



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

THE PORTRAYAL OF CHINESE FAKELORE IN FILM

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Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours

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THE PORTRAYAL OF CHINESE FAELORE IN FILM

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

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTEXT	PAGES
Title Page	
Declaration of Originality	
Acknowledgements	i
Contents	ii-iv
Abstract	v
Abstrak	vi
List of Figures	vii
List of Diagrams	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	
1.0 Introduction	1-2
1.1 Background	3-10
1.2 Problem Statement	10-11
1.3 Research Objective	11
1.4 Research Question	12
1.5 Purpose of Research	12
1.6 Significance of Research	13
1.7 Limitations	13

1.8	Audiences	14
1.9	Conclusion	14
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW		
2.0	Introduction	15-16
2.1	Folk Custom and Folklore	17-18
2.2	Folklore Context in Formal Form and ‘Faklore’ in Informal Form	18-21
2.3	Portrayal of Folklore in Film	21-22
2.4	Portrayal of Folklore in Asian Film	22-24
2.5	Faklore Element in Chinese Film	24-26
2.6	Conclusion	26-27
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH APPROACHES		
3.0	Introduction	28-29
3.1	Research Design	30-31
3.2	Research Approach	31-34
3.3	Data Analysis	34-35
3.4	Conclusion	35
CHAPTER 4 FINDING AND DISCUSSION		
4.0	Introduction	36-37
4.1	Film Analysis Discussion – ‘Painted Skin’	37

4.1.1	Film ‘Painted Skin’	37-38
4.1.2	Story of ‘Painted Skin’	38-40
4.1.3	The Adaptation from the Original to Film	40-41
4.1.4	The Variation of Film According to Generation and Society	42-43
4.2	Film Analysis Discussion – ‘A Chinese Ghost Story’	43
4.2.1	Film ‘A Chinese Ghost Story’	43-44
4.2.2	Story of ‘A Chinese Ghost Story’	44-45
4.2.3	The Adaptation from the Original to Film	46-47
4.2.4	The Variation of Film According to Generation and Society	47-48
4.3	Project Application	48-52
4.4	Conclusion	53
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
5.0	Introduction	54
5.1	Conclusion of Research	55
5.2	Recommendation	56
5.3	Conclusion	56
REFERENCES		57-63
 APPENDIX		64-73

ABSTRACT

This research is aimed to study the portrayal of Chinese fakelore in film. The manufactural or imitation of fake culture and how the adapted in fakelore must be deeply analyzed. This is due to the understanding of the fakelore inside the film are not clear among people since what they knew about fakelore film is Zhang Yimou's film. Hence, the aim of this research is to explain and analyze the fakelore element that portrays in Chinese film. The end of the research is the applied of fakelore in storyline, costume, and props in short film as a result that captured using several methods which is analyzing the content, interview and applies method.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji berkaitan penggambaran 'fakelore' Cina dalam filem. Sesuatu pembuatan atau tiruan daripada budaya palsu dan bagaimana 'fakelore' disesuaikan harus dikaji dengan lebih terperinci. Hal ini adalah disebabkan pemahaman terhadap 'fakelore' dalam filem tidak jelas dalam kalangan orang di samping apa yang mereka ketahui tentang filem 'fakelore' adalah filem Zhang Yimou. Oleh itu, tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk menerangkan dan menganalisis unsur 'fakelore' yang digambarkan dalam filem Cina. Akhir kajian adalah pengaplikasian 'fakelore' dalam jalan cerita, kostum, dan prop dalam filem pendek sebagai hasil yang menggunakan beberapa kaedah yang menganalisis kandungan, temuramah dan juga kaedah aplikasi.

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGES
Figure 4.1: Film ‘Painted Skin’ Poster	39
Figure 4.2: Film ‘A Chinese Ghost Story’ Poster	45
Figure 5.1: A Spritism Ceremony to Find Dead Bodies	51
Figure 5.2: Throw Watermelon to Find Something Missing	51
Figure 5.3: Taoist Holds A Peachsword During A Ceremony	51
Figure 5.4: A Fake Ceremony Which Has Been Adapted in Short Film – ‘The Bitter Sweet Watermelon’	52
Figure 5.5: The Red Stamp On Forehead	52
Figure 5.6: Taoist With Yellow Color Robe	53
Figure 5.7: Created Fakelore Which It Changed Into Chinese Traditional Hanfu	53

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

DIAGRAM	PAGES
Diagram 3.1 Research Design	30

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Folkloristic is the folk custom that inherited from generation to generation. It can be in many forms such as during the work, daily life, traditional festival, society activities, growth stage even marriage and funeral and the others. It is the custom that most closed to the culture of what the people inherit from the culture before. A lot of folk custom existed until today, especially in the society. There is a basic concept in people's minds, they have to conduct a wedding ceremony to get the social approval. On the other hand, many of the folk customs have their own taboo.

Winick (2014) stated that folklore is a term that coined out by William John Thoms in the year 1846. It is a traditional customs, beliefs, stories, and sayings that arise out of a culture. (Folklore, n.d.). Until now, film as a tool or medium for the filmmakers to tell a story or deliver some message to the audience. The film often used folk custom as the element or story inside the film narrative. In general, almost every film will have a folklore element inside as long as the story was connected to people's life. In film context, it can be seen especially in the film that directed by the fifth-generation filmmakers, from China such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige.

Brunvand (1996) explained that Richard Mercer Dorson coined out the terms 'fakelore' in the year 1950, which means an imitation folklore or a story created by modern author and passed off as genuinely traditional are determined as fakelore, a manufactural folklore. Zhang Yimou is famous with his 'fakelore' film which has been created something that different with the original folk custom, especially the imaginary lantern myth in the film – 'Rise of the Red Lantern'. ('Jie du zhang yi mou jing dian da hong deng long gao gao gua', 2016)

The general aim of this research is to give a clear explanation of fakelore film to filmmakers, film students and those who are related or interested in this study. The folk custom that applies inside the film might become the core of a film to bring the story develop. This research discusses the fakelore element inside the film and what type of the folk custom that applies to the story. The informal folk custom 'fakelore' as an imitation of folklore that has been created or adapted from folklore. The researcher will discuss the applies of fakelore context inside a film.

1.1 BACKGROUND

There is not only one folklore but many in this world. Folklore is the folk custom. In general, it is the lifestyle that creates, use and inherits by people from a country or a nation. It appears as the needed of community life of human society. No longer, its forms expand and evolution continually in the specific nation, generation and territory. This changes also formed the different folk custom in the world no matter in Eastern or Western.

In general, 'folkloristic'/ 'folklore' is refers to the people's knowledge at the early time about folk custom, traditional beliefs, myth and legend, tales, culture, verbal literature that forming one of the parts of our tradition. At now, 'folkloristic'/ 'folklore' can be used to the definition as the study and research of folk knowledge and culture. Winick (2014) stated that the terms of 'folklore' were suggested by W.J. Thomas, who was a British antiquarian in 1846.

Schlosser (n.d.) explained that 'folklore' was appeared as a simple term to replace for the term 'popular antiquities', 'the lore of the people', 'the old-world manners, customs, observances, popular superstitions, ballads, proverbs, of the olden times'.

Although there are a wide range of folk custom and might be different among custom according to the territory. In a summary, people inherited by generation in time and expanding from one territory to another territory. As an example, in Chinese custom, the adult will give red envelopes to children or the elder during the traditional festival - Chinese New Year to represent good luck and blessing. But of

course, it also transforms into another form during its inherited process based on the territory. ('Shen me shi min su', n.d.).

The traditional custom that constant until today is the custom during the Spring Festival. This particular festival was the biggest festival in Chinese society. Before the Spring Festival, every family needs to prepare a lot of special purchases for the Spring Festival. In addition to this, they also need to clean up the house and prepare the confectionery snacks to serve their relatives and friends during the festival.

'Shen Me Shi Min Su' (n.d.) as China websites that discuss Chinese folklore also explained that the people have an old habit during the New Year Eve. Family reunion dinner is the most important thing during the New Year's Eve. It represents people growing a year older. They will gather together and stay up late or all night on New Year's Eve after New Year's Eve dinner. The adult will explain to the children the reason why they have to stay up, a storytelling time will be conducted to let the children know more about the Chinese traditional culture and custom.

The custom of traditional firecrackers also relates to the Monster Nian (the monster like make trouble during the New Year's Eve, it also will destroy crops and animals in other edition. People beat drums and gong, let off fireworks and plastered their house with red paper to beat off the Monster Nian). As time passes, the custom became the Chinese Traditional Festival and has been in use ever since. ('Shen Me Shi Min Su', n.d.).

People having vegetarian food on the first day of Spring Festival while they will start having meat dishes on the second day of Spring Festival. People will have

many custom and taboo during these days, for example, cannot sweep the floor, cannot wash the hair, avoid saying something unlucky, and the others. The second day of Spring Festival is known as mothering that one's daughter and her husband visit the women's parental home.

Folkloristics (n.d.) explained that folkloristics is a study of folklore. The existence of folklore formed the self-knowledge among the nation or country as one of the identities of their characteristic. After that, the term 'folkloristic' coined by Reinhold Kohler to study about the folk custom that seeking for its nature structure, characteristic and social function besides research, collect, collate, describe, analysis and argument. (Dundes, 1999)

'Min Su Yu Min Su Xue' (n.d.) stated that there is also various subfield from folkloristic, such as oral literature as the research object to study mythology, folktale, proverbs, epic, folk song and the others. Second, folk custom about the ceremony such as family system, social system, marriage and funeral, superstitious, games and folk dance or music. Next, the folk religion that discusses the folk beliefs. The religion, Buddhist or Taoism, spirits, reincarnation, evil spirits, divination or prediction, sorcery and folk medicine. The last, material folk culture about the focus on life. Folk art, folk architecture, folk costumes and foods that exist in our life.

Although the folklorist thinks that the folk beliefs are different compared to the religion, and it is something more like superstition or sorcery in the early days. However, the folklorist always feels interested in the religion area as their research object. Some folk beliefs, represent the spiritual connection between human and nature. ('Shen Me Shi Min Su', n.d.).

The folk medicine that exists until today is scrapping therapy. In Chinese custom, this method was used for the people who are sunstroke, catch a chill, headache, or slight fever. The people mostly choose scrapping therapy except take an injection or medicine. Not only because of this kind of method cheaper than injection and medicine but also can faster recovery. The traditional Chinese therapy of scraping the body channels help to improve blood circulation to bring out the wind-evil (ailment said due to cold or exposure). In general, the people use a small spoon, coins or another method, together with branch water, fresh ginger or mint oil scrape on human skin. According to different shades that appear on the human skin, someone's condition can be estimated.

'Shen Me Shi Min Su' (n.d.) also mentioned that the productive labor folk custom is the custom in producing matter process. This custom along with the process of matters reflect the thought of people. This had affected the producing of matter in the long history and has a certain effect. For example, agriculture custom, fishery custom, forestry custom which have an inseparable relationship with nature as the elder said, we are all the creatures of gods, revering life and remote from something that is worst.

Daily life custom including the costume, cooking, residential custom and the others that purpose to fulfilled someone needs. With the changing and progress of time, from the beginning that satisfies the physiological needs until later, the development of society and the changing of hierarchy in society caused diversified custom. Not only the physiological needed but also including the need for safety, love that more complex compared to the basic necessities of life.

Traditional festival custom shows the wisdom of the ancients that master the knowledge through observed the astrology and those traditional festivals also shows that the different level development of social, economics, science and technology from different dynasty. For the people created folklore through oral and produced than spread among the people to reflect the life and ideology of people to shows the aesthetic idea and interest. Folklore can be divided into three categories. The oral literature such as mythology, legend, jokes and various folktale. The folk poetry such as epic and folk song, proverbs while the others such as folk storytelling and folk opera.

Magoulick (n.d.) stated that performance theory is a theory used in folklore studies, as a part of folklore research paradigm shift in 20 century. Folklore as a part of the culture to spread and show to the audience, to let them understand the culture by providing a complete context. Various culture manifestation based on the religious background also described. The oral art through folk instrument used to tell folktale and offing they use the performance theory to explain the narrative about religion context.

‘Min Jian Ge Se Zang Fa Fen Xi’ (2011) explains that the most special folk custom in Chinese Society is marriage and funeral. In ancient times, the forming and choice of ways of the funeral was related to people’s destiny. The ancients regarded the Feng Shui’ is important and they tried to find the best places to bury in good condition in order to protect their later generations. Although there are various funeral ways and customs, in fact, until now they existed as a symbol system that reflecting people’s ideology and concept to the real world and the world after they die.

‘Min Jian Ge Se Zang Fa Fen Xi’ (2011) also mentioned that the ancients have a concept of ‘burial peace to the deceased’. The one way that we know well is burial underground. The Han nationality will make a coffin to burial the deceased together with some clothes, the things that the deceased favored before he/ she dies or some joss paper to be burnt for the dead. In the early days, the wealthy and noble family will burial with some golden and treasure. Cremation is a funeral way that rises with the coming of Buddhist and has a long history. In the beginning, this is the way that used for monks and priests, Afterwards, the believer started to imitation but these funeral ways are a clash with the concept of burial underground. The dominator of feudal society strongly against to this kind of funeral ways.

During the Qing Dynasty, cheongsam as the costumes of the eight banners women. Not only to keep warm but at the same time, cheongsam also as a symbolize of identity. ‘Qi Pao Ceng Shi Shen Fen Deng Ji Xiang Zheng’ (2016) explained that now the ordinary people also can wears cheongsam along with the social development, and cheongsam not just only a privilege for the upper class in society.

A lot of horror story which is related to the culture of ghosts and gods, most of them come from the folktale. After a period of time and the changes of territory, the original story might be developed until the edition that we all know today. Some of them evolved became the unique culture and folk custom. The terrorist custom in the Chinese society such as Obon festival, spirit festival, ghost marriage, crazy spirit and the others.

The famous Chinese novel Ghost Story, written by Pu Songling of Ching Dynasty was one of the famous ghosts and gods stories. Those spirits who are more

powerful and stands beyond the human existence in the novel. People conduct lustrum to drives out evil spirits, and these folk custom evolved to the traditional festival such as Hungry Ghost Festival that the hell will release the ghost to the human world at that day in tales.

When this folk custom appears in drama series or movies. Another method was used to spread the message of Karma or causal circle. According to the Hindu and Buddhist religions, the people believe that all the good and bad things that someone does in this life affect how good or bad their future lives will, that is why the karma terms come from. The drama series or movies spread the message of poetical justice and at the same time combined with the social and historical background to reflect the reality to achieve the aim of to do good turns.

Knappert (1999) stated that Southeast Asian written traditions were assimilated, transformed, and carried in oral form in popular everyday village religious practice; and myths, legends, and stories, which were part of local oral histories and cultures, were subsequently codified and reinterpreted in the printed word.

Most of the literature written by a court writer, officer, scholar and ritual specialists – king and princess, referred to the adventure and fantasy of the elite members, sometimes related to gods and spirits. The human, as the creation of the world, always connected with the supernatural worlds in this type of stories as one of the parts of United cosmos.

The terms ‘fakelore’ was coined out by Richard M. Dorson in 1950 which means an imitation folklore or a story created by modern author and passed off as

genuinely traditional, are determined as a manufactural folklore. Brunvand (1996) stated that fakelore is not a product of folk or folklore process but the product of writers. Zhang Yimou is famous with his 'fakelore' film which has been created something different with the original folk custom or totally created by himself, especially the imaginary lantern myth in his film – 'Rise of the Red Lantern'. ('Jie du zhang yi mou jing dian da hong deng long gao gao gua', 2016)

To sum it up, folklore as the wisdom treasure that inherited by us from generation to generation is a precious folk custom. Once people forget it, these folk custom will disappear forever. Although the existence of folklore still a question to the scholar whether it is a superstition or a sorcery, but it is still the custom from the ancients as one of the fact that improved the development of the world in the area of social, economics, science and technology.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A culture might exist but as time goes on, the culture itself can disappear. The filmmakers had to recreate or adapted from the culture to 'represent' the culture. Wu (2006) explained that there is a misunderstanding concept among the audiences who watched Zhang Yimou's film since some of the audience has no idea about the 'fakelore' film. The audiences did not think seriously about it. After they watched the film, they automatically classify it as a 'Folklore' film because of the element inside with national features, and the custom that is unique.

Dundes (1985) stated that Richard M. Dorson has critic about fakelore but there should not have any discrimination through fakelore since a fakelore can be a

folklore. In fact, fakelore might same with folklore, as a part of culture needs and we as a researcher, doing a research from a folklore perspective in fakelore.

Durian Films and Television (2017) stated that some people say that Zhang Yimou's film is full of 'fakelore' and he often used these 'fakelore' element to express the story in his mind. Majority of the journal mentioned about Zhang Yimou's film that portrays a fakelore element inside. Not only Zhang's film, but also the film adapted based on fakelore also can be a part of it, too. The researcher would like to explore this aspect that showing the different form that adapted from a novel.

According to this matter, the researcher can say that the folklore itself not only mention on how is it been told inside a film but also how the folklore can be applying in the film either into formal form – 'folklore' and informal form – 'fakelore'. Therefore, fakelore element that applies in film needs to define and analysis in deep.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explain the context of folklore in formal form – 'folklore' and informal form – 'fakelore'.
2. To analyze folklore and fakelore elements that applied in Chinese film.
3. To apply fakelore as an element in short film project.