DOCTORAL THESIS

Co-producing a cold war cosmopolitan fantasy: collaboration and competition between Hong Kong and Japanese Cinema in the 1950s and 1960s
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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of how Hong Kong and Japanese cinema constructed an imaginary of cosmopolitanism in films for a global market through co-production during the Cold War. Co-production examined in the dissertation is not limited to co-produced films. In the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, Hong Kong and Japanese cinema had frequent contact, which included co-organizing a film festival, exchanging film talents, and adapting films. Neutral terms like collaboration and cooperation describing the interchange between Japanese and Hong Kong cinema often disguised their competition in an uneven power relationship. Focusing on the two major studios in Hong Kong, i.e., Shaw Brothers and Cathay Organization, this dissertation examines their relationship with Japanese cinema by analyzing the complex negotiations inherent throughout the collaboration.

The dissertation conceptualizes the tension between Hong Kong and Japanese cinema as a spatial struggle, in which the materiality of space played a critical role. Japanese cinema’s attempts to maintain its hegemony and dominance in Asia and Hong Kong cinema’s endeavors to improve its position in the hierarchy of regional and global film industries contributed to the production of space. The space of production such as the cinematic space in films, in turn, influenced the dynamic between the two cinemas. Each chapter examines different forces within the production of space with common concern on the space of production that the two cinemas competed to construct a worldview beneficial to its own respective positioning in the region and the world. The forces at work are the role of technology
at the Southeast Asian Film Festival, the embodiment of Hong Kong star in the co-produced films, and the border-crossing of Japanese talent to work in Hong Kong. The dissertation argues that through co-production with Japanese cinema, Hong Kong’s film industry imbued its stars and films with a fantasy of cosmopolitanism for a global market, without challenging the patriarchal family ideology of Chinese society. The spatial struggle with Hong Kong cinema demonstrates that Japanese cinema attempted to define itself as a leader in Asia while confronting the West during the Cold War.
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