

DOCTORAL THESIS

The post-2000 Hong Kong film workers

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an interdisciplinary study that traces the commerce-art-politics nexus of Hong Kong cinema since the new millennium, through investigating the current young generation of film workers who joined the industry as it gradually entered an era marked by the domination of Hong Kong/Mainland co-productions.

It reveals the filmmaking ideologies of emerging filmmakers from both within and beyond their film texts, and uncovers the artistic and ideological discrepancies between this young generation and their predecessors – the established generation who contributed to the glory days of Hong Kong cinema during its economic boom. By tracing the studies of national cinema and transnational cinema in the last three decades, I debunk the national/transnational antagonism with the case of the post-2000 Hong Kong cinema. It does not only prove that the binary is far more complicated than one being superseded by the other, or them coexisting with each other, but rather evolving into each other from a historical perspective. In this vein, the current Hong Kong cinema has split into two: a transnational cinema represented by the established generation of filmmakers; and a national cinema that is driven by the emerging generation who struggle for better preservation of Hong Kong local culture and their own cultural identities.

Furthermore, this thesis scrutinizes the working and material conditions of these young film practitioners, in which employment and economic opportunity are primarily derived from co-productions and mainland productions. It expands the discussion over the concept of precarity and argues that the Hong Kong case demonstrates two extra dimensions of labour precarity: an excessive reliance on an external market (i.e. mainland market), and the workers' dissenting political attitudes towards a politically sensitive regime, namely mainland China under the ruling of the Communist Party.

Lastly, developments in Hong Kong film policy since the handover are examined. As its longstanding managing philosophy of "minimal intervention" has largely remained unchanged in Hong Kong, the government has turned from a "laissez-faire" approach to what Mark Purcell terms an "aidez-faire" approach in the local film industry, yet it still failed to meet the industry's expectations of creating a holistic film policy. Nevertheless, film policy in the post-handover era had an undeniable impact in terms of cultivating young filmmakers.

To research the topic, 47 in-depth interviews were conducted. These first-hand interviews, combined with data gathered from multiple resources, as well as a text analysis of the 107 films made by young directors between 2000 and 2018, form the factual basis of this thesis. Employing a Hong

Kong/Mainland Film dynamics perspective, this study aims to fill a gap in the academic study of Hong Kong cinema, which has paid scant attention to the material conditions and artistic visions of craft labour in the industry, and especially of the young generation of filmmakers who are facing the decline of a once prosperous but currently diminishing local film industry.

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