

Research On the ‘Southbound Filmmakers’ with Their National Images: Diaspora, Anxiety and Spiritual Identification

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Abstract: The ‘southbound filmmakers’ refers to a group of filmmakers who, during 1931–1966, went to the Southeast Asia from the cities like Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chongqing. They are one of the important parts of China’s filmmakers and their films is a significant attempt disseminating at abroad in the early days. To analyze the Southbound Filmmakers’ identity construction as well their activities such as living in the Southeast Asia, film-makings and dissemination, this paper adopts psychology, psychoanalysis, national identification, audience reception, etc., associated with theories like ‘culture, anxiety, identity and ideology’ under the overview of behavioral science. The ‘Southbound filmmakers’ is not only a group of filmmakers, but a historical concept and a special cinematic phenomenon. The diaspora complex and national identification were the important spiritual pillars for the filmmakers to carry on their film and social activities in the Southeast Asia. The Southbound films’ dissemination overseas is a helpful attempt for the Chinese films. Even though the filmmakers had different subjective activities and varied film contents, it objectively strengthened Chinese films’ connections with its foreign counterparts, promoted China’s films’ influences and increased Chinese culture’s dissemination in other countries, which is significant and has a long-time effect.

Keywords: Southbound Filmmakers; National Identification; Home Country Images; Spiritual Anxiety, Diaspora Complex

1. Introduction

For the full-scale consideration on restating film’s history and research perspectives, this

paper studies the activities of the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ from 1931 to 1966, it is the beginning of anti-Japanese and the ending of the ‘seventeen years’(1949-1966), which could be divided four important active phrases for the ‘Southbound filmmakers’. Under the scope of cultural identity, the following problems should be clarified, that is to find out when and where the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ coming into being and what the value of it, what their situation was like at that time and where they were going and the significance of it. In order to do that, it is necessary to collect the newspapers, magazines, pictorials, books during that period for the purpose of comprehensive study. At the same time, this paper also takes the Southbound filmmakers’ commercial, social and national activities into account under the guidance of community consciousness and cultural identity for defining what the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ means, exploring how this cinematic phenomenon comes into being and finding out what the realities were when it disseminated across areas, through which to fully study the film makers, along with their works, activities, this phenomenon and its effects, to accentuate their significance for the present. It hopes that this paper could provide references for rewriting Chinese film history.

2. Diaspora Complex: The Emotional Identification of the ‘Southbound Filmmakers’

To explore the origins of the ‘Southbound filmmakers’, a sort of ‘logic of the reality’ should be followed, that is ‘the perspective of science and philosophy, which demands to see the nature and changes in the process’. It, on one hand, could find out the causes of China’s films’ dissemination and influences in the Asian Southeast; on the other hand could look for the effects they brought. And it could be regarded as a ‘historical mirror’ for China’s

films nowadays. The study on the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ can be found in the film history, however, all its historical phrases didn’t get full study. The past study paid more attention to the years after 1945 mainly about the Southeast Asian filmmakers, while the Singapore-bound counterparts were neglected. Along with the help of IT technology and the access of more and more digital resources about China’s films home and abroad, to further study them becomes possible and convenient. Therefore, this paper will adopt textual research method with the help of digital technology to search and extract the records and historical materials about the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ in a vast text and data sea through identifying and distinguishing to supplement the past study’s lack of materials. By restoring the original faces of China’s early films and studying their makers’ creations, activities, dissemination and effects, it hopes that this paper became a useful piece for the puzzle of the China’s film history.

The reason to summarize and comment the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ and their national film-making activities because it has the following values: the first is the supporting value. Through collecting and combing the scattering materials, the empty spots could be cleared and fulfilled. For example, the important filmmakers like Sima Wensen, Wang Weiyi, Yang Shaoren whose activities and creations in the Southeast Asia, as well as Hou Yao, Wang Ying and Wu Cun in the Asian Southeast areas; the second is the proof value for how their national images were constructed, which involves the filmmaker’s complex identities and psychologies, their diaspora, their films’ nationality, and their diverse expressive methods, while they all needs to be proved and clarified based on the concrete historical facts and materials. The last is the value for reshaping art and academic ideologies. That is to differentiate the different receptions and arguments among the Southeast Asian films. Because the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ lived in a complex cultural times, whose national ideologies and images’ creating proved what was the ‘Chinese language films’ under the scope of the ideology of China’s film history, and the key point is to pin down their relationship from the point of national community consciousness.

To trace the origins of the ‘Southbound

filmmakers’ and their creation should start from the concept of this group and find out values by asking: who they were, why they went South and what they wanted to do; from the angle of their movement to find out values by where they were from, where they went and how they sustained themselves; from the angle of their activities to find out values by how they created, what they created and why they did thus and what their creative styles were; from the angle of their communication from different places to find out values by how they blended in, integrated, lived, developed and communicated; and from the angle of historical influences to find out values by how their subjectivity was constructed, why national culture had its own consciousness and how the cultural identity disseminated. All above-mentioned values mainly demonstrate in the academic and practical fields:

Firstly, for the academic value, this paper is the continuing and echoing of the study on the ‘Southbound scholars’, which means the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ will be observed under it, that will not only fulfill the former’s study, but amend the latter’s unfulfilled study at present, as well as contribute an angle and a little energy for rewriting film’s history. From their film making activities and creations to study how they constructed national community consciousness and how the national images disseminated locally and across areas, it will provide a new paradigm for the national images’ writing and disseminating; through film companies, commercial networks and Chinese film theaters, along with combing the developing and accepting histories of their national images creations at macro and micro levels, it could find out how the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ promoted and influenced the Asia’s Southeast films.

Secondly, for the practical value, this paper’s study starts from the beginning of anti-Japanese to the ending of the ‘seventeen years’, which includes four phrases: the early 1930s, before and after the 1940s, the transitional period between the 1940 and 1950 and the early 1960s. However, the study about the former two phrases is not enough. Spatially, the origins of the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ is expanded, which are from Shanghai, Guangzhou and the the Southeast Asia, trying to right the mistakes and fulfill the empties. At

the same time, it hopes that this paper could, to some extent, reconstruct the film history in the the Southeast Asia based on the discourse of China's film, so as to get rid of the cover above it made by the 'Chinese lingual system'. finally, it hopes that this paper could offer some strategic suggestions for China's national films' dissemination abroad for the 'Southbound filmmakers' had taken the responsibilities in their films about China's images' dissemination.

Therefore, it is very valuable to accumulate and sort the historical materials because they are scattering in many different countries and very rare. It is also valuable for the present study to peel off the complexity and dissect the wholeness from the Chinese-language film system, the complexity comes from the rather wide fields that the study object involves, and the web-like systems of reception among the colonies in the the Southeast Asia, while the wholeness refers to the above-mentioned three spaces are inter-connected. Since the 'Southbound filmmakers' and the overseas Chinese, as variables, are hard to measure, it has some innovative values to define their changes.

3. National Spirit: The Image Value of the 'Southbound Filmmakers'

The 'Southbound filmmakers' extremely identified themselves with their homeland, country and nationality, on this basis, they strengthened the connection between the films and their counterparts in the Southeast Asia through disseminating the images and cultural movement. In a long time, the study on them is mostly concentrate on the individuals or introducing and admiring some films. Around the new century, though they got more and more attentions academically, the study on them, especially on the filmmakers to the Southeast Asia is still not enough compared with those to the Southeast Asia after 1946. In recent years, the fast-growing of China's films and the national confidence strengthened the constructing of the national community consciousness on the image level, which promoted the real-sensed academic study on this group and their national image creations, covering the fields ranging from history, literature, art, communication and sociology. Since then, they got more and more attention from the scholars home and abroad.

3.1 Study on the 'Southbound Filmmakers' in China

In China, the direct study on the 'Southbound filmmakers' is rather few, the focus is mostly concentrated on combing and studying the filmmakers, which can be proved by the works such as 'HK Film Review' [1], 'History of HK Film Art', 'Drifting South: Shanghai Emigre Filmmakers and Postwar HK Films (1946-1966)'[2] 'Downstream and Countercurrent: Rewriting the History of HK Film [3], they just made some researches about what the filmmakers had done for the purpose of confirmation, although it's not specific study but offered some innovative insights. Besides, some articles such as Cantonese Filmmakers Going to the Southeast Asia in the 1930s and Its Subsequent Effects and Exploring the Origins of filmmakers heading south to the Southeast Asia in the 1930s (1934-1936), some research paper like 'Escape and Rebirth: Shanghai filmmakers heading south to the Southeast Asia' and 'the Southeast Asia films about the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in 1930s and 1940s', all studied the filmmakers' activities, their films' dissemination and reception in those areas prosperity in the 1930s and 1940s. However, even though those articles mentioned the film companies like 'Tianyi', 'Lianhua', and 'Yihua' went South during 1934--1937, they didn't consider Guangdong Cantonese opera actors and Guangzhou opera students who went to the Southeast Asia as the 'Southbound Filmmakers', and opined that it was the first 'Southbound' when those Shanghai filmmakers such as Shao Zuiweng, Zhu Qingxian, Tang Xiaodan, Su Yi, Shao Renmei, Hou Yao, Li Yingyuan, and Jiang Baigu went to HK, which is doubtful and should be reconsidered.

The study on the 'Southbound filmmakers' put more attentions to their diaspora situation and nationality, especially on the films after 1946, discussed several peak times that the filmmakers went South, which can be seen in the following works: 'Reflections: Made in H K', 'Changes in the HK Film Industry', 'Politics, Art, or Commerce: The Interaction and Influence of Mainland and HK Films Since 1949' [4], 'Historical Perspective and Realistic Reflection on HK Film from the Perspective of New Concepts', 'The Story of Two Cities - Cultural Politics of Early Chinese Films', 'HK

Film Night and Fog', 'Cross Century Freeze Frame -100 Years of HK Film' 'HK New Wave Film', and 'Galaxy Reflection: The Global Spread of HK Type Films'. They only gave a glimpse to the 'Southbound filmmakers' when discussing filmmakers. Some research book like 'Cold War, Modernity, and the Complex of Discrepancy' : A Discussion on the Unique Position of 'Southern Film People 'in Chinese Film History', 'Moving Forward in the Vortex of History -Yue Feng and Postwar HK Films', and 'New Exploration of the Interaction between Film People from Mainland and HK before and after the Establishment of New China', Wang explained 'Preliminary Exploration of the Relationship between Shanghai and HK Film Industry in the Early Years of the Founding of the People's Republic of China (1949-1952)', 'Southern Film Actors, Literary Adaptions and Classicization of Modern Chinese Literature', and Liu explained 'The Differentiation and Fission of Shanghai Film Tradition (1945 1965)', those articles studied those filmmakers after war and offered some insightful points on the issues of their identities and diaspora complex, but the study on their national images and national community consciousness were not enough.

For the historical works and articles on films in China, the 'Southbound filmmakers' were discussed and elucidated at different levels, especially those in the Southeast Asia were oft-mentioned, but still not quite a lot, the representative works are 'Introduction to East Asian Film', 'Chinese Film in Singapore', 'History of HK Film Art', 'Introduction to Film', and 'A Study on the Communication of HK Films in East and Southeast Asia'. The main viewpoint of these research papers is 'hand by hand, the mainland filmmakers with HK film companies made a great number of masterpieces following closely with the times in the film's history'[5], Tan studied those filmmakers' some activities during the WWII, and explained 'the mainland filmmakers cultural self-consciousness and social responsibility delivered a simulation to HK's profit-oriented Cantonese films', when she was discussing 'the phenomenon that filmmakers went South in succession because of the political turmoils' [6]. Lu said 'Chinese Film Spread Abroad in The Twentieth Century Twenties and Thirties' [7], combed China's films' dissemination in Asia's Southeast areas

during 1920-1930 based on the historical materials he forged in the mainland, but did not give a whole picture for the dissemination of the films of the 'Southbound filmmakers'. In his articles 'The Intervention and Influence of Nan yang on the Development of Early Chinese Film Production (1923-1949)', 'The Spread and Influence of Chinese Films in Singapore', and 'Popular Culture and Entertainment: The Production of Chinese Ancient Costume Films during the WWII and Their Spread in Aisa's Southeast areas', Xu made a multi-level studies on the 'Southbound filmmakers' [8], but it was not suitable when he defined this group and the overseas Chinese according to his different study purposes, and he lost sight of revealing their constructing national community consciousness and identifying themselves with Chinese culture.

3.2 Study on the "Southbound Filmmakers" in Foreign Countries

The scholars from Singapore blurred the line between China's films with Chinese films, subjectively lost sight of the early Southbound filmmakers from Guangzhou and Shanghai and their film-makings. Gongsun said 'The History of Chinese Cinema', speaks highly of the Southeast Asian films, while weakens the important role the 'Southbound filmmakers' played for its developing; Singapore scholar Xu said 'Chinese Language Movies in Post-Malaysia: Local Opera Style, Huayi Style, and Author Theory', and article 'New Guests: On the First Film Produced in Singapore and Malaysia from the Perspective of the', separately discussed the issue of Chinese lingual system's belonging and the double marginalized identities the 'Southbound filmmakers' had when they first came there through textually researching some of their films. In his discussion, he lost sight of the causal relationship between China's films and Malaysia's Chinese films and avoided the topic on the filmmakers' creations in Malaysia, trying to reconstruct the local Chinese films' discourse right. The two books, 'New Malaysian Chinese Film (1927-1965)' and 'The Old Stories in the New Malaysian Film Circle', compiled by a Singapore scholar named Xu Yongshun after long-time collecting reports from newspapers, are very valuable in sorting and elucidating the historical materials. Another Singapore scholar, Rong Shicheng, from the National University of

Singapore, settled his study foothold about the 'Southbound filmmakers' on the Southeast Asian films in his article 'Expanding the Territory: Shaw's Entertainment Industry Development in Southeast Asia', and explored the situations how Shanghai filmmakers expanded market in the Southeast Asia during the period of 'Tianyi' company in 1930s.

The occidentalist scholars are inclined to study films with the discourse of the Southeast Asia with the intention of severing the local films with China's films in order to accentuate their subjectivity and minimize their connections with China's films and culture. As the first book for studying the film history in Asia's Southeast areas, 'Latent Images: Film in Singapore' by Jan and Yvonne, mentioned their influences to Singapore's films brought by the early Southbound filmmakers, such as Hou Yao and Wang Ying, but not further and deeper [9]. However, Millet in his book 'Singapore Cinema' not only studies the China's films' early dissemination in the Southeast Asia, but makes a research in a wider scale on the 'Southbound filmmakers' and those new comers to the Southeast Asian when he combs Singapore's films' history from 1902 to the new century. Most of Millet Raphael's study focuses on Southeast Asian films after the war, which can be seen from the specific chapter about Shaw Brothers' development [10].

4. Identity Anxiety: The Spiritual Sources of the 'Southbound Filmmakers'

To trace the origins of the 'Southbound filmmakers' is for knowing how this phenomenon happened and developed. After 1966, the 'Southbound filmmakers' has become a historical concept, and its commercial mode, their styles, films' characteristics, etc, are still influencing today's China's and Asia's Southeast areas' films. However, the study on those filmmakers are not enough, the researchers' number is also quite small and their opinions are changing with the times which are needed to be connected academically. There is no one to study those filmmakers from the angle of the national images, especially a kind of systematic study because of lacking enough materials and supporting theories. For the study, it could take two dimensions: horizontally, by asking 'who they were, where they were from, why they went South and after that where they went' to trace their origins and flowing and

analyze the influences they got from the nationality, politic, commerce and culture; vertically, by considering their film-making, identity anxiety and nationalized expression as clues to specifically analyze how the national community consciousness's construction was built step by step. Therefore, to comb the origins and flowing of the 'Southbound filmmakers' is for the purposes of reconstructing the commonality and centrality in the cross-border and cross-area Chinese films, and clarifying those filmmakers cross-area communications as well as the dissemination about China's national images in their films.

Under the scope of national community advocated by China, this paper tries to describe their activities and film makings when the 'Southbound filmmakers', in a state of diaspora and exile, still insisted their national images' creations. However, there are some doubtful points: why they are seldom mentioned in the film history, or can be said in a state of absence? How they built the cross-border commercial network for their films? How they completed the construction of their films' national images and promoted them in the local places and across areas? How they set up their writing formula on the national images among the factors of nationality, commerce, politic and culture? How they built up a space for the national images' reception with the local Chinese against complex situations? In order to solve these problems, three dimensions could be considered: the first is time. According to the materials at hand, it can be said that there were four times the filmmakers went South, not three, and it is probable that the first time was earlier than the histories home and abroad recorded, which is worthy of discussing and debating academically; the second is space. It no longer only takes the southeast Asian cinema into consideration, but takes Shanghai, Guangzhou and the Southeast Asia as a whole; the third is to reconsider how they recognize their identities and how did they see their nationality and national images among the web of nationality, politic, commerce and culture.

The studies that this paper's review introduces are for the further studies on the 'Southbound filmmakers', filling the empty gaps about them during anti-Japanese war. In the future, it is also needed to analyze the drive force in their film makings, and construct the time line about their films' reception. Cheng and Cheng in their

article said ‘the film images are no longer regarded as the reproductions of the real feelings and experiences’[11], which is inspiring for studying from what angles that the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ constructed their national community consciousness, and useful for re-combing their national images’ dissemination history of the Southeast Asia. For discussing their cross-border creations and identity construction, this paper makes use of the following concepts: ‘identity’ from the culture study, ‘existence’ from philosophy, ‘memory’ and ‘basic anxiety’ from psychology and psychoanalysis, as well as the discourses from the fields of film-ology, communication, sociology, politics and reception Aesthetics. Through solving the old problems and find the new one, this paper tries to reach the following aims: to find out how the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ and their national images, to provide academic supports for studying the early China’s films and their national spirit, to provide the historical materials for study the ‘Southbound filmmakers’, to offer a coordinate for the future studies, to find a new angle for rewriting China’s film’s history, to give some experiences and lessons for present China’s film going abroad, and to give some references for the government when it wants to make film policies.

5. Conclusions

In sum, the films of the ‘Southbound filmmakers’ contained the national community consciousness in a style of national images, which was because they had a common identity anxiety as immigrants. Unconsciously, they promoted Chinese culture and brought out their memories obviously about the mainland in the images. They made it possible for China’s films disseminated at abroad and accepted across areas. They are a special group, and also a unique film phenomenon, which means 3 active phrases in 35 years from the anti-Japanese to the ‘Seventeen years’, not only that, it also means that the films, filmmakers affected and phenomena changed by them in a long time. They and their film-makings has become a part of film history. They promoted China’s films at abroad and offered chances for them to communicate with other countries’ films, thus strengthened the connection between China’s films (makers) and foreign films (makers). To study their activities and film-makings, it needs

to take time circumstances, political phenomena, audience’s reception, and so on into consideration in order to make a comprehensive study on them as a diaspora group, a film phenomenon, a creation of national images and cross-area dissemination with cultural identity. However, the study is still not enough, especially about the period of anti-Japanese when they were facing new markets, new audiences and new challenges. They knew they should shoulder the national mission at that time and didn’t forget to express it in their films’ images. Many of them had did a great contribution, but only few traces left in the film history. Therefore, we, on the basis of the past studies, with the help of digital media and big data technology will do a textual research in order to correct the mistakes, fill the empties, restore the orders and offer new ideas. Under present situations of Chinese culture and films’ dissemination, the ‘Southbound filmmakers’, as a historical concept and phenomenon, still have further and deeper influences, which can be a reference for China’s films going abroad.

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