The Colour Spectrum: Racial (Mis)representation as Identity Construction in HK Cinema from 1970s to the Present

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Abstract

According to some scholars’ view, in the city of Hong Kong, local Chinese often claim themselves as Hong Kongers and maintain its dominance to represent the general interest of society. For instance, “Hong Kong literature” designates literature written in the Chinese language only, and “Hong Kong cinema” refers restrictedly to local film productions either in mandarin or Cantonese. However, such hegemony is not comprehensive enough to represent the coming together of diverse groups, and it is unable to establish a basis of consent. The appearance of this thesis is more or less a response to such perpetual absence of the racial other in the realm of cinema—a crucial cultural agency in Hong Kong. A remapping of existence of racial minorities in Hong Kong cinema and an investigation of the onscreen representation of them in some renowned Hong Kong directors’ works will be attempted.

The research purposes are mainly to arouse awareness of racial equality; to enable a clearer Hong Kong identity; and to contribute to the research of Hong Kong film industry; with a focus on the racial representation from the 1970s to the present.

The first chapter explores the relationship between modernity and racism in Ann Hui’s three films i.e. Boat People, Song of the Exile, Ordinary Heroes. The three films which I have chosen in a way, manifest Ann Hui’s subliminal tendency of bearing modernity’s Eurocentric mentality; but her films also demonstrate that the dissolution of a fixed ethnic boundary can as well be emancipatory and peace-calling.
In the second chapter, I examine the relationship between racism and nationalism in Tsui Hark’s blockbusters *Once Upon a Time in China I* (Huang Fei Hong, dir. Tsui Hark, 1991) and its sequel *Once Upon a Time in China II* (Huang Fei Hong II Nan er dang zi qiang, dir. Tsui Hark, 1992). Action movies are inclined to be associated with the spread of nationalistic sentiments, yet, a closer look on the two chosen works of Tsui reveals the fact that the construction of Hong Kong identity is very much reliant on a “counterfeited nationalism” i.e. partial identification with both the Chinese and Western sovereignty.

In the final chapter, films from two directors with divergent filmic styles are put together for meaningful comparison. The two films are Wong Kar-wai’s *Chungking Express* and Fruit Chan’s *Little Cheung*. While Wong is famous for his grandiose and dreamy directorial signature, Chan’s works embody the spirit of raw documentary outlook. The juxtaposition of the two films aims to achieve a complementary purpose since they show discrepancy in regard of “reality” conveyance. It is found that in both films, the casting of the ethnics serves to create a multicultural ambience for Hong Kong before and after the handover. This multicultural subjectivity is to demarcate the city from a full identification with the Mainland one.

Through the above analysis, this thesis aims at generating some alternative perspectives in understanding the relationship between racial minorities and the Hong Kong identity as reflected in some of the city’s prominent film works.
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