The Film Scene: Cinema, the Arts, and Social Change

The Film Scene: Cinema, the Arts, and Social Change, University of Hong Kong, 21 – 22 April 2006

A report by Jing Yang, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

'The Film Scene: Cinema, the Arts, and Social Change' symposium was held on 21-22 April 2006 on the main campus of the University of Hong Kong, and was sponsored by the Film Culture Project of the Department of Comparative Literature, the Department of Music, and the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). The interdisciplinary, two-day conference brought together scholars from Hong Kong and abroad to explore the connections between the cinema and the other arts within the context of social change. The symposium traced the growing relevance and internationalization of Hong Kong cinema and discussed the increasing interest from other parts of the world in the critical and scholarly work done on cinema, as well as providing a meeting ground for artists working in various forms on the cutting edge of aesthetic exploration and social change.

Day One

The symposium was scheduled into eight parallel sessions on the first day: 'The Scene as Site: Space, Place and the Film Scene' (9:00am-11:00am) chaired by Jinhee Choi from Carleton University, Canada; 'The Queer Scene' (11:15am-1:15pm) chaired by Petula S.Y. Ho from HKU; 'King Hu's Movies' (11:15am-1:15pm) chaired by Thomas Luk from Chinese University of Hong Kong; 'History Seen: The Past on the Screen' (2:45pm-3:45pm) chaired by Peter Cunich from the History Department of HKU; 'Micro-Narratives' (2:45pm-3:45pm) presented by Linda Chiu-han Lai from City University of Hong Kong; 'The Asian Scene: National / Transnational' (3:45pm-5:15pm) chaired by JoAnn Prochetti from Kyorin University in Tokyo and 'Bodies Seen and Unseen -- Religion, Sex and Disease' (3:45pm-5:15pm) chaired by Eva Man from Hong Kong Baptist University.

The 'Women and Activism' session (5:15pm-7:30pm) screened a documentary film *Her Anti-WTO* and invited the filmmaker Kong King Chu from Hong Kong to give a talk. The session on the works of veteran Hong Kong martial arts film director King Hu was particularly interesting for the diversified approaches adopted by the researchers. For instance, Chung Ling and Cheuk Pak Tong from Hong Kong Baptist University talked about 'Zen Allusions and Buddhist Ideas in King Hu's Raining in the Mountain' and 'The Temporal and Space Dimensions of King Hu's Film' respectively; Law Kar from Hong Kong Film Archive traced the inspirations of Chinese oral literature and Beijing Opera on King Hu's films, Natalia Chan studied the female representation in King Hu movies and Gina Marchetti discussed his films with a vision to Cold War consciousness.

The first day of the conference concluded with an evening session of 'The Seen, the Unseen, the Obscene: From Spectacle to Information', given by Professor Ackbar Abbas from HKU. The keynote address juxtaposed five films by directors of Chinese origins—Hong Kong director Fruit Chan's *Durian Durian* (2000), Wong Kar-Wai's *2046* (2004), Alan Mak and Andrew Lau's *Infernal Affairs* (2002), Chinese director Zhang Yuan's *Crazy English* (1999), and Chinese-American director Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005).

Professor Abbas compared and contrasted the understanding of cinema and the cinematic and posed the question: What happened to social and personal experience when 'space' and 'affect' can no longer be kept separate? He proposed that the awkward historical questions of cultural identity and colonialism get lost in a post-historical city like Hong Kong which was submerged in global language. Prof. Leo Ou-fan Lee from the Chinese University of Hong Kong responded that in spite of the fusion and confusion of generic cities at global scale, each city still retained some 'faked' 'local' features that are recognizable signifiers in the global dynamics of culture and economy.

Day Two

The symposium's second day covered an equally wide range of interests: 'The Arts Scene -- Music, Adaptations, Remakes, Citations' (9:00am-11:00am) chaired by Chan Hing-yan from the Music Department of HKU; 'The Asian Cinema Scene' (9:00am-11:00am) chaired by Suzie Young from York University in Canada; 'The Horror Scene, Myth, and the Supernatural' (11:15am-1:30pm) chaired by Paul Clark from the University of Auckland; 'Hong Kong Seen on the World Scene' (11:15am-1:15pm) chaired by Angelina Yee from Hong Kong University of Science and Technology; 'The Arts Scene -- In and Out of the Gallery' (2:45pm-4:45pm) chaired by Carolyn Muir from the Department of Fine Arts of HKU; 'The Fighting Scene' (2:45pm-4:45pm) chaired by Kam Louie from Faculty of the Arts, HKU; 'Music and Accented Cinema' (5:00pm-7:00pm) chaired by Julia Kuehn from the English Department of HKU and 'Alternative Scenes' (5:00pm-7:00pm) chaired by Ho Chi-Kwan from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. These panels were followed by an evening session of cutting-edge film experimenters entitled 'Sex Environments Online and Network Imaginaries'.

The session of 'Hong Kong Seen on the World Scene' addressed the issue of how the Hong Kong identity got constructed / de-constructed, located / dislocated in a flexible specialization through film studies. Chan Ka-ming from the University of Melbourne reviewed the transnational co-production of Hong Kong Cinema; Wendy Gan from the English Department of HKU studied the weather representation in Hong Kong films and explored its significance in exploring the western perception of Hong Kong and Hong Kong's relation to Mainland China.

Following the successful 'Hong Kong / Hollywood at the Borders: Alternative Perspectives, Alternative Cinemas' symposium held by HKU in April 2004, this event encouraged new perspectives in the connection between the cinema and the other arts within the context of social change and created research synergies through inter-institutional and international collaboration.

Third Annual MeCCSA Postgraduate Conference

Third Annual MeCCSA Postgraduate Conference, University of Ulster, 22 – 23 June 2006

A report by Bernhard Gross, Cardiff University, UK

The Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster is an isolated place. Without local knowledge and possibly the help of a taxi ride it is difficult to get away. This made it an ideal setting for the third annual MeCCSA Postgraduate Conference on the 22nd and 23rd of June 2006. The point of a conference like this is to get people together. The emphasis is less on exchanging academic expertise and more on sharing the experience of being a postgraduate student. The locale did keep the group of more than 60 delegates together and talking about teaching, bursaries and life as a postgraduate student after the formal sessions of the day had concluded.

Of course there was also discussion about the papers presented during the panel sessions. For many delegates this conference was the first time they had had the opportunity to reach an audience beyond their own department. Mostly they focused on research related to their MA dissertations or PhD theses. With the broad range of possibilities coming together under the MeCCSA heading, the panel topics differed widely. This provided the delegates with an opportunity to look beyond the confines of their own or their department's usual focus -- again, something I consider a strength for this type of conference.

During each day, a total of up to four panels of ninety minutes ran concurrently. As far as possible the organizers combined related topics into one panel. I tried to make the most of this by attending the panels closer to my own research interest -- media discourses around Europe -- as well as some that were not. To provide just a few examples: a presentation by Niamh O'Sullivan from the University of Ulster on the portrayal of refugees in photojournalism was of direct interest to me; the role of Shakespeare in Secondary Education developed in a paper by Sarah Martindale from the University of Aberystwyth was less so, but gave me a interesting perspective on the various movie adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*; and Bas van Heur from Goldsmiths College synthesized a fascinating approach of cultural theory and geography to map the electronic music industry in Europe in a paper on 'Electronic Music, Aesthetics and the Political Economy of the Post Industrial City'.

The downside of such a wide variety of topics and theoretical approaches is often the lack of engagement by the audience in the question and answer section of the panel. Some chairs tried to generate a discussion, but more often than not failed to get it going. Without a more in-depth understanding, many delegates apparently did not feel in a position to participate. However, as mentioned above, the exchange of academic ideas was only one of the several aims of this conference.

Besides making contacts and getting a better feel for the wider research field, one key purpose of the conference was to help postgraduate students gain an understanding of the

academic job market. Three presentations during the plenary sessions focused on this topic. They offered good advice on dealing with the challenges new PhDs are likely to face when they want to make the transition from student to academic professional.

Like most professions today academia is a competitive field. The completion of a PhD rarely suffices in itself to get a job. Potential university employers often require some sort of a track record, even from newly minted Drs, and proof that they are suitable for the demands of results-oriented research or teaching. This was the message conveyed by the first day's afternoon plenary session: 'The PhD and After'. In the two papers devoted to this topic, Stephen Cushion and Dr Jennifer Kidd shared their own experiences with the audience.

Stephen Cushion started this transition essentially from day one of his PhD at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University (JOMEC). Throughout his PhD he took every opportunity to be involved in research projects at JOMEC. He also remained flexible with his PhD research to incorporate current interests and turn them into publishable output. All this he did with the aim of developing a fairly substantial publication list. Even before finishing his PhD he was hired as a lecturer at JOMEC on a fixed-term contract.

Dr Jennifer Kidd completed her PhD in 2005, also at JOMEC. Her research, 'Capture Wales: Digital Storytelling and the BBC', was externally funded and hence very closely focused. This left little leeway for tangential research to generate publications. It did, however, provide Dr Kidd with a strong long-term research background, which led to her starting work on a research project on the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' project at the Centre for Applied Theatre Research at the University of Manchester the day after her PhD viva.

The accounts of their respective career paths were very different and clearly very personal. So to what extent their particulars could be applied more widely remained open to debate. Still, they provided a good indication of the challenges that lie ahead in the academic job market.

Besides personal qualifications, the upcoming Research Assessment Exercise could have substantial consequences for the chances of finding a job in the coming years. To better understand the dynamics of the RAE, the plenary session on day two was devoted to this topic. In her presentation, Professor Sue Thornham, Head of the Media and Film Studies Department at the University of Sussex, gave a comprehensive overview of the history of the RAE and the positioning of Media and Cultural Studies within it. The development of the grading scheme and its repercussions for funding made up the key parts of the presentation. Professor Thornham stressed the difficulties of institutions to move up the scale in a financially meaningful way.

Of particular relevance to the audience was her explanation of the roles the delegates have in this process -- PhD numbers, retention and completion all filter into the RAE grading. What also became apparent was the relationship between job opportunities and the RAE timetable. With uncertainty about grading, potential funding or lack thereof, departments could be less inclined to create open and long-term positions. However, in an attempt to free up staff from teaching to write the all important publications, shorter-term opportunities may arise. One other thing that became clear from the presentation was that many parameters of the RAE remain unknown -- even for the experts -- but that the exercise has to be taken into account when mapping out a career plan.

The Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster is an isolated place. On a day-to-day basis postgraduate work, too, can often feel isolating. The focus is narrow; the next chapter deadline looming ever closer. The plenary as well as the panel sessions at this, the Third MeCCSA Postgraduate Conference, went some way to break this feeling of isolation, and also to help understand the wider context both in terms of the infinite possibilities of research and realities of the academic job market.

What a Difference a Region Makes

Cultural Studies/Cultural Industries in East Asia, Birkbeck College, University of London, 17 - 18 March 2006

A report by SooJeong Ahn, University of Nottingham, UK

Recent years have seen the dynamic growth of cultural industries and cultural studies in North-East Asia. In particular, the increasingly dense flow of popular / consumer culture in North-East Asia and its relation to the historical and cultural identities of the region is intertwined with the force of globalization and related concepts such as hybridity and transnationalism. As the title clearly demonstrates, this symposium was established in order to generate productive debate on how cultural studies and cultural industries have developed in a North-East Asian context. The event raised a couple of key questions: "What does it mean to do cultural studies in East Asia? Is it the same as it is understood to be in Europe or North America?"

This symposium was organized by the Japanese Cultural Studies Programme of Birkbeck and the Asia-Pacific Cultural Studies Forum of Goldsmiths, in cooperation with the Japan Foundation (London). Initially the organizers prepared for this event on a small scale to consider the above issues rather intimately. However, due to "an unexpectedly high demand of registration", they had to change the venue just a few days before the symposium began. Indeed, while it was a highly successful event that more than 100 people attended, the event did not lose the friendly, enjoyable atmosphere the organizers aimed to create. The symposium comprised of four panels scheduled over two days.

Day One

The first panel entitled "The Global in the Local: East Asian Appropriations" was slightly confusing, since two papers explored Taiwanese identity in cultural industries in Taiwan in different ways, while the other examined the relationship in film location work between Japanese and American film crews. In his "Theory and Identity in Taiwan: Knowing Oneself in Cultural Studies", Mark Harrison (University of Westminster) attempted to contextualize the importation and / or development of Cultural Studies in Taiwan in relation to Taiwanese identity. Vinnie Guo-Chiang Yu (Goldsmiths College)'s "Struggling Industry, Liberated Audiences, and 'Cinemagoing': Transnationalized Taiwan Film Culture in the Digital Era" outlined how Taiwanese film industry has been deteriorating with the use of a series of statistics. Following the two Taiwanese cases, "Global America? How Japanese and American Film Crews Work Together" by Yoshi Tezuka (Goldsmiths College) presented case studies on *Shogun* (1980) and *Lost in Translation* (2003).

The second panel focused on transnationalism in cultural product in East Asia. Griseldis Kirsch (University of Trier) explored Japanese-Chinese encounters in the Japanese TV dramas of 2000-2002 in her paper "Towards a Better Understanding of Asian Neighbours?" Her paper was interesting, as it demonstrated the different representation of Hong Kong and China in recent Japanese TV soaps. She suggested that Japan looked at itself as a 'Western'

country that had lost its values in the process of modernization, whilst China could be seen as a repository of "Asianness" which Japan needs to rediscover.

As the last session of the first day, the first keynote speaker, Koichi Iwabuchi (Waseda University, Tokyo) spoke with the title of "On the Usefulness of Media and Cultural Studies". He explored 'brand nationalism', by using popular culture to promote national political and economic interests, such as 'Cool Japan', the 'Korean Wave' in Japan, and anti-Japanese popular movements in East Asia. Overall, he outlined how popular culture and the media are subsumed in 'national culture' and wielded as a form of 'soft power' to promote national economic and political interests.

Day Two

The first panel of the second day was "Creative Industries / Cultural Industries". Three papers showed the diverse range of the current status of cultural / creative industries with empirical case studies. Chung-I Chin (Goldsmiths College) gave her paper on "Governmental Subsidy and Creative Industries in Taiwan from the 80s to the Present". Her study of creative industries in Taiwan was empirically based on her own experience engaged with the industry; however, it could have been improved if China or Hong Kong's case had been compared. In fact, the whole symposium programme lacked in papers dealing with cultural industries in mainland China.

Ae-Ri Yoon's (Goldsmiths College) paper, "'In-between' as a Mirror for Self and Others: Cultural Identities of Korean Animators" provoked many insightful questions about the current status of the Korean creative industry. She effectively demonstrated the transformation process of the Korean animation industry from being contract labourers to creative artists, specifically by exemplifying Korean animators' experience in *The Simpsons*.

The second keynote speaker was Laikwan Pang (Hong Kong University). Her paper "The Transgression of Copying and the Ties of Sharing: Forming Alternative Networks" illustrated the illicit copying of popular movies and music and the online sharing of entertainment and pop culture files and how this can be seen to be subverting the dominant global system of information society and knowledge economy.

The final panel focused on the *Korean Wave* and was entitled "Turning the Tide? Regionalism, Postcolonial Nationalisms, and the Korean Wave". SooJeong Ahn (University of Nottingham) discussed the relationship between contemporary South Korean Cinema and the Pusan International Film Festival. She particularly focused on the way in which *Peppermint Candy* (1999) was selected as the opening film in the Pusan International Film Festival and its interrelation to the institutional context. Mark Morris (University of Cambridge), argued "Postcolonial Visions: Japan in Recent Korean Film" through the representation of Japan in Korean film since the late 1990s, using examples such as *The President's Last Bang* (2005); bio-pic (*Rokidôzan* (2004)); martial arts film (*Fighter in the Wind* (2004)); gangster drama (*The General's Son* (1990)) and futuristic cop thriller (*2009 Lost Memories* (2002)). Although his points were provocative, the engagement with more than five films in one paper delivered no more than a snap-shot and the audience was not able to actively engage with the paper.

The symposium as a whole raised far more questions than it answered. Particularly, several similar questions were raised from the floor regarding the way of approaching this particular

topic, and whether it should start from the point of area studies first or from a cultural studies perspective. Perhaps it might reflect both a degree of obsession in academic methodology and also confusion in looking at these newly emerged issues. As a presenter and observer of this event, admitting the complexities in contextualizing this recent phenomenon in East Asia, the author agreed with the issues that Laikwan Pang raised after the first panel -- what does it mean that East Asian scholars are studying in the West?

This self-conscious question provoked some serious subsequent discussions of the state of cultural production in East Asia. She also pointed out that scholars should be careful in dealing with the cultural industries in this area. It was a poignant suggestion as the discussion of the regional in this kind of symposium is easily exposed to the danger of either overgeneralisation or simplification of the phenomenon over the region. For example, in a panel devoted to the Korean Wave, two papers highlighted the Korean nationalism within China. Myung-joo Chung (Goldsmiths College)'s paper, "Two Strands of Nationalism in Transcultural Era Korea" exemplified the national myths such as 'Old Korea' and 'the Uniqueness of Korean Culture' which provoked serious debate on the territories between Korea and China.

Although she suggested a "healthier version of nationalism" as her conclusion, this paper failed to deliver any convincing evidence to support her argument. Another paper also dealt with 'The Chinese hahanyizu' ('Crazed for Korea' tribe): 'Nationalism, Internationalism, and Authenticity in the Consumption of Popular Culture' was delivered by Rowan Pease (SOAS). What was not discussed in enough depth is how authenticity and nationality are closely linked between Korea and China. This panel clearly showed the difficulties in exploring the complex and contradictory relationships among the local, the regional, the national and the global. To evade the dichotomies in researching this topic, it seemed to need a more thorough understanding of the multi-faceted state of the cultural industries in East Asia.

Yoshitaka Môri (Tokyo University of Arts), the third keynote speaker, looked at the transnationalisation of Japanese and Korean identities through the sharing of popular culture, the FIFA World Cup 2002, the 'Korean Wave' in Japan and the memory of Japanese colonialism and the Second World War. He tried to contextualize the cultural phenomena named 'Hallyu' in Japan as a political concept. In particular, he traced the trend in cross-border popular music flows between Korea and Japan.

Overall, it was a highly successful event with many insightful, productive discussions. However; some papers were contradictory in the same panel and failed to deliver their clear idea. It might well reflect the confusion and contradiction in exploring this complicated issue with the uneven development in the field of cultural industries in this area. Nevertheless, the most important contribution of this symposium to this topic is that these questions were discussed mostly in an East Asian context whilst other similarly themed conferences tried to analyze these issues within a European or North American context. In this regard, the 'What a Difference a Region Makes' symposium provided much to stimulate the debate and to continue to expand the programme relating to this topic.