THE FRAGMENTED FAMILY THEME IN FILM

Dickson Ng Chia Wei

Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
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THE FRAGMENTED FAMILY THEME IN FILM

DICKSON NG CHIA WEI

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

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

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2018
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This declaration is made on the Friday of 8 June 2018.

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I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all who have contributed, either directly or indirectly in completing my research. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my mentor, Ms. Teo Miaw Lee, for her generous guidance and patience leading me to complete this research and at the same time sharpen my understanding about what is research methodology. I also want to say a big thank you to my parents because giving me a hope and keep supporting me in terms of financial and encouragement. Also to all my friends for their moral support and sharing their opinion and experience to improve my research from time to time.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study about the fragmented family theme in film. For this thesis, the research is conducted mainly based on the film directed by Malaysian Director Ho Yu Hang, which is “Rain Dogs”. There are very few researchers who are conducting researches on fragmented family theme in film, especially on Malaysian films. There are many famous film directors who made films based on fragmented family theme, including the renowned film director from Hollywood, Steven Spielberg, and the films actually received a good review from public. With that, the researcher will be focusing on how a film of fragmented family theme is made according to the data collected in my research methodology. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to conduct this research about fragmented family theme in film so that the outcome of the thesis will bring contributions in the Malaysian film industry.
ABSTRAK

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Renowned Aussie Film Director, Peter Jackson once said, “Film is such a powerful medium. It is like a weapon and I think you have a duty of self-censor”. Film is recognized as one of the most powerful art medium to deliver the message through audiovisual content. Film directors can make films based on created storyline or even based on real life story. A good storyline of the film can really stay in the heart of millions for many decades, even until they are passing away. There are various way for the filmmakers to market their films. Some of them adapt the story from best-selling books, cartoons, anime, comic and TV series to grab the audience to watch their film. Some of them adapt the story from real live events to make the audience believe in what they watch in the cinema.
This research is aimed to conduct a research on “Fragmented Family Theme In Film”. With that, the research also aims to study the fragmented family theme film based on a local Malaysian film directed by Ho Yu Hang, “Rain Dogs”. It is crucial to carry out this research based on the local film due to the reason that the local film is more relevant to Malaysian despite of films from Hollywood or other countries. Besides that, this research will also analyze the cinematic style used in fragmented family film. Last but not least, the research will testify the fragmented family theme.

The idea of this research derived from the researcher’s experience being brought up in a single-parent family. Growing up in a single-parent family is not easy as it is as the absence of father or mother can lay immediate effect on the children, such as children are facing negligence from the adults and will conduct unhealthy activities without the supervision of the adults. It is significant to conduct this research on how fragmented family films are made according to filmmakers in the industry. This situation is also similar to the situation of fragmented family due to the separation of the parent, or the parent are busy working days and night, and this situation may disrupt the lines of communication between each other. This research is important in hopes to bring awareness to the society using the effective outcome of this research. Films can deliver its theme, its concept, its message to the audiences. The message of fragmented family theme in a film is conveyed through specific cinematic style to connect with the audiences.
“Film is communication, film is rhetoric, and the relationship between interpersonal and media communication is interactive” (Protoc II & Adler, 2009, p.393).

There are filmmakers who made films based on their fragmented family experience as well and one of them is Steven Spielberg, who made the film “Catch Me If You Can” based on his own childhood experience.

“Spielberg’s early family difficulties seem to have provided raw material for a filmography crammed with broken homes, abandoned children, and wayward, would-be, or substitute fathers. His family relocated a number of times when he was a child, from Ohio to New Jersey to Arizona to California. While his mother Leah was indulgent to the young boy’s interests, Spielberg’s father Arnold was emotionally distant, and he and Steven did not have a good relationship. He has said that his father never gave him his approval until his dad’s fellow workers walked up to him and said they’d seen his son’s movies and they really liked them. Eventually, his parents’ marriage began to fall apart. Steven would shove towels under his door to keep out the noise of the arguments. They were soon divorced, and Steven was estranged from his father for fifteen years. It is this early hardship that seems to have provided Spielberg with his greatest source of inspiration.” (Lehman, 2004)

The uneasy hardships in Spielberg’s childhood had inspired him to take on a movie entitled “Catch Me If You Can”. That is undeniable that Catch Me If You Can
has not been shaped along familiar Hollywood lines. Unlike Abagnale's more free-form biography, the movie is the story of a boy trying to reclaim his relationship with his father—a search-for-daddy saga. Frank Jr. isn't just out to make heaps of money and to sleep with a lot of mini-skirted stewardesses in pillbox hats—although both are major assets of this handsome con artist's life. It's also to get revenge against the banks and the government that have stripped his father, Frank Sr. Christopher Walken of dignity and caused him to lose the woman of his dreams, Frank Jr.'s beautiful, narcissistic French mother, Nathalie Baye.

Therefore, for this research, Ho Yu Hang’s film, “Rain Dogs” is selected as the main film to be studied on the purposes of this research. The film focuses on the separation of the parent and its effect on the children. The film portrays the situation of the fragmented family and this film is the most suitable artwork for this research. This research will analyse the cinematic style that he used to express this fragmented family as a film theme to make this film “Rain Dogs” from the aspect of cinematic style, and also the art direction and the concept that was used.

1.1 Background of Study

Most film directors, like any artist, are inspired in their work by their own life experiences. This is more readily apparent in some director’s films than others. There are also other Malaysian filmmakers who made films based on family issues.
“The film “Sholay” focuses on the family, on the figure of the renouncer-hero, on the particular context of the vengeance plus its employment of a local form situates it firmly and unambiguously within the tradition of the Indian cinema.” (Heide, 2002, p.53)

However, the main focus of this research is to analyse fragmented family as a theme in film. What is the reason why the directors wish to do film about fragmented families? Moreover, how do they portray these situations through films? Is there any message that they wish to deliver through these scenes?

As a conclusion, there are specific categories that will be focused on so that the outcome of this research will be effective and solid. Malaysian audiences come from different kinds of backgrounds hence presenting the question of the acceptance of fragmented family as a film theme in Ho Yu Hang’s film and will this be able to contribute to other filmmakers to work on fragmented family as a film theme in their future work.

1.2 Problem Statement

The scenes inside “Rain Dogs” can represent the situation about fragmented family, besides watching all the visual played on the screen, the researcher strongly believe that there are other factors that makes this fragmented family movie so effective. However, this is something that normal audiences would not go deeper into. They may shed tears in the cinema but they will not understand the ways that it
is portrayed through films. How does the film really enable them to cry and also how the message is delivered through the film. There also some famous director who convey the message through visual through his way of storytelling.

“Director Robert Zemeckis likely kept this in mind when he filmed the “seat’s taken” scene of Forrest Gump. As the young Forrest makes his way down a school bus aisle, we see through his eyes as classmates sneer at him and refuse to share their seats. Then, the camera shifts back to Forrest’s face, allowing us to view his reaction—a quiet expression of hurt. As viewers, we cannot help but ache for this little boy. Our own experiences, gathered throughout the course of our lives, are the ammunition behind such powerful narrative fiction. “First, from his point of view, we’re feeling what he’s feeling,” says Howard Sklar, a post doctoral researcher in the English Philology Unit at the University of Helsinki. (Nuwer, 2013)

The cinematic style that was manipulated and designed is very important to further convey the message directly or indirectly to the viewers. Ho Yu Hang has a unique way of storytelling. He does not just focus on positive side of a scenario, he also shows the negative side of the scenario to help audiences understand the movie through his cinematic style to express fragmented family theme in film. The Kuala Lumpur depicted in Ho Yu Hang’s Rain Dogs is bustling, seedy, unfinished, on a slow brew threatening to boil over. He shows only cheap, sleazy motels, low-cost flats, backstreet food stalls, smoky, illegal snooker halls and dubious auto workshops. And these are populated, not by suit-wearing businessmen and high-
maintenance women, but by thugs, bookies, prostitutes and murderers. This is the underbelly of KL rarely seen in local productions. Tung is the leading character of the movie. He intentionally ran away from his broken family, and is influenced badly by the negative side of the hustle city. He looks for his brother and his brother is murdered.

Therefore, the researcher will explore the fragmented theme through the analysis of mainly based on Ho Yu Hang’s “Rain Dogs” and also some parts of Steven Spielberg “Catch Me If You Can” and to analyse Ho Yu Hang’s unique cinematic expression in fragmented family theme in film.

1.3 Research Objective

This research is based on three main objectives in regards to the research of fragmented family films as a film theme mainly based on Ho Yu Hang’s “Rain Dogs”

i. To study the fragmented family theme in film.

ii. To analyze the cinematic style used to express fragmented family theme in film.

iii. To testify the fragmented family theme in the short film directed by the researcher.
1.4 Research Question

The research question presented are in relation to the objectives pertaining to this research.

i. How does fragmented family films be used as a film theme to tell audiovisual story?

ii. What cinematic style is used to express fragmented family theme in film?

iii. What is the result testified through researcher’s short film?

1.5 Purpose of Research

This research is important in bringing assurance to filmmakers that fragmented family can be used as a film theme to develop their work. It can contribute in giving inspiration and motivation to the filmmakers to create films based on the theme of fragmented family with the usage of the correct and unique cinematic style. It is significant for them to understand so that they can deliver the message to the audiences correctly.

1.6 Significance of Study

This research will contribute to the understanding of audience in fragmented family films. Besides that, a better understanding on these fragmented films would
also help other filmmakers to make better and more effective fragmented family films based on the outcome of this research. With this, it is really significant to carry out this research as it can really affect the public in positive ways as there are countless people who are suffering from the fragmented family situation.

1.7 Restriction / Limitations

This research is limited by referencing other resources and studies on it. There are less peoples who are interested in this topic and they would not want to put in effort into it. Most of the film critics are only based on the award-winning films. The restriction and limitation are set for this research to avoid this research going out of topic and at the same time allow the researcher to focus on what is to be studied and its results.

1.8 Audience

The audience for this research will be aimed at the point of view of Malaysian audience to keep on track despite their different background and because dysfunctional families may happen to all. This research will be conducted by focusing on film enthusiast who are interested in the making of the fragmented family films.
1.9 Conclusion

Film nowadays are labeled as one of the most powerful media to delivering the message and also one for of art. By understanding the story, the audience will able to understand the message. Therefore, the research is carried out in hopes that the outcomes of this research would benefit the filmmakers who are interested in these fragmented film and they can come out with better film that would bring a lot of advantages to the public, be it national or even worldwide.
2.0 Introduction

The question here to be answered - What is a family? A family is a group of individuals closely related by blood, marriage or choices, as spouses, parents, sons, daughters, whether dwelling together or falling apart, respected or rejected, estranged or reconciled. Therefore, how does a fragmented family occur or portrait through films? Conflicts and estrangements may be generated by any kind of provocation. Every family’s experience is unique, different and special, reflecting complex element. Bitter conflicts may occur when a promise is not kept, a shameful secret is divulged, expectations are not fulfilled, an inheritance is withheld. For example as to be screened in some scenes, a man is seeking forgiveness from his own son,