046* deals with the fear that, eventually, not only will these changes occur, but that people will begin to forget that things had ever been any other way. Hong Kong's Cantonese culture will become, in a sense, a secret, whispered into a hole somewhere and forgotten about. Within the gaze of the film *2046*, the loss of Hong Kong's Cantonese identity and status in the global market was and would be one thing; the imminent loss of memories about the time of Hong Kong's separation from China would be another disaster entirely. Chow Mo-wan's novel, also entitled '2046', is about a train that takes its passengers

to a place where they can access lost memories, and Wong uses films as his own train to the potential lost memories of Hong Kong. The film becomes Wong's way of ensuring that, should the fears about the future of Hong Kong come to pass, at least there will be some vessel through which memories of post-1997 Hong Kong can be accessed.

If Wong Kar-wai was a filmmaker dealing with anxieties regarding what might happen after the 1997 handover and the vague 'what-ifs' of Hong Kong's future, Ann Hui is working with and around reality, and the actual, present-day consequences post-1997. In *A Simple Life*, made in 2011 and intended to be her final work, Hui creates an avatar for herself in the character of Ah Tao, played by Deanie Ip. The film introduces Ah Tao during a sequence in a marketplace. She is portrayed as very picky about both quality and price of the ingredients, and has a rather lightly intentioned and yet somewhat cruel trick played on her by some young men who work behind one of the stalls. It is clear that Ah Tao is something of a pain to these men; she picks and chooses the best products and demands appropriate prices, and as a result becomes the butt of a joke constructed by the men who are 'in charge' of the marketplace environment. The men, seeing her coming, turn down the temperature in the walk-in refrigerator, knowing that her fussy nature will ensure she is in the fridge for longer than they wish as she picks through the frozen product. When Ah Tao goes into the cooler, she comments that it feels much colder than usual. This scene, then becomes representative of Ann Hui's own experience with the men of the integrated Beijing/Hong Kong film industry, an industry from which she was being 'frozen out'. There is a suggestion that, as Hui demands a certain level of quality in both her own work and in that of her colleagues, she can expect to find herself further peripheralized and mocked by the men in the marketplace – film financiers who are looking for commercial entertainment – just as Ah Tao should expect to be pranked for her finicky nature. The point that this joke occurs on the same day that Ah Tao has her stroke also hints that, perhaps, it is the thoughtlessness of these men that leads to her eventual death. The severity of the consequences of their actions are unexpected and unintentional, but still quite significant, for both Ah Tao and Ann Hui, who had begun to find the film industry increasingly hostile to her form of autobiographic and personal film making.

The scene can be read as a somewhat biting commentary on the state of the Hong Kong film industry and Hui's own treatment within it. As Hong Kong cinema was absorbed by the film industry of Mainland China and cities such as Beijing and Shanghai became major centers of film production in China, Hong Kong cinema slowly became a more and more peripheralized site within the industry, where it had once been a central point of innovation and a focal point of Chinese language film. It is something of a joke that, within the film, most of the 'down and out' residents at the old folks' home Ah Tao resides in are actors, producers, and directors from the golden age of the Hong Kong film industry, most of whom had experienced their golden years of filmmaking in the 1980s and 1990s. One character in particular, Uncle Kin, is played by Paul Chun, a well known actor and director who made most of his movies during the previous era. Kin is an unusual character and he seems to be constantly asking Ah Tao and Roger for money. He claims it is because of his health problems, but the audience quickly realize that, really, it is because he wants to seek the companionship of prostitutes. Roger, upon finding out about Uncle Kin's habit, attempts to chastise him for asking for money yet again, but is admonished by Ah Tao who tells Roger to let Kin do what he wants while he still can. It is a sobering sentiment that serves as a rare reminder to the audience of the true end and purpose of the film- Ah Tao's death, which could easily have been ignored for much of the film. The statement that Uncle Kin should be permitted to do what he likes suggests that, while the group of people the character of Uncle Kin represents have made considerably less films recently, they should be permitted to continue doing what they like with their careers, though

the newer, younger generation of filmmakers and audiences centered around mainland culture may not appreciate, or even approve. The film suggests that there is room in Hong Kong for both commercial and artistic film industries. While the peripheralization of the Hong Kong independent film industry after that period had negative influences on most all filmmakers in Hong Kong, it took a particular toll on women such as Ann Hui. In Lisa E. Bloom's article on Asian women artists she points out that "Even [a] period of affluence... has not made it easier for Asian women artists to establish careers for themselves on the same footing as their male counterparts. The more inflated the prices for art, the lower the proportion of commercially successful artists who are women" (Bloom, 2003:14). Even in the golden years of Hong Kong cinema Ann Hui was, undeservedly, one of the least acknowledged filmmakers. Erens refers to Hui as a 'New Wave' filmmaker within Hong Kong, and claims that she produces three main types of films: drama, political, and personal. Of course her films often combine two or even all three of these types, as 'A Simple Life' does, but politics, particularly gender and age politics, are certainly prevalent, and in these contexts the political becomes very personal to such artists. Erens claims that Hui tended to produce art films; not quite the action and entertainment movies that were popular in the mainstream. While the types of films Hui produced certainly had no small part to play in her marginalization within the industry, one need only to try and find other examples of female filmmakers before recognizing that gender politics were, and still are, a clear issue.

As the Hong Kong film industry declined, then, so did Hui's career. The industry's continued focus on entertainment values left little room for the types of films Hui was making. As Erens points out, "...each [of Hui's genre films] creates a twist on the genre and several have strong political overtones" (Erens, 43). This penchant for combining the personal with the political so explicitly in her work aligns Hui with many contemporary feminist artists. Just as female artists are less commercially successful and peripheralized in the world of art, Ann Hui experiences the same kind of peripheralization within the Hong Kong film industry. The decrease in popularity and size of the industry in Hong Kong has led to its return to more chauvinistic values and the decline of Hui's career. There is a scene at the premier of the movie that Roger, Ah Tao's client-turned-caretaker, has produced, which contains a sequence that becomes a perfect vessel for the notion that Hui's colleagues can no longer 'speak her language'; when Ah Tao turns to a gentleman sitting nearby- who turns out to be a producer from Mainland China- and requests that he not smoke as it is bad for health, he reveals that he cannot speak Cantonese and Ah Tao must get her point across with crude sign language, pantomiming tobacco's effect. Hui, then, becomes that nagging old woman whom nobody can understand; she insists upon making art films that don't sell and aren't popular, but refuses to adapt to, as Hui sees it, lesser standards of filmmaking. The only way she can get her point across to her audience is by resorting to a far more crude form of communication, like Ah Tao's gestures. Just as Ah Tao does not really belong at that film premiere, and is only permitted because of the indulgence and kindness of her client, Ann Hui has been told she does not belong to the commercial film industry. The chauvinistic film industry of this newly handed over Hong Kong has told her that her correct place is sitting quietly in the margins, or else not making films at all.

It is, of course, no accident that the film meant to mark the death of Ann Hui's filmmaking career is in fact a film about death. Ah Tao finds herself at the end of her life just as Ann Hui has come to the conclusion that she has reached the end of her career; however Ah Tao's death marks more than just Hui's personal retirement. It also marks the death of the Hong Kong film industry as it had been known by Hui and her comrades in the 1980s and 1990s. When Ah Tao has her first stroke, there seems to be a handover of caretaking responsibility; this is read quite

clearly as symbolic not only of the political handover of Hong Kong in 1997, but of Hui's handover of the film industry to the men in the industry who were making all those action and entertainment films. Sick and unable to care for herself, Ah Tao relinquishes her duties as Roger's caretaker. Ah Tao no longer takes care of Roger; she will no longer buy the high quality fresh seafood and prepare lavish, artistic meals for him. Instead Roger, who, in a stroke of ironic humor not uncommon within the film, literally produces populist films that are described in the film itself as being bad – as being so boring that they put Ah Tao to sleep and cause audience members to leave the premier – must take over for both himself and Ah Tao. The audience of *A Simple Life* are encouraged to show concern with regards to Roger's domestic competence, particularly when it is revealed that he would have found it too difficult to even take care of Ah Tao's cat after she is placed in the residency. It is clearly meant to be at least mildly concerning that this is the character meant to represent the new leaders and caretakers of Hong Kong cinema. Ah Tao's death also indicates something that Wong Kar-wai's films were similarly concerned with; a loss of Cantonese culture and identity as expressed through death and dispersal.

Food is one of the most important signifiers of Cantonese culture within the film, as throughout the film Ah Tao's cooking had been Roger's one expensive indulgence. Everything else Roger consumes is bare and cheap. He wears old clothes and is often mistaken for a taxi driver or mechanic. His apartment is sparse and functional. However, the food that Ah Tao prepares for him is lavish and sumptuous, and his meals consist of braised ox tongue, pan fried crabs, and steamed turbot. These meals are also a facet of Cantonese culture and a marker of the 'old' Hong Kong that, with Ah Tao's retirement and eventual death, seems to disappear from Roger's life entirely. Hard as Ah Tao tries to find a replacement for herself to begin to work for Roger, none of the young caretakers she interviews have even the slightest interest in preparing the lavish meals to which Roger had grown accustomed or caring for him in the same way that Ah Tao had for his entire life. One potential replacement caretaker refuses to do certain tasks, another has no idea how to 'properly' make rice, and another even gets very angry that Ah Tao would suggest or expect her to be able to perform the tasks she herself has been doing for over sixty years. This sequence serves as commentary on the lack of care this newer generation of filmmakers seems to take in what Hui perceives as quality; and the handover of control of the industry marks the end of that quality. Even the location where the interview takes place, a rather dingy looking diner where Ah Tao and Roger had had a disappointing meal with a rude server only several scenes before, shows a lack of care for tradition. This trend continues as Ah Tao's health declines. The last thing the audience sees Roger eating after Ah Tao's final stroke, is a truly pathetic looking cup of noodles, presumably from a vending machine or a cheap takeaway shop. It is a rather long take, particularly since it really only consists of Andy Lau as Roger, looking despondent while sitting in an uncomfortable-looking hospital chair, eating his disappointing instant noodles. This sequence, completely unnecessary as far as the plot is concerned, serves to symbolize the end of an era, both for Roger personally and for Hong Kong in its entirety.

While the films of Wong Kar-wai, as well as Wong Kar-wai himself, seem to be dealing with pre-handover anxiety about what might become of Hong Kong and with remembering the Cantonese identity that he is so eager to carve out within his films, Ann Hui's films, in particular *A Simple Life*, are dealing with the reality of the situation after the handover has already happened and commenting on its influence within the film industry. As an already marginalized member of an industry ruled and populated mostly by men, by 2011 Hui had become a largely ignored party in the increasingly chauvinistic 'boys' club' of the declining Hong Kong film industry. The character of Ah Tao becomes a vessel for Hui's frustration with

her professional situation when viewed in the context of Hui's struggle with being pushed to the margins of Chinese cinema and having her art films deemed less appealing than the less refined action films of her male counterparts. While, ironically, this would be the film that would rejuvenate Hui's career and cause her to agree to take on other projects, the storyline of the main character Ah Tao was meant to end with a metaphysical death; of the character of Ah Tao and of Ann Hui's career within the Hong Kong film industry

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The Taste of Ice Kacang: Xiaoqingxin Film as the Possible Prospect of Taiwan Popular Cinema

Panpan Yang

Abstract

Although Xiaoqingxin Film has been widely recognized as a new sub-genre in Chinese-language film circle, it rarely received sustained academic attention in either Chinese or English publications. In this article, I would explore the contours of Xiaoqingxin Film in four aspects: (1) a tentative definition; (2) a style analysis; (3) a cause analysis: why Taiwan has overwhelming superiority in making this sub-genre; (4) a unique distribution mode. To provide a style analysis of Xiaoqingxin Film, I will not only observe its script, sound and cinematography, but also look into its genre bending. To conduct a media capital analysis of Xiaoqingxin Film, I would borrow the concept of “media capital” from Michael Curtin and pay particular attention to the fact that co-productions between Taiwan and Mainland China are popping up as Taiwan has relaxed trade embargoes with Mainland China. As shown by the successive box-office hits, the pan-Asian commercial success of Xiaoqingxin Film is not a one-hit wonder. Rather, in this sub-genre, I believe, lies the possible prospect of Taiwan popular cinema.

Key Words: Xiaoqingxin, genre, media capital, Taiwan cinema, J-style photography, Pan-Asian Cinema

Introduction: A Fresh Wind on Taiwan Screens

Much has been said about the long-standing sickness of Taiwan's popular cinema. For instance, Yueh-yu Yeh (2006) wrote in a pessimistic tone, "There was a popular Taiwan cinema until 1994" (165). Facing the fact that Taiwan films generated less than one (0.7) percent of the local box-office in 2002, Fan Hong and Wei Zhang (2009) claimed that "In terms of the film industry, Taiwan is already a city of death" (57). Nevertheless, it's noteworthy that a fresh wind has been blowing onto Taiwan screens since 2002, initially feeble but increasingly powerful: *Blue Gate Crossing* (dir. Zhiyan Yi, 2002), *Love of May* (dir. Hsiao-ming Hsu, 2004), *Winds Of September* (dir. Tom Lin, 2008), *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled* (dir. Fu Tien-yu, 2009), *Taipei Exchanges* (dir. Ya-chuan Hsiao, 2010), *Starry Starry Night* (dir. Tom Lin, 2011), *You are the Apple of My Eye* (dir. Giddens Ko, 2011) and *Touch of the Light* (dir. Rong-ji Chang, 2012). All these films, with fresh taste, popular lure and box office success, fall into the sub-genre of Xiaoqingxin Film, a catchword in recent years. The main concern of this paper is to explore the particular contours of Xiaoqingxin Film in four aspects: (1) a tentative definition; (2) a style analysis; (3) a cause analysis: why Taiwan has overwhelming advantages in making this sub-genre; (4) a unique distribution mode.

1. A Tentative Definition of Xiaoqingxin Film

1.1 Xiaoqingxin: from Music to other Art Fields

Xiaoqingxin, is originally an alternative term of Indie Pop, a music genre. As early as 1978, a group of British kids came up with the idea that instead of waiting to be discovered by a big record company, they could record and release music by themselves. From then on, a whole legion of do-it-yourself guitar bands, such as Smiths, Josef K and Orange Juice, started popping up, whose songs embraced all forms of sweetness, earnestness, simplicity and comfort. Indie Pop is different from Indie Rock in the way that it is more melodic, more angst-free, less noisy and less masculine. In contemporary Chinese-language music circles, Sodagreen, Nature Q and especially Cheer, are considered as the representatives of Indie Pop (Xiaoqingxin Music). Cheer, is celebrated for her image as a girl who is forever bumming on campus, carrying a wooden guitar and her act of releasing Demo in her early years. Accompanied by the popularity of Xiaoqingxin Music, Xiaoqingxin, as a style, gradually infected other fields: literature, photography and cinema. Briefly speaking, all kinds of Xiaoqingxin art forms touch on small happiness and slight melancholy in daily life, value a spirit of individualization and testify to the trend of escaping from a dissatisfactory reality and drowning oneself in one's own world.

Xiaoqingxin contributes to anti-consumerism in the sense that it refuses a commercialized, vulgar society. Yet, it should be admitted that Xiaoqingxin art forms are considerably easy-to-digest and thus, are never insulated from mass cultural consumption. When Xiaoqingxin becomes a new gathering arena of popular art, the spirit of individualization might turn into "pseudo-individualization" or "the always-the-same" in Adorno's (1979) sense: consumers purchase the illusion that every commodity is tailored to the individual's personal preference, while cultural goods are in fact just variations on the same theme. How Xiaoqingxin Film becomes Taiwan popular cinema, in a certain extent, confirms Adorno's argument.

1.2 Xiaoqingxin Film: A Variation of Wenyi Film?

When discussing the issue of terminological choice, Yueh-yu Yeh (2009) asserts that, "a step toward de-Westernization and intellectual decolonization can be taken through a tactic of terminological choice, to opt for an endogenous concept (Wenyi Film) over melodrama"

(p.439). For the same reason, I would use “Xiaoqingxin Film”, rather than “Indie Pop Cinema” in this article.

Is Xiaoqingxin Film a variation of Wenyi Film? In the first place, indeed, Xiaoqingxin Film has some type of affinity with Wenyi Film. In the tradition of Taiwanese cinema, Xiaoqingxin Film and Wenyi Film are both genres of sentiment, frequently involving romantic relationships, centering the cultivated heroine and avoiding straightforward sex description. In the second place, a comparison between Wenyi Film and Xiaoqingxin Film in the context of Taiwan cinema, or more specifically, between Qiongyao Film in the 1970s and Xiaoqingxin Film from 2002 to 2012, reveals their prominent differences: (1) Qiongyao Film obviously hammers at overwrought, excessive emotion; however, in Xiaoqingxin film, emotion, no matter positive or negative, is always controlled enough not to cloy; (2) Qiongyao Film is full of conflicts and builds steadily toward a climax, whereas the action of Xiaoqingxin Film is considerably loose and free-flowing; (3) Central to most Qiongyao films is the conundrum of family order in conflict with personal love, while the hero and heroine in Xiaoqingxin Film are entangled in more intimate problems, such as restless puberty, mental instability and sexual ambiguity; (4) In Qiongyao Film, “the female ideal” is characterized by “gentility, kindness, softness and frailty”(Teo, 2006, p. 208); in contrast, in Xiaoqingxin Film, the strong, sometimes boyish female character seems more and more popular; (5) Most importantly, Qiongyao Film tells us countless love stories in order to repeatedly demonstrate the greatness of love, whilst Xiaoqingxin Film involves love stories, especially first love memories, only to express the sentiment of youth, the confusion of growth and the futility of life. To illustrate the above viewpoints, concrete examples will be provided later in this article.

2. Style Analysis of Xiaoqingxin Cinema: A Formal System

The preceding analysis helps us trace the outline of Xiaoqingxin Film, but it simultaneously foregrounds the difficulty of defining Xiaoqingxin Film, mainly due to the overlaps of Xiaoqingxin Film and other genres. I don’t want to pretend to be able to give a single definition of Xiaoqingxin Film. Instead, I would argue, Xiaoqingxin Film can be recognized by a series of style elements, or in other words, its formal system. This act of recognizing a film genre works something like looking at a combination lock: “one’s combination is distinct from others, not because no one else in the world has the same numbers or sequence, but because the chosen numbers, as well as the reason why the numbers were chosen in a particular sequence bear special meaning to the viewer” (Choi, 2011, p. 181).

A style analysis of Xiaoqingxin Film will be offered in three aspects: script, sound and cinematography.

2.1 Script

As mentioned earlier, Xiaoqingxin Film is still a genre of sentiment- it never abandons the clichés of melodrama, such as “rain” and “flashback montage”. For example, in *You are the Apple of My Eye* and *Love of May*, when Ko Ching-teng quarrelled with Shen Chia-yi, when Xuanxuan had to go back to Mainland China with her Peking Opera troupe, it began to rain. Also, in these two films, “flashback montage”, as a sensational, stereotyped cinematic code, was used when Ko Ching-teng was kissing Shen Chia-yi’s husband in Shen Chia-yi’s wedding, imagining that he was kissing Shen Chia-yi, and when Ah Lei received Xuanxuan’s diary. Nevertheless, different from melodrama, it seems that Xiaoqingxin Film always deliberately avoids the moment of fulfilment and the excessiveness of emotion, which could be best exemplified by the dialogue between Ko Ching-teng and Shen Chia-yi when they were flying a Kongming lantern:

Ko Ching-teng: Someday, I will definitely catch up with you.
 Shen Chia-yi: Do you want to know the answer?
 I can tell you right now...
 Ko Ching-teng: No, I didn't ask you, so you cannot refuse me.
 Shen Chia-yi: You really don't want to know?
 Ko Ching-teng: Please, please don't tell me now... please allow me to continue adoring you!

It is quite obvious that Xiaoqingxin Film prefers youth theme, which is not unfamiliar to Taiwan screens. Youth films in earlier days include *Student Days* (dir. Ching-chieh Lin, 1979), *The Boys From Fengkuei* (dir. Hsiao-hsien Hou, 1983), *A Brighter Summer Day* (dir. Edward Yang, 1991) and so on. These films are overloaded with Chinese memory, Taiwan history and social issues. Therefore, it's easy for the audience of these films to feel oppressive and sad. On the contrary, Xiaoqingxin Film says goodbye to all these heavy topics and chooses to focus on individualized, inner problems: Can I win the heart of that girl (*You are the Apple of My Eye*)? As a girl, can I fall in love with another girl (*Blue Gate Crossing*)? May I travel around the world (*Taipei Exchanges*)? In short, the essence of most Xiaoqingxin films, is a young mind that is in conflict with itself.

Closely related to the youth theme, most Xiaoqingxin films are films of reminiscence. Instead of following a direct causal narrative chain, the action of Xiaoqingxin Film, just like a shattered memory, is considerably loose and free-flowing. What particularly interests me here is, a handful of Xiaoqingxin films, such as *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*, *Winds Of September* and *You are the Apple of My Eye*, employ childish handwriting titles, whispering the youth theme and the privacy of individual memory to the audience from the very beginning. It should be noted that sweetness and sorrow in Xiaoqingxin Film are always light and trivial. For this reason, Xiaoqingxin film can be called a light-hearted type. In *Ice Kacang Puppy Love* (dir. Ah Niu, 2010), there is a line that depicts the taste of Ice Kacang, which might serve as the description of the taste of Xiaoqingxin Film as well, "Ice Kacang is fresh and sweet... it slightly hurts your mouth sometimes because it's too icy. It dissolves in your mouth even before you start talking about your feeling." It's true that Xiaoqingxin is not so nutrient for our thoughts, but it at least provides young audiences with a shelter where they can have a good relax and heal their wounds.

Considering that Taiwan screen had long been "a screen of sadness", Xiaoqingxin Film has already brought the audience so much "warmth and tenderness" (Li, 2009, p. 42). In *Love of May*, there is a shot in which the window was framed visually to separate Ah Lei and Xuanxuan. This shot seems to owe something to *Taipei Story* (dir. Edward Yang, 1985)- in the opening scene of *Taipei Story*, when Jean took Ah-Long to see her new apartment, a huge window was framed visually to separate them, indicating an unseen split in their relationship. However, in the shot from *Love of May*, Ah Lei soon guessed what was in the mind of Xuanxuan. Seen in this light, we can say the shot from *Love of May* is an allegory of Taiwan screen, which is changing from "a screen of sadness" to "a screen of tenderness".

2.2 Sound

It's quite interesting that in Xiaoqingxin film, music is usually the most important thing engaged in assisting the character construct a sense of age. *You are the Apple of My Eye*, for example, begins with the voice-over of Ko Ching-teng, "1994. I was at the age of 16. Songs of Tom Chang were still popular. More than 1 million tapes of *Take Me to Your Heart* by Jacky Cheung, had been sold out." Also, as Giddens Ko (2012) said in an interview, "In the last scene

of the film, I use the song *Nunchakus* by Jay Chou, what I want to tell the audience is, we have come to the year 2005.” The use of music in Xiaoqingxin Film should be discussed within the tradition of Taiwan pop music and cinema. In Taiwan Wenyi films in the 1970s, a partnership was already well established between popular music and cinema to promote songs in the films as well as compensate for the lack of ambient sound. This partnership was suspended in the 1980s when the New Cinema endeavoured to “alienate itself from commodity apparatus” and emphasize “its high-art quality and great authenticity”- “One specific way to do this was to reduce the use of pop music unless it was used as ambient sound as part of the realist representation” (Yeh, 1995, p. 12). In recent Xiaoqingxin films, we can see the reconciliation of pop music and cinema. Most Xiaoqingxin films make good use of theme songs as well as interludes, but escape the “one theme song, played three times” pattern in Qiongyao films. The reunion of pop music and cinema here manifests that different from New Cinema authors who hold their heads high, these young directors of Xiaoqingxin Film would rather dwell among their spectators.

Most theme songs used in Xiaoqingxin Film fall into the category of College Folk. Flourishing in the 1970s in Taiwan, College Folk privileged its youth identity, which simultaneously connoted a sense of playful sensibility and unthreatening innocence. It reduced its critical quality by making the music less sophisticated in lyrics. “As a result, as compared to modern folk, College Folk was largely transformed to an escapist pop music from 1978 to 1981”(Yeh, 1995, 12). And it’s not difficult to recognize what we call Xiaoqingxin Music today is actually College Folk that appeals for pureness and goes to the extreme. As an interesting footnote, the composer and singer of the theme song of *Blue Gate Crossing*, is not anyone else, but Cheer. Besides, voice-over also plays a vital role in Xiaoqingxin films. Quite appropriate to the youth theme, the endless, discursive and dreamlike voice-over, implicates a desire to pour out innermost secrets as well as a state of mental loneliness, and is dissolved into a murmur of individual memory.

2.3 Cinematography

In terms of cinematography, we could clearly see a set of unique devices gradually developed and are solidified in recent Xiaoqingxin films. The set of style devices is extremely similar to Japanese Style Photography. I will elaborate this point later in this paper.

3. Media Capital Analysis: Why Taiwan?

This section aims to explain why Taiwan has overwhelming advantages in making Xiaoqingxin Film by providing a Media Capital analysis. “Media Capital”, borrowed from Michael Curtin (2012), is a concept that “acknowledges the spatial logics of capital, creativity, culture, and policy without privileging one among the four” (p.183). This concept encourages us to offer dynamic and historical accounts that delineate the operations of capital and the redeployment of talents, at the same time directing our attention to socio-cultural forces and contingencies that might engender alternative discourses, practices, and spatiality.

3.1 Capital, Policy and Creativity

Before examining why Xiaoqingxin Film can grow in Taiwan, it’s necessary to briefly list these factors that caused the long drought at the box office for locally made Taiwanese films: the depletion of generic and star resources, the decline of the Southeast Asian oversea market because of rising national assertion against Chinese business hegemony, a paranoid view of

Taiwan art cinema and most of all, the forced opening of Taiwan's movie screens to the world. Beginning from 1994, all foreign films could be imported with low tariffs. After Taiwan became a member of WTO in 2002, the 58-copy restriction of foreign films was finally cancelled.

It's true that Hollywood movies have dominated Taiwan film market since 1994. However, I would argue, it is not simply because "there is no Taiwanese audience for Taiwan film" (Yeh, 2006, p.156), but because over one decade, Taiwanese distributors poured money into distributing Hollywood films, "sardonically realizing audiences' species being" (Adorno, 2002, p. 116). When Taiwanese audiences could only swallow Hollywood products for a long time, their desire for cinema gradually became uniformed and standardized. It's clear that Xiaoqingxin Film pitches for audiences that are very different from standardized Hollywood spectators. Briefly speaking, typical audiences of Xiaoqingxin films are those who have a strong sense of being independent, different from others and feel it a shame to go to see a standardized Hollywood film. In this sense, the dominance of Hollywood products paradoxically enhances the desire of some audiences to have another taste.

With *Taiwan Film and Television Venture Capital Investment Conference* since 2005 and *Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement* between Taiwan and Mainland China in 2010, film co-productions between Taiwan and Mainland China are increasingly enhanced and Chinese mainland becomes a promising market for Taiwan local films. The key factor that contributes to Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film, is the redeployment of talents in the Taiwanese film circle. Taiwan's eminent producer-critic Peggy Chiao Hsing-ping (2008) uses the catchword "Too Much Generation" ("Tai Chao Guo Shi Dai") to describe the younger generation of directors, mostly born in 1970s: Te-Sheng Wei, Giddens Ko, Tom Lin, Rong-ji Chang and so on. To borrow Peggy Chiao's words, "the Too Much Generation is expected to blow away the dull moods of former generations and to save Taiwanese cinema." At the same time, a younger generation of film stars is also becoming the backbones of Taiwanese screen: Berlin Chen, Lunmei Kwai, Kai Ko, Michelle Chen and so on. Celebrated for their pure smiling face, Lunmei Kwai and Michelle Chen are considered as typical Xiaoqingxing girls.

The policy adjustments of the long-established Taiwan Government Film Fund in recent years also testified a trend to explore young talent and revive the Taiwanese film industry. In 1998, Film Fund started to fund short films. In 2003, well aware of the importance of digitalization, Film Fund gave preference to digital films. In 2005, Film Fund divided applicants into three groups: General Group, Green Hand Group and 3D Group and set down two new rules: first, for the General Group, the budget of the funded film should at least double the fund while for the Green Hand Group, the budget of the funded film can be at least 120% percent of the fund; second, one director can apply for fund for no more than 2 times. In 2012, if the box office of one film was more than 10 million NTD, Film Fund would provide funding for the next film of the company.

3.2 Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and Its Japanese Cultural Affiliations

As previously suggested, it's no doubt that Taiwanese traditions of Wenyi Narrative and College Folk both add credit to the success of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film. A closer examination of the formal system of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film, however, also reveals its cultural and aesthetic affiliation with Japan. To elaborate this argument, a level of interpretation will be offered in three aspects: Japanese Style Photography, Japanese Aesthetics and Iwai Shunji.

3.2.1 J-style Photography

The first thing that should be pointed out is, just like Japanese never calls J-dorama as J-dorama, the term, J-style Photography, is actually not commonly used by the Japanese. Yet, commonly used by other countries, J-style Photography, in a narrow sense, refers to a group of Japanese photographers with relatively consistent style, including Rinko Kawauchi, Kobayashi Kisei, Iwata Shunsuke, Marisa Shimamoto, Tokyo-Eight, Tomo Kohsaka and Nagano Toyokazu. The catchiest characteristic of J-style Photography is its use of undersaturated, pastel, pale washed-out colour. A clean, clear light often permeates images. The result is characterized by a lightness of touch. It's because the colour is less saturated and less aggressive than the real world that, every image is able to withstand a long gaze. Gazing at a J-style photograph, it's easy for the viewer to experience the photography world with a feeling of equilibrium, to enter a state of quiet contemplation. In Xiaoqingxin films, by using the pale washed-out colour, the sweetness and beauty of filmic images are controlled enough not to cloy.

J-style Photography is also famous for its fascination with shallow depth of field. For instance, whenever Nagano Toyokazu takes photos of her daughter, she skilfully employs a shallow depth-of-field to focus solely on her daughter in the foreground by using a large aperture or long focal length. The same technique is usually used when depicting the young protagonists in Xiaoqingxin films. By solely focusing on the character, the large aperture serves as a suggestion of loneliness. The use of long focal length, simultaneously means the camera should keep a long distance from the character, thus conveys a sense of insecurity. In sum, when the entire outside world is dissolved into a fuzzy background, what we could see is a narcissist living in one's own world. As a stereotype in J-style Photography, backlit shot is used to film a sweet moment, slightly overexposed and soft focused. Numerous examples using the same trick could be found in Xiaoqingxin films. For instance, in *Touch of the Light*, whenever Xiaojie is dancing, she is filmed in backlit shots. In *You are the Apple of My Eye*, the moment Shen Chia-yi smiled at Ko Ching-teng, they were again filmed in a typical backlit shot, slightly overexposed and soft focused.

Another significant feature of J-style Photography is to capture the small moments and details of everyday life: an egg, a vase and a photo, these quotidian, small, insignificant of daily life are elevated into something transcendent and mesmerizingly beautiful whisper to us. As Kawauchi (2001) nicely puts it, "I prefer listening to the small voices in our world, those which whisper. I have a feeling I am always being saved by these whispers; my eyes naturally focus on small things" (last page). To be more precise, what Kawauchi is fascinated with is life's transient moments. It's only these extremely sensitive photographers that can lead us to discover these small miracles in everyday banality: creation, destruction, life, and death. Just like touching on pathos of puberty and neurosis, no matter what stage of life they depict in their images, a celebratory tone is offset with a sombre stillness. Although no single image can neatly encapsulate the nuance of temporality, what interests J-style photographers is merely to convey the beauty of all of life's moments, no matter how ephemeral. Here the rhythms of this life are recorded, rather than its set pieces.

Accordingly, in *Ice Kacang Puppy Love*, *You are the Apple of My Eye* and *Touch of the Light*, fixed shots, over ten seconds, are generously given to a fish, a book and a tape recorder. Although these still life shots still have something to do with film narratives, they make possible the emergence of the purely optical and sound situation, for audiences to see, to hear, rather than to react to. In this sense, they approach what Deleuze (2010) calls "pure and direct

images of time”- “This is time, time itself, ‘a little time in its pure state’: a direct time- image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced” (p. 13).

Through the above analysis, these similarities between cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and J-style photography have been quite obvious. However, two things appear similar do not necessarily mean they are causally related. In fact, I have not yet found out any direct evidences that could definitely prove that cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film learns a lot from J-style photography. The juxtaposition of cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and J-style photography here, I think, at least offers a possibility of inter-textual interpretation. To move a step further, I would continue to explore two tentative arguments on the relationship between cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and J-style photography: First, considering that Taiwan experienced a long occupation by the Japanese, it’s quite possible that Japanese aesthetics has become entrenched in Taiwan and is embodied in Taiwanese arts, including cinema. Second, given the prevalent of Iwai Shunji’s films in Taiwan in post 1995, probably Iwai Shunji served as the intermediary between J-style Photography and Taiwan Xiaoqingxin films.

3.2.2 Japanese Aesthetics

Within Japanese Aesthetics framework, the most important aesthetic notions I would explore here include *Waibi-sabi*, *Mono no aware* and *Shibui*. *Shibui* is an expression of a particular simple, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty. *Shibui* objects appear to be simple overall but they include subtle details, such as textures, that balance simplicity with complexity. This balance of simplicity and complexity ensures that one does not tire of a *shibui* object but constantly finds new meanings and enriched beauty that cause its aesthetic value to grow over the years. The notion of *Shibui* helps to explain why J-style Photography refers a pale washed-out colour and pays special attention to details. *Wabi* (transient and stark beauty) and *Sabi* (the beauty of the natural patina and aging) both refer to a mindful approach to everyday life. Over time their meaning overlapped and converged until they are unified into *Wabi-sabi*, the aesthetic defined as the beauty of things “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete” (Koren, p. 60). Things in bud, or things in decay, are more evocative of *Wabi-sabi* than things in full bloom because they suggest the transience of things. Closely related to *Wabi-sabi*, is the notion of *Mono no aware*, a poetic mood, or a bittersweet awareness of the transience of things. With notions of *Wabi-sabi* and *Mono no aware*, we can have a better understanding of the fascination with life’s transient moments and the tone of agreeable melancholy in J-style Photography. In short, J-style Photography is suggestive of a Japanese aesthetic that notes simplicity, transience, and at times, melancholy. This, to a large extent, explains why this particular style is regarded as typical Japanese photography style by other countries although the styles of photography in contemporary Japan are actually diversified and hybrid.

3.2.3 Iwai Shunji

For more than two decades, KMT government either banned (1972-1983) or restricted (1984-1994) the import of Japanese films. However, when *Love Letter* (Iwai, 1995) entered onto Taiwanese screens in 1995, it soon became the Pure Love Bible in the eyes of young Taiwanese audiences. A closer look at the beautiful cinematography of Iwai’s films reveals that Iwai does have a good grasp of the visual tricks of J-style photography. For instance, in *Love Letter*, a ten-second shot is left to a dragonfly, dying on ice, which is no doubt an unobtrusive detail and a transitive moment. Iwai is also stuck on pale colour, intentional backlit, slight overexposure and soft focus. One example can be the scene from *Love Letter*, where the high-school female student Itsuki was working at the public library, slightly out of focus, bathed in a clean, clear, white light from the window behind her. An even better example using backlit, overexposure

and defocus, can be the key shot of *All About Lily Chou-Chou* (Iwai, 2001), which shows the central character Hasumi, with big headphones covering ears, standing alone in a wide-open, sun-dappled rice field, lost in Lily's songs. The shot here is indeed very telling in the context of Xiaoqingxin Film. In the first place, it testifies the marriage of cinema and pop music in Iwai's films. Lily's imaginary songs—"Wounds that Heal", "Abyss of Loneliness" and "Wings that Can't Fly", as Tony (2002) notes, "could even serve as alternative titles for the film itself" (p. 36). In the second place, the act of covering one's own ear with big headphones confirms the redemptive power of Xiaoqingxin Music as well as Xiaoqingxin Film: for teens in this film, Lily Chou-Chow is their means of release and escape, their only refuge in an increasing hostile environment.

In terms of film script, Iwai's films have already offered an embryonic form for Xiaoqingxin films. *April Story* (Iwai, 1998), for example, is a story about Nireno, who began her fairly unimpressive college life, and frequently went to a bookstore, hoping to be recognized by Yamazaki who worked there. The plot of the film is elegantly loose and half of the shots are "useless" in terms of advancing the plot. Trivial issues and youthful sentimentality in the girl's mind are taken seriously. Great care is taken so as not to bruise the girl's romantic worldview. Yes, Yamazaki finally recognized Nireno and offered her a left-behind umbrella. They smiled at each other in "rain" - the story stopped here, avoiding being too sweet to cloy.

Given that most directors of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin films were born in the 1970s, almost certainly, Iwai was part of their film memory. When these directors, who grew up in the flood of Qiongyao films in the 1970s and Qiongyao TV series in the 1980s, encountered Iwai, it could be imagined that what ripples were caused in their mind. Seen from the three aspects above, cinematography, music and script, it might be not an exaggeration to say that Iwai is a forerunner of Xiaoqingxin Film.

4. Pan-Asian Distribution of Xiaoqingxin Film

4.1 Xiaoqingxin Film as Pan-Asian Cinema

Central to the idea of "pan-Asian cinema", is "to build a networked market that's actively connected and co-operating rather than fragmented, isolated and antagonistic. 'Connectivity' has been an important business strategy in managing media globalization" (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 94). Formed by Peggy Chiao Hsing-ping in 1996, Arc Light seemed to have the foresight to produce pan-Asian cinemas. It's noticeable that "Pan-Asian Packages: Arc Light Picture", which aimed to "sell six cities to Asian audiences in one package" (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 90), included *Blue Gate Crossing* and *Love of May*. It's true that Xiaoqingxin Film is marked with international sales potential, thanks to its universal emotional pursuits, easy-to-digest pleasure and isolation from sensitive political issues.

The pan-Asian box office success of *You are the Apple of My Eyes* strikingly reconfirmed the commercial potential of Xiaoqingxin Film. The brochure hidden in the Collector's DVD Edition *You are the Apple of My Eye*, recorded the film's commercial glories: in Taiwan, 460,000,000 NTD, No.3 box-office hit in Taiwanese film record; in Hong Kong, 61,860,000 HKD, No.1 Chinese-language box-office hit over the years; in Singapore, 2,260,000 USD, No.1 Chinese-language box-office hit in 2011; in Malaysia, 1,390,000 USD, No. 4 Chinese-language box-office hit in 2011; in Mainland China, although the film was not released until January 6, 2012, near half of a year later than in Taiwan and a couple of months later than its Internet pirated version, it still set the 75,800,000 RMB box-office record, No.1 Taiwanese box-office hit in Chinese mainland over the years. Angie Chai, producer of *You are the Apple*

of *My Eye*, who once created the commercial miracle of *Meteor Garden* in 2001, afresh miraculously baked a hot topic for pan-Asian audiences and successfully made the actor and the actress in the product become superstars. In 2011, October Film Workshop, was established in Shanghai by Chinese and Japanese filmmakers, including Iwai Shunji. This workshop will start to work on its Pure Love Trilogy in two years, which, to a certain extent, indicates the possible prospect of Xiaoqingxin Film as pan-Asian cinema.

4.2 The Case of *You are the Apple of My Eye*

A new sub-genre would probably give birth to a new distribution mode. As can be observed in the case of *You are the Apple of My Eye*, Xiaoqingxin Film needs to develop a distribution schema different from commercial film and art cinema, a unique mode for itself. When *You are the Apple of My Eye* was acclaimed in Summer International Film Festival, Fox Film (HK) didn't choose to release the film earlier in Hong Kong as expected. Instead, it chose October 20, 2011 as the HK premiere date and held one or two mystery screening every weekend during September 13 to October 20. The time and location for each mysterious screening were successively posted on the Facebook page of *You are the Apple of My Eye*. Just like Cheer's releasing Demo in her early years, the act of holding small-scale mysterious screening, actually satisfied the audience's desire to be distinct from others. The role of social media was also highlighted in this case. Obviously, Xiaoqingxin Film pitches at young audiences who are probably frequent users of SNS. Among Chinese SNS websites, Douban might be extremely important in the context of distribution of Xiaoqingxin Film- as a popular saying goes, "So-called Xiaoqingxin girls, are those girls who bury themselves in Douban every day." Another approach to reach for young spectators, as illustrated by *You are the Apple of My Eye*, is to hold screening and other related events in universities and colleges. On November 5, 2011, as a prelude to the film's release in Mainland China, Giddens Ko (2011) made a presentation in Peking University, which soon led to the heated discussion and the almost crazy pursuit of the film among college students in the Chinese mainland.

Another unique marketing strategy used in the case of *You are the Apple of My Eye* is to let the film spill over into real life. Giddens Ko repeatedly stressed that the film was merely a record of his personal experience and he made this film only to tell the Shen Chia-yi in his real life that he was still in love with her. More interestingly, fans of the film, motivated by the curiosity to find out who was the real Shen Chia-yi, finally exposed all the prototypes in real life for this film via "cyber manhunt." Seen in this light, *You are the Apple of My Eye* was no more only a novel or a film, but "a behaviour art" that anyone could join, which again proved that Taiwanese audiences "wished to be entertained by storytellers who dwelled among them" (Yeh, 2006, 168).

Conclusion

In sum, on contemporary Taiwan screens, Xiaoqingxin Film has gradually grown into a sub-genre with a systematized style system and a shaping distribution mode. Taiwan's advantages in making Xiaoqingxin Film are engaged with its manifold logics of capital, policy, creativity and culture. As shown by the successive box-office hits, the pan-Asian commercial success of Xiaoqingxin Film is not a one-hit wonder. Rather, in this sub-genre, I believe, lies the possible prospect of Taiwan popular cinema

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Subtitling Chinese Humour: the English Version of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009)

Yilei Yuan

Abstract

Zhang Yimou is one of the most critically acclaimed Chinese film directors and he has touched upon a wide range of themes in his more than two decades of film directing. In 2009, his *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (or Zhang's Blood Simple) was a new experiment and adventure. Adapted from the Coen brothers' directorial debut, this film stands out as a dark film noir as well as a comedy. Humour is one of the most dominant features of this film. Subtitling the humour is considered challenging and thus multiple humorous conversations are deleted in the English version. Explication is a strategy frequently resorted to in the humour subtitling of this film. However, the humorous effect is not satisfactorily reproduced or is weakened or even eliminated in the English version given that certain weak subtitles are provided. Apart from verbal humour created with language, non-verbal humour is prominent in this screwball and slapstick comedy and mise-en-scene is very well applied to convey the visual jokes. This paper will discuss explication as a primary strategy in subtitling, with a focus on omitted scenes, and will investigate non-verbal humour with two aspects of mise-en-scene.

Key words: *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop*, humour, explication, omitted scenes, mise-en-scene.

Introduction

In mainland China, an increasing number of films are produced each year. According to statistics from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), in 2011, 558 melodramas and overall 791 films were made in the People's Republic of China; in 2012, 745 melodramas alone were produced (Li & Li, 2013). In regard to film quantity, Chinese film production is globally third, only behind the US and India. Whenever Chinese films are screened in a foreign land, it is necessary to translate them into the language commonly spoken or understood in the land in question, dubbed or subtitled. In terms of subtitling, audiences' complaints about confusing, unintelligible or erroneous subtitles are not to be disregarded. Besides, particular subtitles or complete scenes may be omitted from the subtitled films. The renowned Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou has been exploring films of a wide range of themes and genres, including melodrama, martial arts (*wuxia*) and historical war films, and his films have been critically acclaimed around the world. Zhang's 2009 film *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (or Zhang's *Blood Simple*), as his first attempt to combine a comedy with suspense, might be distinguished from his previous artistic and thought-provoking films. Owing to the specificities of humour in this film, subtitling is a challenging task and several conversations end up missing in the English version. On the other hand, particular translation strategies like *explicitation* are frequently and necessarily used. Interestingly, this film, adapted from the Coen brother's directorial debut *Blood Simple* (1984) stands out as a hilarious screwball comedy as well as a film noir. The humorous elements are fully embedded throughout the film and refer to Chinese popular culture, such as song-and-dance duet (a traditional Chinese folk art). Comedy as it is, almost half of the film is comprised of physical humour rather than funny utterances, which reveals that non-verbally expressed humour contributes significantly to the entire humorous situations.

Non-verbally expressed humour is closely related to song-and-dance duet culture, and the hilarious cues are very familiar to Chinese audiences. However, for Western audiences who are familiar with Zhang's art film pedigree and *Blood Simple*'s (1984) art-house sensibility, the adaptation may be baffling regarding the use of slapstick. As Maggie Lee (2010) puts it, 'their specific cultural references and the cast's screeningly noisy acting style are what eventually wear out non-Chinese viewers' (para. 8). The difficulty for Western viewers to read the film's sensibility also allegedly caused the unsatisfactory reception and low distribution of this film in foreign countries. Still, humour created by slapstick tricks and other non-verbal gags are inclined to be universal and understandable to foreign audiences in general. Nevertheless, verbal humour relies on language transfer to be appreciated in another country in another language. By concentrating on both verbal and non-verbal humour, this paper will investigate humour, with a focus on omitted humorous conversations in the target language (TL) version as well as *mise-en-scene* in the presentation of non-verbal humour.

Background

'Subtitling humour requires insight and creativity, but it is also a matter of establishing priorities' (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p. 214). Humour appears at various levels and can derive from the interaction between word and image, or a play on words, or become an inseparable part of a storyline (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, pp. 214-215). Some lines will thus be easier to translate than others. While the importance of different lines can vary too and it is important to understand to what extent humour is part of the texture of the film.

In regard to dialects in humour, Aramatzis (2012) approaches dialects at the service of humour with American sitcoms as a case study. As Mayoral Asensio (as cited in Aramatzis, 2012) puts it, humour in terms of translation is presented as codified (user/use) or non-codified (comment) (p.72). Aramatzis (2012) also introduces five strategies of translating dark humour

with a dialect: *levelling* or *standardisation*, *conservation* of dialect, *paralinguistic compensation*, *explicitation* and *generalisation* (p.73). In terms of *dark humour*, Bucaria (2008) bases her research on Delabastita (1989), Gottlieb (2005) and Chiaro (1992), and she analysed dubbing dark humour in audiovisual translation by categorising dark humour, on the basis of ‘verbal/non-verbal’ and ‘visual/acoustic’ divisions. Bucaria also demonstrates the most commonly used strategies of subtitling dark humour, which are: *close rendering*; *complete omission*; *weakening*; and *increased effect*.

This paper will adopt verbal/non-verbal divisions in the study of the humour in Zhang Yimou’s *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009). It will respectively look into how verbal humour is transferred by English subtitles with primarily the *explicitation* strategy that Arampatzis has discussed or by Bucaria’s *complete omission* and how non-verbal humour is portrayed by *mise-en-scene*.

The study

This study is to examine existing subtitles of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) and discover translation strategies adopted. The version of DVD that provides all English subtitles in this research is distributed by Momentum Pictures and authorised by Beijing New Picture Film Co., Ltd. and Film Partner (2009) International, Inc. Although excellent subtitles convey both meaning and effect, particular subtitles contain minor errors or are subject to discussion.

Explicitation and analysis

Explicitation is one of the most frequently and necessarily used strategies with regard to subtitling the film in question. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), *explicitation* is a term adopted to describe a phenomenon where the target text explicates the original in a more intelligible way, usually by adding explanatory words or including connectives. Therefore, the natural logical flow of a text and readability are both enhanced. As a matter of fact, films are more often than not composed of utterances located in contexts which original language audiences can easily recognise and grasp. By contrast, TL audiences may neglect or not be able to interpret significant contextual details, which hinders their understanding. Hence, it is essential to render particular phrases in subtitles more explicit. Hervey and Higgins (1992) also use the term *exegetic translation* to define explicit translation where extra details are added and the source text is expanded and explicated (p. 250). When a subtitle contains culture-dependent references whose equivalents are absent in the TL culture, the subtitler has to include additional explanation for the sake of TL audiences, especially as references often have an influence on interpretation. Nonetheless, lengthy explanations are not allowed and intricacies of cultural-bound and other terms cannot be explained with only one or two more phrases. In this case, another strategy, *condensation*, is critical. To produce subtitles with acceptable lengths, condensing information is crucial. *Condensation* and *reformulation* often go hand in hand and how to rephrase largely depends on TL norms (Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007, p. 150). Below are several examples of explicitation found in Zhang’s *Blood Simple*. Dialogue lines have been taken from the film together with the subtitled translations and will be explored in regard to how the dialogue lines have been translated, specifically the significance of the translated information as well as what is lost in translation.

The boss’ wife buys a gun from a Persian businessman, when guns were still rare in northwest China at that time, and she is very pleased with her ‘high-tech product’:

Table 1

00: 03: 53

Source language (SL)	我也能雷倒众生了
Pinyin spelling (PS)	<i>Wo ye neng lei dao zhongsheng le</i>
Target language (TL)	Everyone will be amazed.

‘雷’ (*lei*) in Chinese, although often used for the natural phenomenon of thunderstorms, or as a surname, has gained a new meaning in recent years. It started from a network usage, indicating a speech or action that makes others wordless or helpless, or shocks or scares others (‘Baidu Baike,’ n.d.). In this context, other people would unquestionably be shocked and scared to see the unusual weapon. The English word ‘thunderstorm’ does not have this connotation, but the meaning is roughly conveyed by ‘amaze’. ‘Amaze’ explicates the surprise and fright that the gun may potentially create on people and *explicitation* is used because of the non-existence of a similar usage of the TL word. The new meaning of 雷 became popular only a few years ago, and thus it produces an amusing effect in this ancient background with a logical conflict. This humour is lost owing to the difficulty of finding an equivalent usage.

Noodle shop helpers Zhao and Chen are secretly approaching their boss Wang’s safe to steal money, as they have not been paid for long:

Table 2

01: 01: 07

SL	投石问路 打草惊蛇
PS	<i>Toushi wenlu, dacao jingshe</i>
TL	I'm just trying to see if he's in there.

When Zhao and Chen sneak to the backyard to steal money from their boss Wang’s safe, Zhao has this utterance. ‘投石问路’ (*toushi wenlu*) is what one says when going out to investigate an action, one tosses a rock on the way to see if anybody is around. ‘打草惊蛇’ (*dacao jingshe*) is a saying which originally means *one hits grass and alerts a snake in it*, implying that one wants to punish someone but alert others. This idiom is often applied to connote the way of handling a problem that is not cautious enough, and so alarms the enemy instead. So a literal translation of *toushi wenlu, dacao jingshe* is ‘*I’ll toss a rock to see if he’s there, hit the grass and alert a snake in it.*’ Both idioms, supposed to be applied in a literary situation, indirectly display how Zhao tries to find out if Wang is in, which produces a slightly humoristic effect. Zabalbeascoa (1996) argues that if a joke centres on an institution or culture-related reference that is not in the TL audiences’ knowledge, *adaptation* is needed or humour may disappear (p. 252). *Omission* rather than *adaptation* is resorted to in this English subtitle. The origins of the two Chinese idioms are omitted, giving priority to audiences’ interpretation and sacrificing an idiom-based minor humour. We might also say the meaning of the source line is *explicitated*.

As Zhao knows how to find out if Wang is in without making Wang suspicious, Chen says that Zhao is very experienced and Zhao replies to her:

Table 3

01: 01: 13

SL	别夸我 我也是摸索着前进
PS	<i>Bie kua wo, wo ye shi mosuo zhe qianjin</i>
TL	Don't flatter me. I'm still new to this.

The literal subtitle may be ‘Don’t flatter me. I’m also trying to feel my way.’ ‘摸索着前进’ (*mosuo zhe qianjin*), literally meaning ‘to feel the way and proceed’, is a term that describes a situation where a new policy is put into practice and people need to discover the unknown way ahead due to the lack of models to follow. 摸索着前进 originally was used to describe the situation of the newly established People’s Republic of China when the Communist Party of China was leading our nation to rebuild our country under a socialist system. As no country had built socialism right after feudalism or semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism, China had almost no model to follow and scarce lessons to learn, but tried hard to blaze its own trail. Thus, this Chinese phrase has connotations of a cultural reference specific to a time period which can hardly be retained in English translations. The subtitler has chosen to overtly reveal that Zhao is ‘still new to stealing’. If the English subtitle is ‘feel my way’, Zhao and Chen seem to be simply walking in the darkness. Therefore, again the subtitler turns to *explicitation* to explicitly show English-speaking audiences Zhao’s inexperience in this illegal ‘undertaking’.

Weak subtitles

In ‘Dubbing Dark Humour: A Case Study in Audiovisual Translation’, Bucaria (2008) introduces her categorisations of verbal dark humour: purely-linguistic, culture-specific, linguistic and culture-specific and non-specifically verbally expressed humour (p. 222). ‘The category of ‘verbal dark humour’ comprises cases in which humour is mainly expressed through the verbal channel’ (Bucaria, 2008, p. 222).

Examples of purely linguistic dark humour are found when the humorous lines are based on linguistic devices such as wordplay, alliteration, homophony, and paronymy. [...] Culture-specific dark humour includes lines and jokes characterised by more or less explicit allusions to culture-specific SL elements, such as institutions, famous characters, food, personalities, etc., used for humorous effect. (Bucaria, 2008, p. 223)

Purely linguistic and culture-specific humour can overlap in particular situations and thus linguistic and culture-specific humour exists. The following part refers to examples of linguistic or culture-specific humorous English subtitles from Zhang’s *Blood Simple* that have been evidently weakened.

Zhao makes such a remark to Chen after the boss’ wife buys a gun from a Persian businessman:

Table 4

00: 05: 40 – 00: 05: 42

SL	你说这老板娘 寻过死 还上过吊 今天差点还买炮
PS	<i>Ni shuo zhe laobanniang, xun guo si, hai shang guo diao, jintian chadian hai mai pao</i>
TL	The boss’ wife has always been a piece of work. And today she bought a gun.

Literally, the subtitle could be ‘the boss’ wife has attempted to kill herself, to hang herself. Today she nearly bought a cannon.’ The verbally expressed dark humour about suicide and death is apparently lost in the English subtitle. Nida and Taber (1969) define *communication load* to describe ‘the degree of difficulty of a message’, which is ‘the ratio between the number of units of information and the number of formal units (i.e. words)’ (p. 198). Communication load refers not only to semantic but also to formal elements, which implies that optimally the target language text should be able to continue the form of the original language text, which enhances the difficulty in the case of subtitling. On the one hand in this subtitle, informational elements are the boss’ wife’s attempts to kill herself, and she almost buys the cannon. This is roughly similar to the English subtitle – she has been a piece of work and bought a gun. However, the Chinese line creates a humorous effect due to the rhyme between ‘吊’(diao) (to hang oneself) and ‘炮’(pao) (cannon) which is a significant formal humorous factor. Unfortunately, the English subtitle only retains the semantic information but not the formal element. According to Nida and Taber (1969), *dynamic equivalence* characterises a translation in which ‘the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors’ (p. 200). Regarding this subtitle, if the formal and humorous effect is lost, the English subtitle is utterly against *dynamic equivalence*, as receptor language audiences will probably not laugh by reading the English version. Moreover, *gist translation* may be able to illustrate this subtitling. As Hervey and Higgins (1992) depict, *gist translation* is a translation that condenses information in the source text and is a ‘synopsis’ of the original (p. 250). The English subtitle deletes the fact that she has been attempting to hang herself and alters it into ‘a piece of work’.

Li is frightened by the thought of people gossiping about his affair with the boss’ wife which will impose a heavy pressure on them and negatively affect their reputation, but she does not seem to care:

Table 5

00: 13: 13

SL	走自己的路 让他们吐去吧
PS	<i>Zou ziji de lu, rang tamen tu qu ba</i>
TL	It's our life. Let others talk.

This sentence, originally translated from Alighieri Dante’s ‘*Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*’, or ‘Follow your own road/course, and let the people talk’ in English, is frequently but funnily quoted by Chinese in daily life as ‘走自己的路，让别人说去吧’, to emphasise that ‘I will do whatever I want and ignore other people’s comment’. In this subtitle, the Chinese version of this renowned saying is literally adapted into ‘Follow your own road/course, and let the people spit.’ Occasionally, ‘gossip’ is expressed by the colloquial phrase that means ‘to spit’ in Chinese, which is the case of this subtitle. The reason why the translator has not used the more commonly used translation but opted *gist translation* may be that either she was not aware of Dante as the initiator or that she explicates the meaning since Dante’s saying will not cause foreign audiences to laugh anyway.

The boss Wang discovers his wife’s affair and violently abuses her. She resents that Li only stands by and says:

Table 6

00: 21: 17- 00: 21: 20

SL	你绝对是南坡第一窝囊废 正宗的南坡腕
PS	<i>Ni juehui shi nan po di yi wonangfei, zhengzong de nan po wan</i>
TL	You are such a wimp, the biggest I've ever seen.

‘窝囊废’ (*wonangfei*) is a wimp and ‘南坡第一窝囊废’ (*nan po di yi wonangfei*) is the biggest wimp in South Slope (a made-up place name). It is condensed into ‘南坡腕’ (*nan po wan*), which is an interlingual homophone of ‘number one’, as ‘腕’ (*wan*) bears a similar pronunciation to ‘one’. That explains why the English subtitle is ‘the biggest I’ve ever seen’. In fact, the film presumably targets young Chinese audiences to whom popular culture is an important and familiar part of life and most of them learn English and understand the phrase ‘number one’ and will laugh at the unexpected linguistic cue. Delabastita (1996) investigates wordplay that involves two (or more) linguistic structures with similar forms and slightly different meanings (p. 128). Homophones, those with different writings but identical pronunciation, are one of the most common types of wordplay (Delabastita, 1996). Although ‘南坡腕’ (*nan po wan*) and ‘number one’ are not strictly homophones, they bear resemblance in pronunciation interlingually and this phenomenon creates a humoristic effect. Li is scared by his boss Wang and refuses to return to the shop with the boss’ wife, and she is extremely disappointed and heart-broken:

Table 7

00: 21: 50

SL	哪知道是个假肢 还是个次品
PS	<i>Na zhidao shi ge jiazhi, hai shi ge cipin</i>
TL	But I was wrong about you.

In the preceding translation, the boss’ wife says ‘I was wrong about you,’ but in the original Chinese, she makes reference to his having ‘fake shoulders’. She thinks she has found a reliable man, one with strong shoulders to lean against, as is often said in Chinese. Nonetheless, what she finds is a wimp, an ‘artificial limb’ or fake shoulders, to quote from the original. Not only is he an ‘artificial limb’, the artificial limb has ‘defects’, as is manifested by ‘次品’ (*cipin*). The ‘prop’ in the culture-related situation – an artificial limb, is entirely omitted and only the fact is retained that he is not a strong man that she can trust. The metaphor between an artificial limb and a coward is also novel and ambiguous for Chinese audiences, so the ambiguity might not need to be omitted in the translation.

The helper Zhao drags the other helper Chen to steal money from their boss’ safe and Chen reluctantly says:

Table 8

00: 35: 20 – 00: 35: 22

SL	什么人跟你这么走下去 那不就犯罪深渊吗?
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PS	<i>Shenme ren gen ni zheme zou xia qu, na bu jiu shi fazui shenyuan ma?</i>
TL	If I dare follow you, that would make me a criminal.

This is a translation through explicitation. A literal translation of the original is ‘who dares to follow you could ever escape the abyss of crime?’ The original rhetorical question has a confirmed answer: one will undoubtedly fall into the abyss of crime and receive harsh punishment if insisting on illegal adventure. However, ‘abyss of crime’, another culture-based metaphor, is a modern Chinese usage for the outcome of continual wrongdoings and life in jail, while the setting of this film is ancient China. Humour is found in such use of a contemporary idiom in the ancient setting. Attardo’s (2002) development of *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (GTVH) identifies *Situation* as an event or a situation where a joke occurs. The English subtitle simplifies the ‘logical inconsistency’ and hides the humour.

Omitted scenes

In the English version, about ten major humorous conversations are omitted. One of the most outstanding conversations is a debate between Zhao and Chen over whether or not to open Wang’s safe to take their long-awaited salary while he is away, the debate is as follows:

Chen: 让人知道不被人笑掉大牙？

Zhao: 笑掉就笑掉呗 我管它那个呢？

Chen: 有的人那大牙呀 鬼斧神工的 那也笑不掉 就得被撬掉

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你的钱放在桌子上 你走过去把它拿起来 放在自己兜子里 这能算偷吗？ 请回答

Chen: 赵六请注意 你是在偷换概念 钱放在钱柜里 而且是放在带有密码锁的别人的钱柜里 和放在桌子上意义是完全不同的 回答完毕

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你要认识到问题的主体 主体是什么 钱 你得知道钱的主人是 谁 不是它在哪里 不管它在哪里 它都要回到主人身边 这叫什么 物归原主 落叶归根 回答完毕

Chen: 赵六请注意 我认为你这种是自私 完全没有社会感的行为 严重点说 你是缺乏基本道德人格的行为 你忘记钱所在的环境 请问你 东西落在别人家 你会在他家没有人的情况下 撬门砸锁把东西取出来吗？ 回答完毕

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你忽略了或者故意含糊了这个问题的另一个关键因素 是我的东西落在别人家了 我的确不应该在人家不知情的情况下 把我的东西拿回来 但我多次提出要回我的东西 他不给我 态度很生硬 有时还挺横 我该怎么办 只能智取 也就这么跟你说吧 我的钱被绑架了 谈判以后没有结果 我只能采取强制性的手段进行解救 回答完毕

Chen: 赵六请注意 我认为你这种比喻依然是不恰当的 甚至是言过其实的 人质被绑架了 面临生命危险 有可能被撕票 但钱是不会的 你是在粉饰你的恶劣行径 回答完毕

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你可以藐视我的行为 但是你能想出更好的办法解救我的工钱吗？ 回答

Chen: 我不回答 此处可以插播广告 不要回来 马上离开

Zhao: 我不离开

This debate involves Chinese law and logical thinking of materialist philosophy, like antagonistic contradiction and dialectical materialism, which are relatively obscure to Western viewers. If subtitled, the unfamiliar elements will need evident explanation and wordy notes may be needed; yet, particular details are subject to omission because of temporal-spatial constraints. If the meaning conveyed by a particular word or expression is not significant enough to the development of a text to justify sidetracking the receptor with lengthy explications, translators can and often do simply omit translating the items in question (Baker, 1992, p.40). Indeed, the debate is not vital enough for the plot, as the two people concerned approach the safe later. The fact is also that none of the stars in the current film are of international appeal, and thus omitting or editing out the whole scene is justified by the case that story development is not hindered. Nonetheless, the debate is crucially linked to the humour creation of the film and performers are known in the Chinese entertainment industries for their verbal dexterity. Also, the subtitler may subjectively reckon that editing out the scene reduces the target audiences' reading pressure, rather than taking account of sacrificing a considerable amount of the film's humour. One way to tackle subtitling in this debate is to simplify the information for the sake of English speakers and omit new knowledge that does not affect the overall interpretation. Despite the risk that target viewers may still feel puzzled, subtitling the scene reveals more fidelity and respect to the effort of creating the original humour.

Below is one of the arguments Chen makes in this debate and is literally translated into English by myself:

Table 9

SL	<p>赵六请注意 我认为你这种是自私 完全没有社会感的行为</p> <p>严重点儿说 你是缺乏基本道德人格的行为 你忘记钱所在的环境</p> <p>请问你 东西落在别人家 你会在他家没有人的情况下 撬门砸锁把东西取出来吗?</p> <p>回答完毕</p>
PS	<p><i>Zhao liu qing zhuyi, wo renwei ni zhe zhong shi zisi, wanquan meiyou shehuigan de xingwei</i></p> <p><i>Yanzhong dian'er shuo, ni shi quefa jiben daode rengen de xingwei, ni wangji qian suo zai de huanjing</i></p> <p><i>Qingwen ni, dongxi la zai bierenjia, ni hui zai ta jia meiyou ren de qingkuang xia, qiaomen zasuo ba dongxi qu chulai ma?</i></p>
TL	<p>Look Zhao. I believe you're very selfish with no sense of society.</p> <p>You lack basic morality and ignore where the money is.</p> <p>If you leave something at others' home, will you break in to take it when they're away?</p>

This argument refers to ‘社会感’ (*shehuigan*), meaning *sense of society*, in relation to China’s promoting altruism and responsibility towards society throughout history. Stealing is evidently a selfish behaviour, to say the least. ‘基本道德人格’ (*jiben daode renge*) is literally *basic moral personality* and refers to the most basic moral standards that people have to meet. These are cultural references and also Chinese moral teaching idioms that frequently occur to Chinese viewers, yet are possibly not often mentioned in other countries. Again, a *sense of society* and *basic moral personality* are modern expressions, and when used in this ancient background, they generate an amusing effect.

Another hilarious scene omitted in the English version is when the chief police officer enters the noodle shop to investigate about the cannon. Four criminals have been arrested and shoved into the shop and Li, the lover of the boss’ wife is ordered by the chief to tell the names of the objects tied on one of the criminals’ shackle. The objects on the shackle are a significant wordplay, which are ‘砖’ (*zhuan*, a brick), ‘镐’ (*gao*, a pickaxe) and ‘破鞋’ (*poxie*, a worn shoe). The ideograms placed together, ‘砖镐破鞋’ (*zhuan gao poxie*), has the same pronunciation as ‘专搞破鞋’ (*zhuan gao poxie*) which means ‘always adulterous’. This scene, as far as I can observe, is omitted partly due to the low-brow amusing situation, as their crime is ‘adultery’ and will receive harsh punishment for it. The reason is as the chief says, ‘our work has been focused on catching infidelity.’ Their exaggerated attention to infidelity is humorous for Chinese viewers, whereas Western audiences may feel bewildered by overreacting to an immoral behaviour. The absence of such a linguistic and culture-related wordplay in English is called a ‘void’. A ‘void’ is defined by Dagut (1978) as ‘the non-existence in one language of a one-word equivalent for a designatory term found in another’ (as cited in Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997, p. 196). What have also disappeared in the English version are the brutal ancient Chinese punishments for the criminals.

Non-verbal humour study

Information does not completely depend on words to be perceived; likewise, humour can be generated without language. Verbal and non-verbal humour both contribute to the amusing effect of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009). Instead of involving humorous dialogues or monologues, non-verbal humour does not take advantage of language, but rather *mise-en-scene*, which ‘signifies the director’s control over what appears in the film frame’ (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 176). Aspects of *mise-en-scene* include setting, costume, lighting and film figures’ behaviours (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p. 176).

As *mise-en-scene* can exceed normal conceptions of realism (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p.177), a director is enabled to portray non-verbal humour through ‘unrealistic’ *mise-en-scene*. Costumes and makeup in this film are intentionally designed to be ‘abnormal’, as is observed in an interview of Mao Mao who plays the role of the noodle shop helper Chen (“The costume design and makeup of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop*,” 2009). The colour of all the costumes is flamboyant, either in the boss’ wife’s emerald gown or Li’s bright pink top and trousers. The strong clash between the colours creates a colourful impression on screen. More importantly, the gaudy colours display the provincial and folk features of the characters, which is consistent with other folk feature presentations in the film, including a dramatized noodle making process. For instance, this film along with costume style highlights a folk art in China – song-and-dance duet. The duet originated from northeast China, dating back to 5,000 years ago, and is now a nationwide renowned form of art (Yuan & Li, 2011, p. 62). It involves an actor and an actress in very bright outfits. The actress plays the role of ‘旦’ (*dan*), a lady, and the actor plays ‘丑’ (*chou*), a clown or the funny part. While the lady’s costume is gaudily pretty, the clown’s outfit design appears exuberant but amusing (Yuan & Li, 2011, p. 63). Male

characters in this film can all be categorised as ‘clowns’ and thus are dressed ‘bizarrely-looking’. Moreover, Zhao’s enormous front teeth are an aspect of the character’s makeup, sardonically mocked by the chief police officer as a sign of premature aging, since people count livestock’s teeth to tell their age; yet this moment is omitted in the English version.

‘Since the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘slapstick’ has been our name for popular, rather than literary, low physical comedy (Dale, 2000, p. 1).’ Editing, gestures and facial expressions of the actors all can convey visual jokes, and common suspense set-up enable viewers to interpret more than the characters at times (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p. 227). *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) is a low physical comedy, either for the bright-coloured and ‘not-very-good taste’ outfits or narratively through the process of catching infidelity as the central task of the police. Furthermore, slapstick elements make crucial contribution to non-verbal humour. With regard to this film, Zhao the helper might have the most slapstick acting, for example, in the sequence where he drags his love interest Chen to trespass into Wang’s backyard in order to take their salary that has not been paid for long. While entering Wang’s room, the couple are tremendously scared, fearing that Wang may by chance be already back from his trip. To test if he has returned or not, Zhao says greetings and pretends to chat to an invisible Wang, but no response is received. Chen, then, similarly attempts to notify Wang, and bursts out the most impressive and identifiable laugh, a laugh well known to Chinese audiences as an aspect of the actress’ brand. Extremely frightened, Zhao slips down and falls onto the ground, and reprimands her for repeating what he has just done. Unlike the previously discussed debate, this scene has not been removed in the English release, probably because the characters’ utterances are fairly simple to translate. What has created more apparent humour in such a scene is their slapstick acting, and the visual humour itself can be well perceived by foreign audiences even if dialogue lines are not comic. Another humorous acting scene involves the boss’ wife and all the helpers in the noodle shop where a Persian businessman attempts to sell the wife a cannon. Lifting the cloth on top, he unveils the ‘high-tech’ weapon to everyone. Surprisingly, a Persian beauty is sitting on it and as she descends, enthusiastic music is played and she begins an appealing belly dance. People in the noodle shop, possessed by the strong music, start moving along to the beat. The businessman, satisfied with his ‘magic’, waves to stop the music and the dancer withdraws from the film frame. The boss’ wife and others suddenly come back to reality and become very embarrassed for their inappropriate behaviour. This scene performs excellently at the service of non-verbal humour. Certain universality exists in gestures and mime, as is shown in the success of *Mr Bean* (1990-1995) (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p. 227).

Nonetheless, this scene is edited out in the English release of Momentum Pictures that this study has employed, the reason for which is predicted that the intrusive belly dance is not inextricably significant to the plot but would look absurd and low-brow to foreign audiences. It also possibly slows down the smooth pace of the film and interrupts the storyline.

Conclusion

This study concentrates on the humour in Zhang Yimou’s film *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) since humour is not one of the major features of Zhang’s films overall and it is thus distinct from his other films. More importantly, this film is adapted from a film as dark as *Blood Simple* (1984), with humour produced both verbally and non-verbally. Verbally speaking, humorous subtitles are frequently transferred into English with the aid of explicitation, aiming at rendering the meaning more explicit. That causes a loss of amusing implication and possibly renders the original humoristic intention mundane. For another thing, certain subtitles are unsatisfactory, either for the trouble of recreating an interlingual

homophone or for the utter disappearance of culture-based metaphors. Another disadvantage for English-speaking audiences is that omission has led to weakened humoristic effect several times, especially for scenes that keep Chinese viewers' mouths open with laugh. As far as I observe, omitting scenes is based on Chinese philosophical terminology uncommon in English-speaking countries. Also, wordplay omitted may be difficult to make sense in English, unless notes can be added which will impose extra reading and understanding pressure on viewers instead. Those culturally-bound phrases, what Leppihalme (1997) calls 'culture bumps', are more often than not baffling or impenetrable for receptor text readers (p. 197). Compared to verbal humour, non-verbal humour bears a certain degree of universality and mutuality between Chinese and global cultures. Visual humour, as a major type of non-verbal humour in this film in particular, well reaches English-speaking viewers via costume design and physical performance - two main aspects of *mise-en-scene*. Visual humour in the film is characterised by song-and-dance duet, a folk art that stemmed from northeast China but has gone popular nationwide. Slapstick performance is well integrated into and has enhanced the whole film's hilarious atmosphere. Therefore, the ending of non-verbal humour is more fortunate thanks to visual presentation. Still, this study is explanatory and has been on the basis of a limited sample of original and target language subtitles. There is still need for a better method of transferring humour into English without incurring unnecessary pressure on viewers.

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