

DOCTORAL THESIS

Living under the Same Roof: History and Politics of Hong Kong Tenement Films in the 1940s-1970s

OU, Huixian

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ABSTRACT

OU's Ph.D. dissertation examines a little-explored subject of "tenement drama" in the history of Hong Kong cinema. It offers an interdisciplinary, historically-grounded critical analysis of the genesis, emergence, and evolution of Hong Kong tenement films from the 1940s to the 1970s. It attempts to unravel the humanity and ideology they convey, the multiplicity of the historical contexts and the complexity of the cultural politics that shaped the construction of these films. Drawing on close reading, intertextual analysis, and archival research, this study contends that, transplanted predominantly from the Shanghai lane-house dramas in the 1930s and 1940s, the formation and development of Hong Kong tenement films from the 1940s to the 1970s were deeply entwined with the history of wartime suffering, refugee experiences, and housing in mainland China and Hong Kong under the influence of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil War, global Cold-War politics, and British imperial politics. Historically as a popular film genre deploying the tenement house as a site of struggle to depict the daily problems confronted by the diasporic Chinese communities living under the same roof in British Hong Kong, these films bring to light the lived experiences, ideological beliefs, and contested identities of Chinese migrants and refugees in the crown colony, evincing the city's pivotal geopolitical position as a locale of Chinese diaspora in the tempestuous twentieth century. This project aspires to open up a new critical paradigm via tenement drama to understand Chinese history and culture, the Shanghai-Hong Kong-Guangdong film connections, and Hong Kong society in its social, political, and cultural dimensions in the twentieth century.