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Re-mapping the “Third World” Places: Discussion on the Exotic Journeys in Chinese Cinema before and after Cold War

Chen, Yishui
School of Art
Columbia University, USA
yishuich@126.com
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Chen, Yishui
 School of Art, Columbia University, USA
yishuich@126.com

**Re-mapping the “Third World” Places:
 Discussion on the Exotic Journeys in Chinese Cinema before and after Cold War**

Abstract

This paper is to examine the “Third World” cultural identities of “Chinese” status by tracing transformational roles the Southeast Asia landscapes performed in Chinese cinema before and after Cold War from a geopolitical perspective. Initially, the paper sketches the geopolitical relationships of two opposing worlds in part of Pacific Rim during the Cold War which reveals that Taiwan, Macao and Hong Kong lied on the “boundary of the Cold War” between the bipolar ideological camps while Southeast Asian region located in the “extended boundary of the Cold War”. Under such sandwiched circumstance, Southeast Asian region was spontaneously portrayed as “extralegal place” onscreen by noted Hong Kong directors which realistically symbolized the fatherless and stateless “Third World” predicament where Hong Kong lost in.

Nevertheless, following the end of the Cold War, rapidly developed globalization and increasingly economic cooperation between mainland China and post-1997 Hong Kong, the role of Southeast Asia in Chinese cinema experienced a dramatic transformation that its rhetoric has turned the “extralegal place” into “exotic journey”. Particularly after 2007 financial crisis, the trans-regional narration concerning exotic journey from China to Southeast Asian countries in Chinese cinema not only makes distinct comparison between Chinese international metropolis and the semi-urbanized even un-urbanized images of Southeast Asian regions but remarkably contributes to establish the superior status and the “First World” economical identity for Chinese middle class.

Furthermore, this paper emphasizes upon the how the intrinsic logic between Chinese middle-class status and Southeast Asian regions as the “Third World” places onscreen function by discussion and elaboration of class and gender discursive narrative of film case studies.

Keywords: Chinese cinema, cultural globalization, Hong Kong film, Southeast Asia

Following the worldwide subprime debacle and China's economic rise of 2007, contemporary prevalent Chinese cinema have presented consistent trends in their reconfiguration of Southeast Asian images with Chinese middle-class narrative—even though it seems to be ambiguous to use the phrase *middle class* in terms of so-called socialistic nationality of P. R. China within the context of globalization, “the unclear concept depicts the real situation of social stratification precisely in today’s China” (FanhuaMeng 216), it is indisputable that Chinese middle-class group now is rapidly emerging and has become the backbone for China’s economic rise since 1990s, particularly during the period of financial crisis which emerged by

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2007.

In this context, the displays of Southeast Asian images with representations of Chinese middle-class narrative play a central role in contemporary Chinese cinema recently. Some good examples of this are the landscape of Thailand in *Go LaLa Go!* (2010) and *Lost in Thailand* (2012), the townscape of Singapore in *My Lucky Star* (2013), the scenery of Nepal in *Up in the Wind* (2013). These films all describe various cross-regional and exotic journeys of Chinese middle-class people, who travel from Chinese metropolis to other Southeast Asian areas. Those destinations of exotic journeys onscreen, namely the “Third World” places, played rhetorically functional spaces serves as a contrast of China’s metropolis urban cities to some degree, which structured the supreme cultural status of Chinese middle class as well as China’s self- imagination of *the* “First World” identity.

This relationship between the so-called “Third World” places and “First World” self-identification in contemporary Chinese cinema reflects certain cultural geopolitical issues today. With the advance of globalization following the end of the Cold War, indigenous culture in the “Third World” nations and regions have become increasingly threatened and re-structured by the spread of the “global culture”, as Arif Dirlik mentioned, basing on the tendency of globalization, the understanding of “indigenous” has been imagined as and substituted into so called “local”, “which has acquired visibility in tandem with ‘globalization,’ offers more radical possibilities for political critique than is allowed for in those critiques that take as their premise the nation or the ‘third world,’ which perpetuates a culturally power politics without questioning the foundations of unequal power” (Dirlik 15-16), and now those terms have been reconstructed into an intricate face, namely “globalization and indigenous cultures”.

The films of Chinese language speaking regions, in this case P. R. China’s and Hong Kong cinema, have long since got used to establish their geopolitical identities by mapping the “Third World”. It is hard to recognize how changes and adaption of the “Third World” geopolitical cultural locations have taken place in mass cultural communication without tracing how Southeast Asia was presented in Chinese cinema during the end of last century. Thus, current situation within this historical context above all need a further probe and rethinking. This paper aims to explore and discuss how Chinese filmmakers map the “Third World” countries and regions in their identifications of “self”, China and “other”, in this case the Western countries. Finally, where on earth is the “Third World” located in the universe of Chinese cinema?

I. “Extralegal Places”: Geopolitical Identifies of the “Third World” before and after the Cold War

The period of before and after the Cold War signified a new historical turning point for many “Third World” countries (if they were ‘countries’ in some extent) that political identification became a thorny problem at this stage. Considering the subjective identifications of cultural status, David Harvey has argued, “The conception of the human body (and of all that goes with it—conceptions of self, subjectivity, identity, value, and social being) depend upon definitions of space and time”, while “space and time are social constructs” (David Harvey 210-248), which are generally determined by the cognitions of historical context (time) and

geographical spaces. Within Chinese-language speaking regions, what did it mean to be “Chinese” before and after the Cold War? How could people who were ideologically neither Left communists nor Right capitalists thought about their national identity? This kind of issue began to be addressed in “Chinese” cinema in the 1980s, particularly in Hong Kong films: where the proposition of national identity was determined by Hong Kong’s intermediate location in geopolitics?

The external geo-cultural relationship between part of East Asia (P. R. China) and West World (the US), and the internal geopolitical relationships between Tai Wan, Hong Kong, Macao and Southeast Asian regions among East Asia (P. R. China) and West World (the US) can be seen from the sketch of a part of Pacific Rim as below:

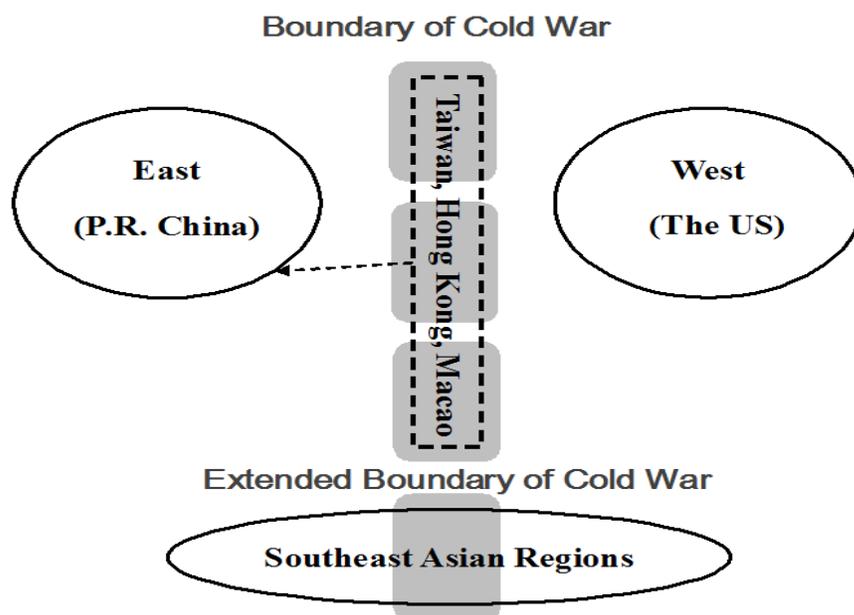


Fig.1. Sketch of geopolitical relationships in part of Pacific Rim during the Cold War.

During the Cold War, People’s Republic of China (mainland China) and the Western world (the US) were isolated from each other by a clear political ideological line which separated them into two disparate ideological camps, as is shown in figure 1, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao were, however, actually geographically located in “a Cold-war dividing line of partitioning the capitalist camp headed by the United States and the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union” (JinhuaDai 85), that is, the “boundary of Cold War” in the sketch. Moreover, the Southeast Asian regions lied on the “extended boundary of the Cold War” and had no choice but to play an advanced guard role because they were sandwiched between bipolar ideological camps. In this situation, images of Southeast Asian regions functioned as “extralegal places” which became remarkable signifier as the “Third World” teemed in Hong Kong cinema since 1980s.

Therefore, the way that mainland China and Hong Kong filmmakers presented the Southeast Asian regions was entirely different due to the distinctions of their geographical locations during the Cold War.

Reviewing the films of mainland China, before and after Cold War, filmmakers were

scarcely able to take the area of “Cold War” boundary—neither the Southeast Asian landscapes, Taiwan, Hong Kong nor Macao—into consideration based upon their unequivocal ideological position of Left camp. Only a handful of plot symbolically involved in these regions as narrative spaces even those films location were not shot in Southeast Asia. The typical cases of that are jungles of Sino-Vietnamese border in *Acacia tree of Leichang* (Dir. Wei Lian, 1985), the kingdom of drug of Golden Triangle in *Adventure in the Golden Triangle* (Dir. Zheng Dongtian, 1988) and the China-Burma border in co-production *International Rescue* (Dir. Xie Hong, 1990). Those Southeast Asian landscapes onscreen were embellished as the “extralegal places” as intermediary venues in the presence of the Western world (the US) and consequently have successfully established as significant backgrounds for being in accordance with Chinese diplomacy.

Whereas in Hong Kong cinema, it was completely different and complex: Southeast Asian landscapes were specifically and emphatically described as the “extralegal places” which dovetailed with the same geopolitical location of “(extended) boundary of Cold War” where Hong Kong was seated before the Hong Kong's return to China by 1997. In other words, Southeast Asian nations and regions, as well as Hong Kong itself, belonged to neither the socialist camp of the Eastern world nor cultural ideologies of the Western world. At this moment, the exhibitions of Southeast Asian landscapes in Hong Kong cinema were portrayed as “extralegal places” which symbolized the real situation which Hong Kong stayed in.

From 1980s, the Chinese and British governments started to negotiate with the destiny of Hong Kong and formally signed the *Sino-British joint declaration* in 1984 that UK would return Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. People realized that the future of Hong Kong was grasped in the both independent states, P. R. China and (or) the United Kingdom, rather than Hong Kong itself. Under such circumstances, postcolonial and “diaspora” experience established Hong Kong identities of being fatherless, stateless and rootless. Hong Kong filmmakers thus found a particular rhetorical device of displaying the Southeast Asian regions as “Third World” places, which located on the extended boundary of Cold War, to express their status anxiety of being fatherless and stateless.

Director Ann Hui (1947-) has made two films in succession by 1981 and 1982 for responding the matter of Hong Kong issue: *The Story of Woo Viet* (1981) and *Boat People* (1982). Both of the narrative spaces were set in turbulent scenes of the tumultuous period of Vietnam War (1955-1975): In the former case, the hero Hu Yue dreamed to escape from Hong Kong and Viet Nam to arrive in the US rather than P. R. China or other places of Eastern world that he can lead an ideal life of “owning private horse, private kitchen and home cooking”, but failed to pursue his “American dream” and helplessly wandered in Philippines in the end; in the latter one, a Japanese photographer as protagonist, tried to rescue the pitiful Vietnamese on his own and help them to flee from Vietnam where he died in finally. These films vividly described the “diaspora” experience and internal anxiety of Hong Kong people for confronting the imminent and unknown fate within the oncoming 1997.

As is shown below, likewise, in the film *Bullet in the Head* (Dir. John Woo, 1990), director John Woo (1946-) has coincided Hong Kong social space which located in the “boundary of Cold War” with Vietnamese political space which lay on the “extended boundary of Cold War” by chronological film editing with apparently similar images:



Fig.2 The narrative spaces of turbulent scenes of Hong Kong and Viet Nam in *Bullet in the Head*, screenshots from *Bullet in the Head*. Dir. John Woo. 1990. Kam & Ronson Studio. 2011. DVD-ROM

What the left-hand picture of Figure 2 depicted is the political event of “Hong Kong 1967 Leftist riots” that Hong Kong students and leftists organized large-scale demonstrations under the influence of Cultural Revolution for objecting British colonial domination and suffered suppression by Hong Kong police in 1967. This scene of the “Hong Kong 1967 Leftist riots” is back grounded as narrative space for revealing the plot of parting of protagonist B and his girlfriend. Moving on the next narrative syntagm, what pictured right portrayed is that the protagonists’s adventure to Viet Nam for a further development and then encountered the military coup. In comparison with these two screenshots, to a large degree, similar tumultuous scenes have mapped the analogous situations of “extralegal places” for both Hong Kong and Viet Nam as the “Third World” places. Particularly, in the narrative of right-hand scene, it was helpless and hopeless for the three protagonists no matter how they tried to declare “I’m Hong Kong people/Chinese!” in the face of Vietnamese force, which highlights the fatherless and stateless dilemma as an “extralegal place” where Hong Kong lost in.

When it comes to the critically acclaimed film, *Days of Being Wild* (1990), which was directed by Karwai Wong (1958-), the Southeast Asian regions not only play significant narrative spaces but also cohere with the purport. At the very beginning of the movie when the title emerged onscreen, the depth of field was paved by the infinite and dense palm forest as typical landscape of Southeast Asia, which is also the vital secret place in the story wherethe hero A Fei was born in. Furthermore, A Fei described himself as “I am a no-feet bird who could never land since my birth until the day I die.” The metaphor of “no-feet bird”, in a way, expressed the structure of feeling of “how difficult Hong Kong subjective identity to be located”, and thus reflected “how hard Hong Kong filmmakers to surmount ideological differences for presenting and reintegrating Hong Kong’s historical and cultural experience in 1990s.” (DaoxinLi 33) The cinematic spaces in this case, whether the Eastern Asian landscapes or Hong Kong city, were presented as ambiguous and transient places which called “space of disappearance” by critic Ackbar Abbas, particularly in Karwai Wong’s films, potentially gave expression to post-colonial cultural identity of Hong Kong people faced with the prospect of 1997 (Ackbar Abbas 48-62). However, the Southeast Asian landscapes performed the vital narrative spaces and pervaded in these cases which highly symbolized identity dilemma of

Hong Kong within the geopolitical location of “(extended) boundary of the Cold War”, Therefore, the metaphor of “extralegal places” was put into use by Hong Kong filmmakers since 1980 for signifying HK’s non-status identity by showing Southeast Asian regions as the “Third World” places.

Following the handover of 1997, the rhetoric of Southeast Asian regions has transformed in mainland China’s and Hong Kong cinema. The intricate and entangled signifier of “extralegal places” has turned into a de-political and de-historical exotic destination that awaiting for Chinese middle class to journey within the consumer culture in the age of globalization today.

II. “Exotic Journeys” :The Trans-Regional Movement in Chinese Cinema after 2007 Financial Crisis

In modern life, individual spatial existence ubiquitously structured cultural identities, as what Lawrence Grossberg argued about the critique logics of cultural studies, “identity can become a marker of people's abiding in such a singular community, where the community defines an abode marking people's ways of belonging within the structured mobilities of contemporary life” (Lawrence Grossberg 101-105). Accordingly, in film art, onscreen bodies are re-defined by landscapes where characters live or visit in, permanently or provisionally, which conduce to structure cultural and ideological identifies. The audiences could be recalled their individual spatial experiences off-screen simultaneously and thus to be re-identified themselves and be re-formed their concepts of social status.

After the 2007 global financial crisis, China occupied a significant global economic position that became the principal creditor of America in the world. At this juncture, the way Chinese filmmakers present the visual images of Southeast Asian regions has approached a major historical turning point.

This creation trend synchronously revealed a specific index to the urbanization process of China which was profited from a series of opening policies enacted before and after the Cold War. Since China's reformations and opening up from 1978, pursuing economic construction and development become the prior target and central task of Chinese governments and people. Urban cities rapidly emerged in contemporary China as a result. Within the economic and cultural globalization, as what Henry Lefebvre considered, the evolution of social culture has experienced a spatial phased development from *village* (ville) to *urban* (urbain), until nowadays, “society has been completely urbanized” (Lefebvre 107-110). Under these circumstances, a number of Hollywood blockbusters were imported in Chinese popular culture (Ding Pingfeng 1995, Zhang Yiwu, 2008)¹, while domestic entertainment sprung up, a considerable part of Chinese filmmakers consciously began to concern and rethink about the problems of urbanization and held negative perspectives for presenting urban spaces since 1990. Like Chinese scholar Zhang Zhen named this tendency as “the Urban Generation” (Zhang, 2007), the productions of the general tendency of Chinese cinema during this period was to portray Chinese urban spaces of developed city onscreen as grey and hollow images and shot by method of Camera Shake, which were in favor to generate the incertitude feeling. For instances, the crowded alleyways in the first independent Chinese film *Mum* (Dir. Zhang Yuan,

1990), the Beijing city of being awash with remains in *On the Beat* (Dir. Ning Ying, 1995), the Suzhou city of being with rubbish and pollutions in *Suzhou River* (Dir. Lou Ye, 2000). Majority of those kinds of films were released by underground channels on account of they were forbidden by authorities in 1990s. The specific creation circumstances off-screen happened to be coincided with the presentations of urban images onscreen, that revealed potential immanent contradiction of China within the economic and cultural globalization.

However, the situation has been changed today. Both Chinese filmmakers and the authorities stay abreast of the attitudes of the urbanization of developed countries as well as the cultural values of the Western world. In the one hand, the urban spaces onscreen after 2007 are generally presented to be more bright, gorgeous and bourgeois than “the Urban Generation”. On the other side, since Hong Kong filmmaker Peter Chan (1962-) removed his company to Beijing and reconfigured into a new corporation, “Many of Hong Kong filmmakers, such as Jackie Chan, John Woo, Jing Wong and Pang Ho-Cheung, distracted their working and living attentions into mainland China.” (Zhan 43). The trans-regional movement off-screen profoundly influenced the manifestation mode onscreen, and thus be in contrast with the expression of Southeast Asian landscapes in Hong Kong films during Cold War.

Reviewing this historical process of social development and movie-production situation of China, there is a prominent phenomenon that the description of “exotic journeys” becomes increasingly common in recently years. Exotic-journeys narrative not only displays Southeast Asian landscapes but aims to make comparisons with urban spaces of Beijing, Shanghai and other international metropolis of China and the semi-urbanized or un-urbanized images of Southeast Asian regions. In consequence, this rhetorical device remarkably contributes to establish superior economic status and the “First World” identity of Chinese middle class.

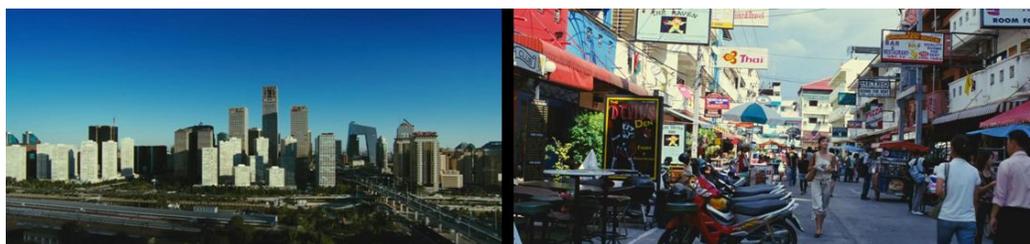


Fig.3 The special comparison between Beijing as a metropolis of China and Bangkok as an exotic town of Thailand in *Go LA LA Go!*, screenshots from *Go LA LAGo!* Dir. Xu Jinglei, 2010. Beijing Video & Studio. 2010. DVD

As is shown in Figure 3 above, in the prologue of *Go LA LA Go!* (Dir. Xu Jinglei, 2010), the way filmmakers present Beijing’s urban space is to utilize aerial photography and parallel-montage editing which have successfully portrayed a magnificent metropolis; when it comes to the appearance of Bangkok of Thailand, is to be depicted as an exotic and developing city which is still at a semi-urbanized stage where hero and heroine fell in love and reconciled in.



Fig.4 The special comparison between Beijing as a crowded metropolis and Chiangmai as an exotic city in *Lost In Thailand*, screenshots from *Lost In Thailand*, Dir. Xu Zheng, 2012. Well Go USA. 2014. DVD.

Moving on the 2012 box office champion of mainland movie, *Lost In Thailand* (Dir. Xu Zheng, 2013), which excessively emphasis on the urban spatial differentiations between Beijing of China and Chiangmai of Thailand. The theme of this case is about how the three Chinese protagonists experience an exotic journey in Chiangmai and what funny story happened on their way. The right-hand picture in Figure 4 above shows a delicate and exotic Thai temple that is visibly contrasting with the crowded and chaotic Beijing in the left-hand picture. By comparing, it is clear at a glance that the urban spaces of Beijing and Bangkok are extremely distinct onscreen.



Fig.5 The special comparison between Shanghai as a busy and over-urbanized metropolis and the landscape of Nepal as an extreme pure and pre-modern place in *Up in the Wind*, screenshots from *Up in the Wind*, Dir. Teng Huatao, 2013. Edko Films Ltd. (HK). 2014. DVD.

One more example of this can be seen from *Up in the Wind* (Dir. TengHuatao, 2013) as Figure 5 displays above. The film makers prominently make comparison between over-industrialized and over-urbanized Shanghai as a metropolis and the extreme pure and pre-modern place of Nepal by cinematic cross-cutting at the end of the tale. The tale of this case is to represent a Shanghai white-collar girl who reluctantly commenced her trans-regional journey to visit Pokhara for her job in the beginning and the exotic journey of Pokhara unexpectedly conducted to improve her mood and enhance her spirit in the end.

Those selected cases above represent the common mode Chinese filmmakers are ready to utilize for imagining the relationship between China as *self* and the “Third World” as *other*: to establish Chinese middle-class status and the “First World” identity by comparing different urban spaces onscreen. However, the potential text under middle-class narrative is to code a contemporary myth of China’s economic rise since 2007 into the “exotic journey”. The rhetorical mode, to some degree, is intertwining with post-socialism cultural (ArifDirlik 364-270)², and the structure of feelings of so called “China dream” of Chinese middle-class

consumer culture (David S. G. Goodman 49-67)³ within the context of globalization.

While the double-side presentations of metropolitan spectacle of China and exotic landscapes of Southeastern Asian regions lead to the formation of various narrative folds in contemporary Chinese films onscreen, whereas the individual/social/national existence and reality off-screen would be invisible and hidden by re-writing and unifying into middle-class narrative.

III. “Venue of Treatment”: Narrative Folds of Chinese Middle Class within the Context of Globalization

No one can deny that consumer culture and bourgeoisie aesthetic are flourishing in Chinese popular culture within the context of economic globalization particularly following the financial crisis after 2007. As Guy Debord pointed out, the display of urban spectacle “...is the self-portrait of power in the age of power’s totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence. The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relationships conceals their true character as relationships between human beings and between classes” (Debord 19). Nowadays, the representation of Southeast Asian travel-city images is gradually coded in structuring Chinese middle-class identities onscreen by metaphor of “venue of treatment”, which turns out to cover the individual/social/national existence in reality.

In 2011, China's National Bureau of Statistics exposed a set of data as proof that the rate of Chinese urbanization today has reached to 52%, while another investigation report released by Tsinghua University in 2013 was shown that there is only no more than 27.6% of Chinese household registration of urbanization rate (CDC, 2013). The later data, to a large degree, reveals the long-term debts as hidden residual which being accumulating along with the development of China’s urbanization and the rise of Chinese metropolises.

Hereon, combining with the analysis of the rhetoric methods Chinese film maker utilized to present Southeast Asian regions as the “Third World” places before and after Cold War in previous two sections, what I tend to point out is that how do the hidden debts of social reality and individual living situation of lower class off-screen undergo being re-written and invisible onscreen? What’s more, how the Southeast Asian regions perform in Chinese films today and the “exotic journeys” metaphor functions here? On the one hand, the hidden debts of social reality off-screen are invisible in the narrative folds of middle-class discourse. On the other, the exotic journeys of Southeast Asian regions play the “venues-of-treatment” role for resolving the inherent problems of Chinese middle class and simultaneously structuring their “First World” identification. It is reflected by re-imagining the relationships between Chinese middle-class identify as narrative subject, the hidden debt of narrative fold, and Southeast Asian regions as object. The rhetorical mode of structuring these relationships in selected cases can be seen by the table belows:

Title	Middle-class Status	Narrative Folds	“Venue of Treatment”
<i>Go LA LA Go!</i>	secretary →HR	<i>petty bourgeoisie</i> ≈ <i>the poor</i> when monthly salary ≤4000	Beijing → Thailand: be in love
<i>Love You You</i>	rich second generation	audition disabled	Beijing → Malaysia: be in

			love and oneself finding
<i>Lost In Thailand</i>	Boss	pancakes seller	Beijing → Thailand: oneself finding
<i>My Lucky Star</i>	successful cartoonist	telephone operator	Beijing → Singapore: wish fulfillment
<i>Love Will Tear Us Apart</i>	Ad person	psycho distortion of urbanite	Beijing → Thailand: destiny finding
<i>Up In The Wind</i>	senior editor & rich second generation	immigrant labor and political movement of Nepal	Shanghai → Nepal: happiness finding

Fig. 6 Relationships between middle-class status, narrative fold and Southeast Asian regions as “venue of treatment” performed in selected contemporary Chinese films

In respects of individual realities, as is shown in Fig 6, in the film *Go LA LAGo!*, the heroine’s middle-class status has changed from a secretary into the head of HR within the myth of middle-class success, as what the narrative depicted, “in our corporation as one of enterprises of the Fortune Top 500, the alleged *petty bourgeoisie* refers to such people, whose positions are under managers and monthly salary would be no more than 4000 RMB, namely *the poor*; while the people of managers can be regarded as *middle class*, who own private cars and annual salary should surpass 200 thousands RMB; people of directors are the *upper class*, whose annual salary will be over 500 thousands RMB; the presidents, whose annual salary could reach at millions RMB, are the only *rich*.” According to these words, it is clearly that the alleged *petty bourgeoisie*, *middle class*, *upper class* and *the rich* are re-defined and replaced by capitalized discourse. Particularly, the *petty bourgeoisie* become the alleged “*the poor*” onscreen instead of *the poor* in social reality when the invisible *poor* of social reality in the narrative folds are re-written by the formula of “*petty bourgeoisie* \cong *the poor* when monthly salary \leq 4000”. As a result, Southeast Asian regions as vital narrative spaces are engaged into establish the status of Chinese *petty bourgeoisie*, namely the middle class as the alleged “*the poor*” onscreen. Naturally, both dramatic climax and happy ending are set into Bangkok, which performs the “venue of treatment” as “Third World” place by comparing with urban space of Beijing where the heroine finds and recovers her true love in.

The co-production film by mainland China and Hong Kong, *Love You You* (Dir. Ma Chucheng, 2011), involved a love story between the rich second generation and a deaf girl. Malaysian island scenery in this film not only performs a key site for dramatic conflict but plays the “Third World” role as an intermediary space to serve as a foil to Chinese upper-class status (not only the middle class). Furthermore, from a gender perspective, the heroine is set as a deaf girl—a physical-emasculation female—which reasonably embellishes the legitimacy of patriarchal logic of class and gender power discourse. Therefore, additional relationships between *rich boy/male* and a *poor girl/female* delicately consist in narrative fold of this case. Obviously, Malaysian island scenery provides a core narrative space for this Chinese adaption of “Cinderella Story”.

In *Lost In Thailand*, the funny role is set as a pancake seller, which is performed by the famous Chinese comedian Wang Baoqiang, who is known as his ungainly figure and clownish behaviors on screen. The status of pancake seller turns out to draw back distance with other two protagonists, Xu and Gao, who are set as highly intellectual and business man of middle class. While Thailand as a main narrative field, becomes a distinct contrast for Beijing as metropolis by its exotic landscape. All of the rhetorical devices ultimately contribute to construct Chinese middle-class status. As the table shows (Figure 6), this exotic journey to Thailand means a hard process of solving couple of Chinese middle-class problems, as what the happy ending revealed in the film, Xu and Gao transcended hatred and hostility each other, also reconciled with wife and welcomed with the new-birth son respectively. Thereby, Thailand plays a role of the “venue of treatment”: the exotic Southeast Asian landscapes not only structure Chinese middle-class status but purify the mind of Chinese urbanite by its conventional religion.

As is summarized in the table of figure 6, in the films of *My Lucky Star* (Dir. Dennie Gordon, 2012), *Love Will Tear Us Apart* (Dir. Li Weiran, 2013) and *Up In The Wind*, the protagonists are all set as successful cartoonist, a person in, rich second generation and senior editor of high-end magazine, who are definitely signifying contemporary Chinese middle-class status within the economic globalization context. What's more, for Chinese middle-class urbanites, only by travelling to Southeast Asian regions, such as Singapore, Bangkok, Nepal and other places of the “Third World”, can the job bottlenecks and love problems of them be symbolically solved. Nonetheless, the living situations of telephone operators in *My Lucky Star*, psycho distortion of urbanites in *Love Will Tear Us Apart* and *Up In The Wind*, are all hidden in the narrative folds.

On the side of social realities, it is clearly at a glance in the chart (Fig. 6) that narrative folds formed by various adaptations and re-combinations of class and gender discourse power: *the poor* is now performed by *petty bourgeoisie* in *Go LA LA Go!*, *the disabilities* (as a gender rhetoric within patriarchal logic of mainstream society) are encoded into the “Cinderella Story” of Chinese adaption in *Love You You*, the pancake sellers on the behalf of *lower class* serve as ridiculous and being ridiculed object in *Lost In Thailand*, the telephone operator as *noteless salaried* imagined as an excellent and courageous agent in *My Lucky Star*, the psycho distortion of urbanite of *urban disease* is embellished into a romantic love story in *Love Will Tear Us Apart*, while the *immigrant labor* in *Up In The Wind*, is completely re-written into Chinese middle-class narrative.



Fig. 7 The narrative syntagms of how the rich second generation successfully leads Chinese tourists to flee from Nepalese marchers in *Up in the Wind*, screenshots from *Up in the Wind*, Dir. Teng Huatao, 2013. Edko Films Ltd. (HK). 2014. DVD.

In respect of national reality of the “Third World” regions, even though the real event of

2009 General Strike in Nepal was involved in this case, which was led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (who was former prime minister of Nepal), the national reality of Nepal became an invisible presence actually. The Strike, Nepalese cultural and natural landscape are all put into background, which could be able to construct Chinese middle-class status, as what the narrative syntagms in figure 7 reveals: facing the marchers (left-hand picture), the way camera narrates how the rich second generation successfully leads Chinese tourists to flee from Nepalese marchers is to present by the view of an elevation angle (middle picture), which is a quite clear and significant standpoint of values where the filmmaker occupied: this dandiacal figure of rich second generation, as what has been depicted in previous plot, is now rebuilt into a lofty hero. The new reborn rich second generation, the sublime savior, is accordingly symbolizing the sublime subjective of rich people who come from upper class. On the bases of the methods of shooting and cutting within this narrative syntagms (right-hand picture), the realities and images of the “Third World” have brushed against and eventually missed with Chinese middle-class narrative and thus fell into the narrative folds.

However, by rhetorical devices of “exotic journey” of Chinese middle class and Southeast Asian regions served as “venues of treatment”, the individual/social/national realities are included in the narrative folds and unified in the bourgeois discourse with the spatial representations of the “Third World” places. The individual/social/national realities become kinds of invisible existences on screen within the background of consumer-culture values, but yet can be seen pervasively off-screen within the rapid rise of Chinese metropolises and the irreversible progress of economic globalization.

Conclusion

Untangling the pedigree relationships between constructions of Chinese (Hong Kong) identities and the images of Southeast Asian regions on screen from 1980s, an explicit ideological and cultural map is can be seen in the depth of historical context before and after Cold War. Following the end of the Cold War and the emergence of economic globalization, the role which Southeast Asian countries played in Chinese cinema, have experienced a dramatic transformation from the “extralegal places” to “exotic journey” rhetoric. Since 1980s, when the “Sino-British Joint Declaration” was signed, Southeast Asia, which lied on the extended boundaries of the Cold War, was portrayed as the “extralegal places” and precisely symbolized the predicament of Hong Kong which suffered from the geopolitical tension between the two ideological camps during the Cold War. Nonetheless, in light of Hong Kong’s return to China and China’s economic rise, an increasing number of Hong Kong filmmakers moved to mainland to seek more opportunities. The structure of feeling they brought to China turned out to influence deeply the way Chinese filmmakers attempt to construct China’s cultural identities and capture its geopolitical status through cinema today. In contemporary Chinese cinema, Southeast Asia is depicted as an “exotic journey” for Chinese middle class to venture out and thus performed to be a “venue of treatment” for purifying Chinese urbanite’s mind and spirit. While doing so, the contrast between the Chinese who travel to these regions and the locals in Southeast Asia has constructed a sense of pride as a “First World” citizen among the Chinese middle class. At the same time, by claiming to narrate the journeys of the Chinese middle class, these films have successfully redefined and

transformed the concept of a Chinese “middle class”. This way, the notion of the Chinese middle class living the lifestyle of a “First World” citizen is emphasized on two levels by the comparison with those in Southeast Asia as well as with the poorer within China itself.

This kind of rhetorical model of image and narrative in contemporary Chinese cinema has been stably encoded into capitalism logic within the economic globalization context. Following the end of Cold War, a series of positive economic policies and reforming measures indeed contributed to China’s economic rise particularly since the financial crisis after 2007. Nevertheless, cultural discourse fell into a symptom of expressive aphasia.

In the context of globalization, with reference to the way Chinese filmmakers represented Southeastern Asia, has China redeemed its super-power status from the history? To what extent or at what point China has done so? Ultimately, when the “Third World” became a rhetorical mode of image and narrative onscreen, don’t we need to rethink about that where on earth the “Third World” is located at today? As China devoted itself to keep pace with the economic power of Western developed countries as well as their cultural values, China’s inherent cultural subjectivity thereupon was lost or fell into aphasia to the end.

Notes

1. In the end of 1994, SARFT (State Administration of Radio Film and Television) approved the recommendation of importing 10 contemporary foreign films per year which could be representative of outstanding achievements of world cultural civilization. On the New Year's Day of 1995, for the first time Chinese audience watched Hollywood film *The Fugitive* (Dir. Andrew Davis, 1993) in theatre. See Ding, Pingfeng and Zhang Yiwu.

2. China’s “post-socialism” is involved in the ideological revisions of socialist tradition and transformations of cultural identity within the economic globalizations since the late 1980s. See Arif Dirlik.

3. The concept of “China Dream” was proposed by President of the PRC Xi Jinping at the National People’s Congress in March 2013, “We are in the early phase of socialism. The China Dream means a better life and that requires everyone to work hard to promote it.” See Xi, Jinping (qtd. in Goodman, David S. G).

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Yishui Chen is a 3-year Ph.D. Candidate from Beijing Normal University of China. Currently, she is a visiting scholar of Columbia University with Prof. Gaines. Chen's major is film studies and her academic interests include cultural studies, the "Third World" film, urban film studies and feminism & gender studies. She has written several articles on the fields above that have appeared in various Chinese academic journals, such as *Frontiers*, *Contemporary Cinema*, *Film Art*, *China Culture Daily*, *Screen Culture*, *Cultural Monthly*, and etc.
