

1st KCL – HKU Film Research Video Conference
3 May 2013
King's Venue: K-1.56
Or live streaming at:
UK Time: 09:00 – 12:45 (approximately)
HK Time: 16:00-19:45

King's College London and the University of Hong Kong are strategic partners, and last year a Joint PhD Programme was established between the Film Studies Department at King's and the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. This video conference provides a space for us to find out a bit more about each other's research profiles and the sort of projects PhD students and faculty are undertaking at the moment.

Programme

09:00 Introduction to the event by Professors Chris Berry (KCL) and Gina Marchetti (HKU)
09:05 Introduction to research at HKU by Professor Gina Marchetti
09:12 Introduction to research at KCL by Dr. Sarah Cooper

Section 1: Presentations by Research Students

09:20 Mary Ying-wa Lo (KCL)

“Images of *Ji* or the Prostitute in the Post-Handover Hong Kong Cinema”

My research project examines the representations of prostitutes across three different genres, namely, comedy, social problem film and the gangster genre in the post-handover Hong Kong cinema. Tracing and theorizing the development of the production cycles of prostitute films, I will be exploring how and why the complex depictions of Hong Kong-mainland China relationship are often situated within the theme of prostitution in films. Drawing upon critical discourses on prostitutes/prostitution and the body in Film Studies and scholarships on Cycle Studies, the project aims to contextualize and provide insights on the complex interrelationships between the conceptions of *ji* (or the prostitute), *funü* (or women), femininity and the ever-metamorphosing modern Chinese identity mediated through the screen images of prostitutes.

09:35 Kate Waller (HKU)

Filmmakers between New York and Hong Kong: Evans Chan and the Filmic Mapping of Doubled Traumas (Film focus: *Bauhinia* and *The Map of Sex and Love*)

As an extension of my work on the immigrant filmic apartment space in Hong Kong and New York, this paper investigates Evans Chan's filmmaking between the two cities. Gina Marchetti has linked Chan's post-Tian'anmen films, *To Liv(e)* (1990) and *Crossings* (1996), in “Transnational Cinema and Hybrid Identities: *To Liv(e)* and *Crossings*”, tying transitory space to the effects of this trauma on individuals. I consider Chan's post-1997 Handover and post-9/11 Terrorist Attacks films: *The Map of Sex and Love* (2001) and *Bauhinia* (2002). Chan's films tie these cities together in mourning, globalization, and migration through the twinning of the traumas. He creates a cognitive mapping of the experience of collective trauma through topographically and psychologically linking New York and Hong Kong. The paper offers the view that the space of the urban apartment not only is permeated by

tragedy and trauma that move toward isolation but also provides a space where a multiplicity of framing and intertexts can lead to healing and assertion of identity as part of a family or community.

09:50 Eva Cheuk-Yin Li (KCL)

“Queer Stardom and Zhongxing Sensibility in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Audience Reception and Everyday Practices”

This project is an audience studies project that explores the emerging queer feeling in Chinese societies through the fans of the emerging zhongxing stardom. I propose the term ‘zhongxing sensibility’. The contextualised usage of zhongxing nowadays implies a specific set of embodiments, gender performativity and personal qualities. My working hypothesis is that zhongxing sensibility is an emerging structure of queer feeling that captures the affective texture of queer’s lives in Chinese societies in the last decade. My methodology will be media ethnography, e.g. reading diary and in-depth interviews.

10:05 Jason Coe (HKU)

Competing Narratives: Choosing the Tiger in Ang Lee's Life of Pi

No director embraces the idea of "world cinema" quite like Ang Lee. His latest film, *Life of Pi*, grossed over \$600 million at the box office, with \$482 million coming from theaters outside North America. The film grossed more in mainland China than the United States and was Hollywood's highest earning release in India for 2012. *Life of Pi*'s global resonance, international production team, and cosmopolitan director are mainstream Hollywood's answer to the demands of a "world cinema" marketplace. Lee himself is the most successful Asian director in terms of box office receipts and Oscar statuettes. Ignoring these notable facts, reviewers often focus upon the film's spiritual themes and impressive visual effects, but Lee's interpretation is also topical to our international political climate. Despite its theological aspirations, I argue that the global appeal of *Life of Pi* hinges upon its representation of migration and survival. Within the context of a changing world whose migrant population (both internal and external) grows substantially each year, this paper reads the film as a present-day postcolonial allegory tied into the mythos of immigrant success.

[This presentation is adapted from a previously published article in *Hyphen* titled "Competing Narratives: Choosing the Tiger in *Life of Pi*." (*Competing Narratives: Choosing the Tiger in Life of Pi*) The author thanks the editorial board for their permission.]

10:20 Tatu Laukkanen (HKU)

Global Goondas: Indian Gangster Film and the Politics of Change

My research is a comparative study of contemporary films from the BRIC countries. Specifically I look at the politics of change that are represented in their cinemas, relating them to the BRIC's emerging in the "family of nations" of the "First World". Right now I am looking at gangster films, a transnational and social genre that is

popular in all of these countries. I will present my research project and then give a short talk of Indian gangster films and how India's recent politico-economic transformation such as the rise of identity politics and the middle class is represented in them. I will also draw links between crime films in India and the other BRICs.

10:35 María Mercedes Vázquez (HKU)

Fernando Pérez et al. A World Cinema of Questions.

A major feature of Cuban filmmaker Fernando Pérez (Havana Suite, Madagascar), is his capacity to construct a “decentred image that contests the norm that dominates the public sphere” (Michael Chanan) by creating what I would like to coin “a cinema of questions” in contrast to a mainstream “cinema of answers”. Beyond the film text, his sometimes controversial decisions also question the status quo. The questions raised by his cinema and some of his attitudes seem to be part of a vision of the world that stands in stark contrast to the majority and connect him to other major directors in distant latitudes. They are both aesthetic and ideological. In this paper, I will explain how they are presented in his films and public interventions.

BREAK

11:00 Sonia Wong (Research Assistant, HKU)

Pornography and lesbian sexual fantasies: The vacuum of representation and the room for autonomy

My research aims to explore the relationship between young Hong Kong local lesbians and the pornographic landscape in which they are brought up – how they navigate and negotiate their own sexual identity and expression in this society which is still very much dominated by conservative and patriarchal discourse on gender and sexuality, while in the public/ media discourse, female sexuality is either stereotypical, stigmatized, or not represented at all. I argue that the absence of “by lesbian for lesbian” pornographic materials in the city makes it almost inevitable for young lesbians to turn to consuming pornographic materials made for majorly heterosexual male audience, and I would like to investigate what and how are these lesbians looking for from such materials, and what subversive/ alternative reading of these materials are possible that would shed light not only on the under-represented sexualities among local lesbians, but also challenges the very notion of “pornography” - Are consumable erotic materials necessary/possible?

Section 2: Presentations by Faculty

11:15 Dr. Tom Brown

"Classical' film rhetoric and Abraham Lincoln as symbol"

My principal research interest is rhetoric in classical film narration and the analysis of formal elements not normally considered as a part of film rhetoric - for example, film spectacle and direct address. I am strongly invested in exploring the productive interrelationship between the practices of close "textual" analysis and of film history

and a related research interest is in the representation of history on film (i.e. film as historiography).

11:30 Dr. Winnie Yee (HKU)

Beyond Ruins and Silence: Topographical Writing of Nature and Urban in Two Chinese Documentaries

Abstract:

Documentary becomes increasingly an effective medium in airing concerns regarding reckless development or the depletion of rural communities in China. This paper attempts to shed some light on the impact of modernization on nature, urban landscape, and the poetics of everyday life by comparing two documentaries by Chinese filmmakers. They are Wang Bing's *West of the Tracks* (Tiexi qu, 2000) and Yu Jian's *Jade Green Station* (Bise chezhan, 2003). Works of Wang and Yu reflect a growing awareness of the combined social and economic consequences of China's socialist experience. *West of the Track* portrays the ruining of one of the China's longest-standing manufacturing centers and the withering of life under the unknown forces of global modernity. As a poet, Yu's work articulates the series of national 'events' that happened in the historical time-space of the small town Bise, namely the prosperity brought to the town by the French engineered rail connection in the first half of the 20th century and the disruptions wrought by the political campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, through a poetic lens. The discussion also highlights the way documentaries question the rationality beneath the modern imagination of the capitalist cities by re-presenting the ghostly space of the northeast China and the silence in/of Bise.

11:45 Dr. Mirana Szeto (HKU)

HONG KONG SAR NEW WAVE CINEMA IN FACE OF NEOLIBERALISATION AND MAINLANDISATION

Hong Kong film dominated Sinophone cinemas until the mid-1990s, when conditions protecting it from regional competition were gradually eroded and Chinese and other Asian cinemas began to challenge its prominence. Hong Kong cinema also needs to adjust to the China market imperative, global industry restructuring and the resulting neoliberal policy reactions from the Chinese and Hong Kong governments. The recent seeming revival of Hong Kong film is often attributed to the rise of Hong Kong-China co-productions, but these developments have put the ontology and sustainability of Hong Kong cinema in question. In order to qualify for market privileges of Hong Kong-China co-production, films need to tailor cultural content to Chinese censorship parameters, but such "mainlandized" co-productions find the more liberal sinophone communities of Hong Kong and South-east Asia hard to penetrate. It is thus pertinent to evaluate (1) if Hong Kong-China co-productions tend to address the relation of Hong Kong to China in more vertical, national and Sinocentric manners, (2) if intra-local and inter-local quotidian sensitivities can continue to be attentively portrayed in Hong Kong films, and (3) if connections with local, Asian and critical audiences need to be given up to make a decent China market viable.

12:00 Dr. Victor Ho-Luk Fan (KCL)

“Extraterritoriality: Rethinking Post-colonial Hong Kong Cinema”

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in theorizing Hong Kong cinema as a “postcolonial” discourse. But in what sense can Hong Kong cinema today be considered *postcolonial*? In fact, are terms such as “colonial” and “postcolonial” adequate in historicizing and theorizing Hong Kong cinema’s sociopolitical and economic liminality? In my presentation, I argue that contemporary Hong Kong cinema is best understood as a public sphere where spectators not only from Hong Kong, but also from other major Chinese cities renegotiate their shared affectivity. I do so by working through a term “extraterritoriality,” a colonial legacy informed the liminal subjectivity of the Hong Kong spectators during the colonial era, and continues to shape the way spectators in the major Chinese cities configure their relationships with the larger national and global imaginaries.

12:15 Dr. Jinhee Choi (KCL)

“The Ethics of Contemplation: Kim Ki-duk’s *Arirang*”

Arirang (dir. Kim Ki-duk, 2011) is a documentary directed and performed by South Korean provocateur Kim, recording his hiatus as he withdraws himself from the industry and his overall community in order to lead a solitary life. The film is also a contemplation of his previous filmmaking, exploring such issues as the physical danger that an actress faced during the shooting of *Dream* (2008) and the moral implications of the extremes manifest in his oeuvre. Martha Nussbaum once noted that contemplation is an ethical goal. However, for Nussbaum, ethical contemplation is not just to achieve “individual clarification and self-understanding” but to “move toward communal attunement.” In this essay, I examine the role of contemplation in Kim’s *Arirang* and consider to what extent it resuscitates Kim’s own desires toward filmmaking, but Kim is unable to embrace vulnerability inherent in the relationship between the self and the other.

12:30 Dr. Aaron Magnan-Park (HKU)

TBA

12:45 Final Remarks by Professors Marchetti & Berry

Also participating from Hong Kong: Esther Cheung, Giorgi Biancorosso, and Derek Lam.