

SPACE AND IDENTITY OF HONG KONG: THE CULTURAL CODE STUDY ON FRUIT CHAN'S "PROSTITUTE TRILOGY"

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ABSTRACT

As one of the most influential parts of film industry, Hong Kong's films have shown their momentum and vitality in Hong Kong's society characterized by the commercialization, colonialization and pursuit of culture identity. Fruit Chan's "prostitute trilogy" recorded the lives of marginal characters of the lowest rung in Hong Kong, which has become an eccentric artistic practise in Hong Kong's films. The paper applies Christian Metz's film semiotics theory to analyze the cultural codes in the trilogy, summarizing the theme code and the binary opposite relationship in the cultural code, finding the value orientation formed by the director in the historical moments for emotional anxiety, and summing up the overall appearance of Fruit Chan in his creative process.

Sub Heading : Hong Kong Films, Film Semiotics, Fruit Chan, Cultural Code.

INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong is famous for being called "oriental hollywood", for it has formed its own characteristics and taken powerful hold of film industry with its magnificent images and complicated narration. Among all the films full of fancy, like Kung-fu films and comedy, Fruit Chan's works are exceptional for reflecting the reality of poverty and society. As the representative of independent film who was strongly influenced by the "Hong Kong New Film Wave", by describing the subsistent of marginal people, Chan revealed the demolition of

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colonialism, the anxiety of the 1997 regression, and the metaphorical expression of the relation between Hong Kong and mainland in his film.

Chan's "prostitute trilogy" (including three movies about the lives of prostitutes, <*Durian Durian*>, <*Hollywood Hong Kong*> and <*Three Husbands*>) is typical for the unique style and the cultural connotation behind the using of the symbol "space". According to Christian Metz, "video works are a Image system designed to describe, show and tell a story or series of events. Firstly, they are objects, a concrete reality that conveys specific meaning (or be given a certain meaning)".ⁱⁱ As an important way in the research of cultural codes, Christian's semiotics theory put the nature of the movie behind the visual image, which is a textual system consisting of themes and narrativesⁱⁱ. In Chan's prostitute trilogy, he depicted personal narrow space, the edge of space, the road space, the rich and poor space, and the plight of survival behind the space. In his shots, space is the transformation of the reality, the struggle and exploration of the city's identity.

SPACE AND CITY: THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY ABOUT POVERTY

The movie researcher, Thomas Schatz believes that there is a certain space symbol for every particular space, where the characters are fully integrated into the atmosphere and formed a unique temperamentⁱⁱⁱ. Magnificent buildings, nightclubs and Victoria harbour are landscapes of Hong Kong's bustling lives. However, in Chan's movies, public rental houses, narrow lanes, and old buses have become the symbols of Hong Kong's real society. Director Chan uses the unique symbols of marginal space to make the narration of the films.

Chan's films presents the lives of marginal people in Hong Kong in a fragmented image of space. In *Durian Durian*, the lead actress travels fast on the narrow and crowded road from her residence to the hotel--her working place. Crowded streets, tattered barber shops, as well as a variety of disorderly hotel signs, these public landscapes are show in front of the audience in the form of fragmentation. In Chan's movies, Hong Kong is crowded, narrow and dirty.

In *Hollywood Hong Kong*, the famous building, Hollywood Mansion becomes the symbol of the modernization, which stands in contrast to the village, where the actors are chasing in the narrow lane. In a hut of the village, the son of the pig roast shopkeeper picks up an arm fallen from the sky.

The mentally handicapped heroine of *Three Husbands* struggles among an old fishing boat and village house, while the Zhuhai-Hong Kong-Macao Bridge overhead is completed and the lights of Disneyland are flickering across the river. Chan shows the psychological alienation of the characters in an almost insane way, reflecting the huge problems of the society. The alienation of the characters' individual psychology shows the imbalance of the social environment, structure and atmosphere^{iv}. The mental problems mark the depression of the people caused by the social environment.

SPACE AND PEOPLE: AN UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE FROM DUALISTIC OPPOSITION

Most of the prostitutes in Chan's films come from the mainland China who are known in Hong Kong as "beigu" (women from the north). In *Durian Durian* and *Hollywood Hong Kong*, Chan uses *beigu* as the symbol of the mainland, making the immigration of the two characters show the dynamic relationship between Hong Kong and mainland. In *Durian Durian*, the heroine comes from the northeast of China, whose home town is very spacious with gardens and balcony, while in Hong Kong's, there is just a narrow living room. However, she could only get the passion of living from the city away from her hometown.

In *Hollywood Hong Kong*, The prostitute from the north comes to a village of Hong Kong and changes the original peaceful life. Chan focuses on the honesty and kindness of the Hong Kong family, who make a living by selling meat. The coming of a mainland girl represents invasion and the change of people in the village also symbolizes the disappearance of Hong Kong's local culture. In the film, the village is a symbol of Hong Kong's local value, which expresses the confusion and anxiety of Hong Kong people about their own identity. □ □

Three Husbands was produced in 2018, the economic status of mainland China and Hong Kong has subtly changed. Chan continues to use the prostitute as the leading role of the story, but the object of the metaphor has quietly changed. Wandering between the ocean and land, unable to control her own body, the heroine is a symbol of Hong Kong people's confused identity. The opening scene of a Hong Kong girl who works in a nightclub of mainland is a symbol of mainland's economic growth and Hong Kong's resistance to becoming a "small city" of a big country^v.

HONG KONG'S IDENTITY PURSUING BEHIND THE SPACE

The marginal problems, the huge gap of wealth, and the problems between Hong Kong and the mainland in Chan's films are not only come from the alienation of people's feelings in the rapid development of the city, but also caused by the serious uncertainty of identity of Hong Kong people in the great social changes.

Although other Hong Kong directors, like Ann Hui, Tsui Hark and Karwai Wong have used many political metaphors in their works, most of the characters they describe are from middle class, who can choose to emigrate to escape the problems. Their touch on the politics is only based on the occasional anxiety, enthusiasm, passion caused by the return of 1997, some films are also intended to cater to the tastes of the audience^{vi}. Fruit Chan focus on the helplessness of the people from the bottom of the society in the face of Hong Kong's regression. Therefore, when studying Hong Kong's culture in the recent years, Fruit Chan's movies become the inevitable choice which present a variety of elements to interpret the Hong Kong's cultural and political orientation.

CONCLUSION

In the films, Fruit Chan uses the meanings of space to the fullest. With the unique film language style, the images of space form a dream between the individuals and and creation under the classification of author's film language - the transformation of reality. He puts the attention on the lives of the marginal characters, showing the confusion and loneliness of the mineral crowd,

the hardship of their lives and the myth of identity hidden behind the characters. Chan's works have different perspectives and expressions on the political, social cultural and other era imprints that benefits our understanding of the city.

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