

DOCTORAL THESIS

French May '68, "China," and the dialectics of refusals in film and intellectual cultures since 1960s

Leung, Man Tat Terence

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ABSTRACT

One of the most fashionable impressions about the legacies of French May '68 lurking in our capitalist society nowadays is perhaps the view that this historic episode has greatly inspired a chain of sexual liberations and anti-authoritarian lifestyle revolts within the realm of modern Western cultures. However, without actually questioning the ideological implications behind this liberal-libertarian ethos, the above convenient historical verdict may still help perpetuate the predominant logic of late capitalism and the concurrent status quo. Historically speaking, during the heyday of the worldwide leftist insurrections of the 1960s, the events of '68 were never simply an isolated First-World phenomenon. Deeply entangled with the empirical lessons of the Maoist Cultural Revolution, May 68 in France has radically invoked and manifested many profound social queries and contestations against both the capitalist universality and the emerging Soviet revisionist thinking for two decades. In this dissertation, my primary research focus is precisely to call into question, through the optics of their inherent "Chinese connections," the dominant narratives about the movements of May '68 as merely a smoothening agent of massive "cultural reforms" in the capitalist West, instead of a continuous response toward the Maoist egalitarian principles that keeps incessantly catalyzing genuine political transformations in the sphere of global communitarian and quotidian practices. By analyzing and rehistoricizing a variety of cultural texts that include travel writings, memoirs, novels and films in relation to the subversive spirits of '68, this study aims to reopen their heavily forsaken sociopolitical significances in order to recast some of the truly alternative historical imaginations of this epoch. Unlike the predominant methodologies of historiography and intellectual histories which usually marginalize cinematic texts as largely "illegitimate" data for the serious investigations of the sixties, this thesis particularly emphasizes the extensive study and critical reexamination of many insufficiently discussed or widely misinterpreted filmic representations of "China" that were produced by a large group of Western filmmakers such as Bertolucci, Godard, Antonioni, Casabianca, Viénet, and Yanne, under the adoptions of different art forms and genres between the 1960s and the 2000s. While the overreliance on European cinematic representations of China may potentially risk becoming a blind repetition of many contemporary capitalist stereotypes about the Maoist influences in May '68 at the expense of those greatly innovative and dialectical Sino-Western encounters during the same period, this thesis also seeks to cautiously retain and reinscribe the latent heterogeneous, antagonistic, and historical Chinese characters long pertaining to the ensemble of the so-called "French Theory" advanced by Barthes, Kristeva, Lacan, and others since 1968, so as to retrieve certain unrealized revolutionary potentialities of the latter beyond the reigning ideological confines of neoliberalism today. I argue that this seemingly "redundant" or "generic" gesture of constantly *delinking* the multiple creative novelties adhering to the aforementioned Western cultural representations of "China" from the unique intellectual innovations of '68 is highly crucial here, insofar as such excessiveness of negativity and refusal may nonetheless offer us a chance to persistently (re)search for some even better forms of emancipatory possibilities to come. [500 words]

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