



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

**THE IMPACT OF AUDIENCES IN
CULT FILMS OF ASIAN AND UNITED STATE**

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Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours

(Cinematography)

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**THE IMPACT OF AUDIENCES IN CULT FILMS OF
ASIAN AND UNITED STATE**

BOY WEN CHUEN

This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Cinematography)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
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The project entitled “ **The Impact Of Audiences In Cult Films Of Asian & United State** ” was prepared by **Boy Wen Chuen** and submitted to the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts in partial requirements for a Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours (**Cinematography**).

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is study about the different of cult films between area Asia and United State. On this thesis, the researcher purposed to study the transformation and present situation of some cult films in Asia and United State. Besides, the researcher using several method such as comparative study, case study and questionnaire to collect the data on this thesis. May this thesis can be give some information on similar field about Asia and Western's cult film in the future.

Abstrak

Kajian ini adalah mengenai pembelajaran dan penyelidikan tentang pembezaan “cult film” dari kawasan Asia dan Amerika Syarikat. Dalam thesis ini, pengkaji bertujuan untuk mengkaji perkembangan dan situasi kini di kawasan Asia dan Amerika Syarikat. Selain itu, pengkaji mengaplikasi beberapa kaedah kajian termasuklah cara kajian perbandingan, cara kajian kes-kes dan cara soal selidik untuk mengumpul data-data yang diperlukan untuk mengkaji. Berharap thesis ini dapat bagi maklumat-maklumat yang bernilai dalam sektor yang hampir sama tentang “cult film” di kawasan Asia dan Amerika Syarikat pada masa depan.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background Of Study

Quoted from Bruce A. Austin (p. 394), “ In summary, the cult film may be defined as a motion picture which is exhibited on a continuing basis, usually at midnight, and gathers a sizeable repeat audience.” A cult films are always builds based on the group of audiences, so it hard to make a final conclusion due to the difference of area comes, such as genre Kung-Fu from Hong Kong and genre *Tokusatsu* especially *Godzilla* series from Japan. Both genre was one of mainstream and success gain commercial profits on local area, but for Western area, it usually listed as a cult movie.

In early days of cinema, cult films had been existed (Allen, 2007). At those time, it always come after with movement of avant-garde cinema and surrealism cinema, *Un Chien Andalou (1929)* directed by Luis Buñuel was one of the famous example. As mentioned by James Hoberman & Jonathan Rosenbaum on their book *Midnight Movies (1983)*, the appearance of modern cult films were followed up with the popularisation of midnight theatre, drive-in theatre and television broadcasting since from 1970s. The development of cult films usually linkage with the underground cinema movement, counterculture movement and transgression art movement, paracinema and independent cinema, B-movie, exploitation cinema, pornographic cinema and Hollywood’s double feature system on 1940s until 1960s. Besides, the transgressive art movement from early 1980s had be inspired many filmmakers started to made some works which totally be sharply demarcated from mainstream works, many excellent cult classics were appeared on this period.

At the same time, accompany with the rise of Hong Kong cinema, the Asian cult following were focused on Hong Kong. For instance, the only four films included *The Big Boss* (1971), *Fist Of Fury* (1972), *Way Of The Dragon* (1972) and *Enter The Dragon* (1973) starring by Bruce Lee had be give a huge shock for the audiences on Western area. According to Daniel McDermon (2017), in many American's stereotype mind on 20th century, Asian men were often cast as servants, deviants or as wily and desexualised, but the indelible screen image performed by Bruce Lee had be changed Western audiences's stereotype. The early KungFu film of Bruce Lee had be became a cult in minority cult following group. After that, Bruce Lee had be quickly affected the mainstream and became an icon as term of KungFu in United State. After that, the successful of Bruce Lee, action movie became the mainstream on Hong Kong. After a few of years, some filmmakers such as Jackie Chan and John Woo had be formed a group of cult following in the Western area. After a few of years, based on the get fame from the cult following on the first, their success ascended to Hollywood mainstream industry on later, John Woo had be directed a few of big budget motion picture including *Face/Off* (1997) and *Mission: Impossible 2* (2000). With *Rush Hour* film series, Jackie Chan became one of the highest paid actor on Hollywood nowadays.

1.1 Problem Statement

“Film is a great distillation of sociological concepts” (p.8), said by McLaughlin (2015). Film likes a mirror, it reflect reality of the men and society. Braudy and Cohen (2004) claims that film is the most powerful agent of mass political movements nowadays. Cult film is consider as an important pattern of manifestation of subculture, just like as the early development of Rock and Hip-Hop culture. Quoted from Cram101 (2016), “A cult is a films that has acquired at cult following. Cult films are known for their dedicated, passionate fanbase, an elaborate subculture that engage in repeated viewings, quoting dialogue, and audience participation, which inclusive definitions allow for major studio productions, especially box office bombs, while exclusive definitions focus more on obscure, transgressive films shunned by the mainstream”.

According to Kawin (1991), a cult classic has 2 major characteristic, first is have a group of fans who watched frequently and repeatedly, and the next is the any popular film which own the spirit of rebel against orthodoxy. However, Paszylk (2009) claims that a cult film cannot be a part of mainstream cinema (p.1). But, *Lord Of The Ring* trilogy, *Star Wars* series and etc, this few of franchise film are produce by major Hollywood studio, these films is a part of mainstream cinema as known as own their huge cult fanbase, however these films also often consider as a cult. The researcher believed that define a cult is not according with mainstream or arthouse whether or not, no matter with who or where produced.

Due to the social background, the KungFu genre is the mainstream for Asian audience, especially area East Asia cultural sphere including mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan (Poshek Fu, 2008). But for Western audience, KungFu is a type of subculture, they considers it as a cult based genre in usually. It is because KungFu is an erotica art on those time for Western audiences. Same situation as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)*, the cult status of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)* was gained through it screening repeatedly on the midnight theatre. However, the midnight movie culture was rarely followed up by Asian audience. Thus, the mode of watch movie and the background of social between Eastern and Western had be the cause different understandings for the terms “cult”. From the other sides, the development of cult film response the change of taste of audience directly from different area. Taken from this aspect, the research aims to study the difference of cult films between Asian and United State.

Along with the improvement of technology and way of people communicate for each other, the way of spread of a cult classic also has transform revolutionary. Formerly, a cult classic needs lot of time to find its follower for gain the cult status. A cult classic could be more faster spread out to other area or other group of audiences. As example as *Fight Club (1999)* directed by David Fincher, *Fight Club (1999)* failed to achieve the expectation of film company on profit and received polarising feedback from critics when it release on theatre. Over times, the release of DVD later made *Fight Club (1999)* win instead of lose on the box office and gain positive reception back (Ye, 2016).

Nowadays, many Asian extreme cult classic such as *Ring (1998)*, *Audition (1999)*, *Battle Royale (2000)* gain cult status on Western area due to the distribution from Tartan Films (Martin, 2015). Thus, in order to compare the difference of cult films between Asian and United State, the researcher aims to study the development, transformation and present situations of cult classic from past to nowadays. The researcher focuses on how above those mentioned film became a cult film and form a group of a cult following on Western area.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the difference of cult films between Asian and United State?
2. What is the transformation and present situation of cult films in Asian and United State?
3. How about the reception of audiences to cult films?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To compare the difference of cult films between Asian and United State.
2. To study the transformation and present situation of cult films in Asian and United State.
3. To analyse the reception of audiences to cult films.

1.4 Purpose Of Research

This research focuses on how audience impact study the difference of cult films on area Asian and United State, in coverage from aspect of the history, development and transformation and the present situation of cult films. Besides, the researcher also analysis the reception of audiences to a few of cult classics in way of questionnaire survey.

1.5 Conclusion

When general talk about cult film, the first idea come in usually linkage with blood plasma, intensity strange visual, disgusting and hardcore plot. In short, it be considered as dirty, ridiculous, low class and monstrous physiologically, be widely divergent with taste of general for pursue elegance and beauty-appreciation. But somehow, more didn't have any concept about the term of cult film. Sometime, cult confuses with B-movie, well, this is not accurate at much. In formally, cult is not one of a types of film genre or style.

According to Mendik (2008), cult films frequently break cultural taboos, and many feature excessive displays of violence, gore, sexuality, profanity, or combinations thereof. This can lead to controversy, censorship, and outright bans; less transgressive films may attract similar amounts of controversy when critics call them frivolous or incompetent. Due to the implication meaning by the cult films has more impact compare with general mainstream, sometime the passionate of fanaticism minority may shock and change the mainstream value and culture of the contemporary era.

The emphasis of cult films is not on box-office figures and mass audiences (Mathijs, 2009). As mentions above, a cult classic accomplish by a group of fanbase. There are not any films will be call as a cult film immediately when it just published. Being a cult classic needs time. There are not any filmmakers will notice them making a cult film, because how to define a cult film is depending on the hand of audiences.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1 The Audiences & Cult Classic of Asia and United State

According to Phillips (2003; p.92), the term ‘audience’ in film studies refers to the group of people who attend in a film viewings. The attendance of audiences are indispensable on any film classic. Christian Metz (1975) indicated that a film cannot be called as a film if without the gaze and attendance of the spectator. According to Gu (2016), visual and narrative is the essence of film. Quoted by John Steele (2014), “ We are visual animals, driven by images.” When the audience watch the film, the first message what audience receive is the visual. Human judges and estimate through the eyes, even through brain realise films is something of fiction, but the emotion and mental of human still be manipulated by the visual (Kjellström, 2008).

Along with the different level of dedicates on the certain films, a group of audience can be refer as ‘cinophile’ or ‘cult following’. The cult following defines as a collective of fans who are highly passionate to a certain culture work. In many ways, the cult following expresses their emotional attachment and passionate through fan-fiction or cosplay activities (Hills, 2003). Famous character Darth Vader and Stormtroopers from *Star Wars* franchise are one of a symbolic representative.

Difference with general audiences, a cult following is a small but very passionate fanbase who are highly dedicated to a work of culture. Cult films had be existed since the early day history of cinema. Quoted from to Hoffman

(2014), “*Nosferatu (1922)* was supposed to be destroyed due to a copyright issue with Bram Stoker’s book *Dracula (1897)*... However, the film was kept alive by a minority cult following that circulated illegal bootlegs, enabling it to become one of the most influential pieces of the horror genre”. According to Saporito, *Nosferatu (1922)* is a dream movie of movie historian. “It is a foreboding and influential motion picture that helped define the German Expressionism and set a precedent for a century of horror cinema”. The passionate cult following led *Nosferatu (1922)* to become one of cinema’s earliest “cult” films.

Mostly early cult following were consisted by filmmakers and motion picture experimenter. However, the concept of ‘cult’ stills not born yet on that moment, thus many early cult film’s status were established by later ages, for instance, *The Night Of Living Dead (1968)* directed by George A. Romero. As Leong (2017) states, due to the content of *The Night Of Living Dead (1968)* had satires and critics the social phenomenon of United State on late 1960, this film causes a big shock to United State’s society. According to Leong (2017), the appearance of *The Night Of Living Dead (1968)* had be inspired many later generations filmmakers. Blood-thirsty, infectious viruses, brainless and cannibalism, all the character setting were carry forward by *The Night Of Living Dead (1968)*. Although *The Night Of Living Dead (1968)* was not the first zombie movie ever made, but itself had be affected a lot of later homogeneity motion pictures, and have a strong impact on the early zombie pop-culture in Western area.

To a certain extent, United State's cult films were rooted from counterculture and underground cinema (Patterson, 2007) . Modern cult films grew from 1960s, which popular among those who rejected mainstream Hollywood films. According to Patterson & John (2007), these underground film festivals led to the creation of midnight movies, which attracted cult followings. The term cult film itself was an outgrowth of this movement and was first used in the early 1970s, though cult had been in use for decades in film analysis with both positive and negative connotations (Mathijs, Sexton; p. 234). *The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)* is the symbolic representative. Although failed to get positive critically when release, nonetheless, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show(1975)* quickly known as a famous midnight movie when audiences began participating with the film at the Waverly Theatre in New York City in 1976 (Hoberman,1983). Cult fanbase returned to the cinemas regularly and began costuming as the characters in plot, initiating similar performance groups across the United States. At almost the same time, cult fans in costume at the King's Court Theatre in Pittsburgh began performing following the plot of the film. This "shadow cast" mimed the actions on screen above and behind them, while lip-syncing their character's lines.

On the other sides at same time, the early 1970s Hong Kong cinema was in the golden era. Due to the social background, Chinese martial art or referred known as WuShu / KungFu and story about ancient swordsman always was the mainstream on Hong Kong (Poshek Fu, 2008). The appearance of Bruce Lee had break the rule. Compare with the Shaw style which more close to Chinese

opera fancy move, Bruce Lee was more pursued the real fighting feeling on his action scene. Besides, the story background in films of Bruce Lee were setting on the modern ages, different with the Shaw Brother's story which usually setting on the dynasty feudal age of China. This kind of new styles on action had be attracted the Western's eyeballs, especially the African America community.

As Wu (2012) mentions, “ Inspire from with Western combat style, Bruce abandons the conventional fixed pattern, he innovates and westernisation the Chinese martial art...” ; this kind of new ideas allows Bruce deduct a new form of Eastern conventional martial art which the Western also can understand and accept. Moreover, Bruce Lee gives shock to the mainstream, he made the Kung Fu fanaticism as a pop-culture on the Western area. The screen image casted by Bruce subvert the Western's stereotype, which as Asian men often cast as servants, deviants or as wily and desexualised (McDermon, 2017).

Bruce's screen image always be full of nationalism and anti-racism concept. According to Wu, he success builds the nationalism hero through his performance on *The Big Boss (1971)* and *Fist Of Fury (1972)*. In *The Big Boss (1971)*, he casts as a hot-blood youngster who help the Chinese immigrant to fight the power, while in *Fist Of Fury (1972)*, he casts an avenger who fight with Japan Imperialism. The rebellion image presented by Bruce resonates the African-American civil right movement on 1960s until 1970s (Wu, 2012). Refer to the *Fist Of Fury (1972)*, the iconic scene which Bruce force the