

#1 From “otherness” to something else

The readings in the past half-semester have been focusing on addressing those two obstacles which stand in the way of the development of Asian film history and Asian film studies: the first one is orientalism as the exercise of power operating through the body of knowledge(E&N, 8); the second is the Hollywood film as the norm or standard in the discursive of Asian films, which is an outcome based on the logic of orientalism. Amongst those writings, Yoshimoto's critical thinking about Japanese film shows a powerful rebuttal to classify Eastern art with a Western perspective: one of his standing pointing is the western scholar's misunderstanding of Japanese film as a mixer of tribe art and modern art, and he argues that the affinity of the tribal art and the modern is, in this logic, an important optical illusion- the measure of a common differentness from artistic modes that dominate in the west and from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century(E&N, 37).In the light of the refusal of western categorization and Hollywood nomination, the history of Asian film study is a history of a redrawing of discipline.

Another illuminating article in those readings should be Leon Hunt's: his close reading about Bruce Lee's late works elaborates how the disappearance of dichotomy and the intertwining of /renegotiation of the east and west happens in the discursive of Asian film research(E&N, 432), which affirms the fact that the categorization of Hollywood is useless regarding the complicate and diverse facts of Asian film production. Even more, film production makes the Asian film mingles with the Hollywood film, which claims the transition from national film to transnational film.

If we look closely into the films screened in class, Asian film itself has to be considered or reconsidered in the space and time when it happens, because it contributes to the subjugation of Asian society, along with other art forms in the past a hundred years. Taking *The Shinjuku triad society* for instance: In the background of colonization, the Asiatic orphans in this film make Asia an inseparable wholeness that has its inner divisive power, which offers us an important reference to think about the concept of national film again: In the film, the Japanese brothers don't look like each other at all: Kiriya's face contour is softer than Yoshihito who has a more typical Japanese look, Kiriya shares more ethnic resemblances with Wang Zhi-Ming who is a refugee from Taiwan. In one scene, Wang and Yoshihito are sitting back to back, while Kiriya is in Taiwan investigating Wang's past. In the hometown of Wang, Kiriya seems to find his own lost memory/melody too. We may argue that Wang and Yoshihito are both Kiriya's alter egos, killing Wang is killing his Chinese origin, and the frantic fight seems to complete the transformation and purification of Yoshihito/Kiriya into a "normal Japanese". When Kiriya speaks with his father over the phone, we learned that Yoshihito was "like a child now", his infantility shows the power of violence. Kiriya killed Wang and established his own order and identity through this power of violence, which is a reenactment of the patriarchal logic of Asian society, and in meantime the subjugation of those orphans.

Asian film also participates in the reevaluation of Asian body in a western scope, and in turn, challenges the western norms and power in many ways: In Bruce Lee's case, the coexistence of masculine and queer traits in his films allows us to re-evaluate Asian male sexuality through this re-evaluation of Asian film, because as Foucault says, sexuality is where the disciplinary and regulatory power meets(Foucault,29). Rethinking of the sexuality

in those films is rethinking the systematic opposition between China and the West: i.e. in *Way of the dragon*, Tang Lung met a prostitute in Roman piazza, and she leads him back to her apartment, when he was left alone in the bedroom, he starts to practice martial arts in front of the mirror. When the woman reappears naked, he flees out of the apartment in a hurry, we may interpret this as the asexual or man-child characteristic of Tang, but it is also possible for us to conclude narcissism or homosexuality from this scene. When he came to the Colosseum, Tang Lung seems to hesitate after the killing, he fetched Norris's clothes and covered him with it. The arbitrary genetic convention quality of kung fu films (E&N,104-105) requires the killing to be done, the transition from Wen to Wu is a performance of resistance against the repression of the westerners. This film contributes as the performative charge of queerness, and the ability to redo and challenge the conventions of heterosexual normativity (Muñoz, 81), also the eastern-western dichotomy.

#2 *Pyasa*: a Bombay popular film which is more than “social”

Thomas and Vasudevan both reevaluate Bombay social film from the perspective of genre and spectatorship. As cinema study scholars, they are both against orientalism and the western-centered criticism upon Indian films. For Thomas, Indian films should not be considered to be the other in relation to the Euro-American film because its qualities mainstream in its own culture, and the unique spectatorship developed from the specific socio-economic structure and cultural background, which decides the mindset of the majority of the audiences, make them have more expectation on affects than on effects. Most of all, Thomas reminds the western scholar to not forget the fact that these films are made for Indian audiences, who have their expectation and emotion, and the makers of Bombay social film are determined to fulfill their requirements. This mechanic constructs a unique narrative

culture different from the western one. Thomas also elaborates on how this misunderstanding of the western scholars has been generated: The circulation and reception of Indian film in the western world are controlled by Indian upper-class intelligentsia (E&N, 282) who thinks very low of social films so that this film genre which has more audiences and more influence receives less attention in the western world. When talking about the narrative forms of social film, Thomas looks into the tradition, she says the epic narrative hired from the village tradition makes the story in the film the pretext for emotion and what append spectacle, the pleasure of the spectator depends on the erotism lies behind that spectatorship, which makes it necessary for the moviemaker to shift from what to tell in a film to how to tell. Because of those textual and contextual characteristics, the Hollywood categorization of genre malfunctions in criticizing Indian film. Instead, the social film satisfies the audience through three phases: social realism to self-reflexivity, and then to parody/dream imagery.

In Vasudevan's case, he also denies the norm of "third film", saying that social film creates a national film space out of Hollywood norms. The Hegemony position of Hindi film among other languages within India resonates with Thomas's assertion of social film's mainstream quality. However, different from Thomas's cultural ethnic viewpoint, Vasudevan focuses on the development of the film industry and how the mechanic of Hindi film is formed chronologically. His analysis of Social films in the 1950s about tableau and movement; the male body as an object of sacred devotion; stasis and mobility; subject and object; tradition and modern, show the peculiarities of the film industry in a transitional society and the function of them.

For Thomas, the dynamic of the spectatorship of social film generates from the similarity of story-lines, the repetition of the same stories in different productions as a source of pleasure. The predictable narratives function only as pretexts, as an opportunity to explore emotion and to display spectacles, which is drastically different from the spectatorship of Hollywood movies. On the building of spectatorship, strictly realism is not mandatory, the success of a film relies on other spectator attractions. And also, audiences are highly involved in the spectatorship, they appreciate the film in a non-Aristotelian way, disregarding time and space. Thomas aimed at the film as a specific cultural activity against the western perspective, while Vasudevan paid more attention to the role of film in constructing a changing society's subjectivity, to verify the deviation of Indian popular film as one of the third films. The popularity of the 1950s Indian film in different countries reflects the same process from traditional to modern societies. Vasudevan's analysis of social film about the acceptance and the interaction between acceptance and film text, while Thomas focuses more on feelings and affects.

In *Pyasa*, Thomas's three phases are laid out clearly during the development of the story, and repetition of the plots contributes more to building up affects rather than telling a linear story. And also, the story ends predictably, like Vasudevan says, "The circling back, the recovery of identity, is then tied into a normalization of social experience, a recover of the reassuring coordinates of social privilege.....urges an empathy towards social deprivation and invited a vicarious identification with such states". However Vesudevan's conclusion of this circling back "underlines the middle-class identity that structures the narrative" (E&N, 306) seems problematic in *Pyasa's* case. When Vijay escapes from the asylum and appears

at the site of poetry recitation, the outdoor light shines through the figure into the hall, he was like Jesus after the resurrection. By using the door frame, Guru Dutt not only forms a worship gaze as Vasudevan describes; regarding the self-referencing quality of his film, he is also trying to create an author-god. Two female characters fall into the stereotype of the social film, however, they are also slightly different from the traditional film female characters who are always deifying their lover/husband: out of admiration for his talent, Gulabo makes effort to publish Vijay's poem after his fake death. From this point, it subverts Vesudevan's conclusion partially about how the social film story circumvent and reformulate female devotional idioms and male sacred authorities (E&N, 300): Gulabo's appreciation of Vijay's talent is more progressive than the patriarchal worship gaze, both of these two characters are idealists who are the outcasts of social norms. In the meantime, although Vijay is worshiped by his readers, his melancholia always transcends her masculinity and makes him a bit feminine. His feminization or asexual qualities are obvious: Maybe it is this lonely posture that provides a space that resonates with the audience, and also the resemblance with other male figures in Asian films.

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