

B-Film 4th Annual PGR Symposium

Glocal and Regional Cinema

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Panel 1

Hening Zhang, University of Nottingham

Transformation of Screen Variations of Journey to the West in Chinese Screen Industries from the 1920s to the 1980s

Abstract:

This paper introduces the historical contexts of industry involvement in screen adaptations of the Chinese folktale *Journey to the West* (*JTTW*). It will focus on how dominant genre preferences impacted live-action adaptations and consider their authorship from the 1920s to the 1980s. The paper investigates two parallel histories of live action and animation within Chinese film history, showing how screen adaptations of *JTTW* have evolved within the changing context of the Chinese screen industry. This paper addresses the impact of industrial practices, economics, and politics on cultural production in the Chinese screen industry. *JTTW*'s screen history demonstrates that the emergence of these adaptations primarily relied on particular genres (*guzhuang*, *wuxia shenguai* and Cantonese opera film), institutions and filmmakers (Shanghai Yingxi Company, the Shao Brothers, the Wan Brothers and China Central Television). The paper finds screen adaptations of *JTTW* were strongly informed by their socio-cultural and political-economic contexts. Shifting censorship policies, the decline of the mainland film industry during wartime, the development of a television industry in the economic reform era, the opening-up policy, circulation and restoration of cultural trends such as martial arts genre production and integration of opera traditions continuously shape the adaptations of *JTTW*. I argue that *JTTW* adaptations create a Chinese version of screen adaptations in the face of imported content, including facing imported European films in the 1920s; competing with imported US and European animation in the 1940s; building a distinct national visual image from the Soviet Union's animation style in the 1950s and 1960s; and confronting imported foreign television dramas during the 1980s. Screen adaptations become a way to respond to perceptions that Chinese viewers were subject to US, European and even Soviet cultural imperialism and establish the Chineseness of screen production.

Bio:

Hening Zhang is currently a second-year PhD candidate at the University of Nottingham, in the Department of Cultural, Media and Visual Studies. She studied at the University of Nottingham, with a BA (Hons) in International Media and Communication Studies. Then she graduated from UCL in 2018 with a Distinction in MA Film Studies before starting her PhD programme. Her paper will be presented at the International Screen Studies Conference in June 2021. She is particularly interested in East Asian

cinema, Chinese screen industries, production culture, screen authorship and stardom. Her current research focuses on contemporary Chinese screen adaptations and Chinese and Hong Kong screen industries since the 1990s.

Dyna Herlina Suwanto, University of Nottingham

The New Indonesian Film Culture Under the Fragile Democratization

Abstract:

This paper examines the impact of national political reformation in 1998 on Indonesian film culture. Moving from authoritarianism to democratization, reformation was underpinned by changes of government policy, the rise of freedom of expression, the proliferation of digital technology and the significant development of educational institutions. One result was that the film industry grew impressively in terms of the number of film productions, the expansion in movie-theatres, and the rise in audience-going. Furthermore, provincial film production sites emerged across the nation, framing local issues and industrial expressions through regional distribution channel. However, since 1998, the national government has not built a robust strategy to tackle crucial issues in the film industry such as unfair business competition, film worker exploitation, rampant digital piracy, threats to free speech, or financial and distribution obstacles. As a consequence, the emerging film industry has encountered precarious circumstances because it is more open but less secure. Developing from my PhD research, examining local film production culture in Yogyakarta, this paper will explore tensions of the new Indonesian film culture.

Bio:

Dyna Herlina Suwanto is 2nd year Postgraduate student of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham. She is co-founder of Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (JAFF) that is considered as one of prominent international film festivals in Indonesia. She is working closely with Yogyakarta Province Government to develop local film industry. This writing is part of her dissertation about Yogyakarta film industry. Her research interest is media industries, film and audience studies.

Mara Etienne–Manley, University of Birmingham

Paradise Lost - Caribbean Representation and Portrayal in Film and Television

Abstract:

From a global perspective, the Caribbean film industry is still in its infancy; however, since the end of nineteenth century, the islands have served as the backdrop against which many films are created. The 2018 release of Black Panther marked a unique cultural phenomenon. The commercially successful film has been a catalyst for more diversity in Hollywood, but... what really is the truth behind Caribbean representation in film and television? This thesis aims to explore representations of Caribbean identity in film and television. In particular, this thesis focuses on three films from different genres - How Stella Got Her Groove Back, 1998, Rent a Rasta, 2006, and Small Axe Series, 2020 – in order to examine how Caribbean identity is represented in film and television and how these portrayals impact the way Caribbean people are perceived by society. Applying close textual analysis on specific scenes and dialogues enables the researcher to interpret the stereotypes of Caribbean identity in film and television. Media representations of Caribbean identity is an underdeveloped area in research and this study therefore makes a significant contribution to the discourse on the representation of Caribbean identity in film and television.

Bio:

Mara Etienne-Manley is a children's author, broadcaster, freelance writer and researcher. She holds a BA in English and a Diploma in Journalism. She is currently pursuing a Masters by Research in Film and Creative Writing with the University of Birmingham. Over the last sixteen years Mara has worked in print and broadcast media and is particularly interested in the subject of representation and portrayal of those who do not normally see themselves in the media.

Panel 2

Jemma J. Saunders, University of Birmingham

Repping Regions in the Rap Game UK

Abstract:

The Rap Game UK returned to BBC Three for its second series in 2020. Predominantly filmed in Birmingham, the talent show follows six unsigned MCs from across the UK as they compete for a record deal. The first series touched on how the London-centric nature of the music industry is a source of frustration and personal conflict for regional artists, and included a ‘home town’ challenge. In series two, these ideas underscore much of the dramatic tension between competitors and extend to the programme’s branding to make locality a core theme. This video essay argues that Series 2 of The Rap Game UK, and in particular its multiplatform content, clearly aligns with the fourth ‘public purpose’ of the BBC’s Royal Charter, ‘to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom’s nations and regions’; yet in doing so highlights numerous tensions wrought by these geographical markers of identity. It uses elements of the desktop documentary form and poses questions about how national and regional identities are expressed within television talent shows, and whether notions of Englishness or Britishness are secondary to more localised senses of place and belonging.

Bio:

Jemma Saunders is a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. Her audio-visual thesis explores how Birmingham is represented in popular film and television, interrogating aesthetics of the city in its role as both narrative setting and filming location, with videographic criticism as a core research methodology. She holds a BA in Medieval & Modern History; MA in History, Film & Television; and is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Alongside her doctoral studies, she manages industry placements for postgraduate students studying film and television.

Website: <https://vimeo.com/jemmasaunders>

Oscar Mealia, University of Birmingham

Film Viewing: *Don't Drown in Me*

Abstract:

Don't Drown in Me is a film centred on Lyotard's fable of solar death and the possibility of the human body existing after such an event, particularly its literal and philosophical implications for thinking and memory. This thematic is placed in dialogue with Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, namely the highly cinematic opening of the book, in which a body metamorphosises and unravels into a pulsing 'mobius strip' of intensities and desires; changing genders and form.

Theoretically, the film traces the relationship between technological apparatus, temporality and memory through an exploration of Lyotard's appropriation of Leibniz's hypothesis of the monad. Lyotard theorises the possibility of a computer able to retain, store and calculate information on an unparalleled level to the extent it can predict everything to come and thus in a sense, stands outside of time. Or as Lyotard asserts; "time cannot happen to it". Such a monad embodied in the film is for Lyotard the culmination of the desire of "making the body adaptable to non-terrestrial conditions of life, or of substituting another 'body' for it" after solar death, all of which has profound philosophical and political consequences.

Bio:

Oscar Mealia is an audio-visual researcher at the University of Birmingham. His thesis 'Inhuman, all too Inhuman: Lyotard, Film and the aesthetics of the Digital', is an exploration of film *vis-à-vis* Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the inhuman, crucially through the medium of film. Centred on investigations into Lyotard's largely neglected notion of acinema, the figural and nihilism, his research traces their implications and theoretical and artistic possibilities for film. In turn, questioning the limits of film in a digital age saturated with images and information and its viability as a site of resistance against what Lyotard terms the "inhuman".

Nina Jones, University of Birmingham

Watching 'Watching the Detectives' and the Power of True Crime Anti-Aesthetics

Abstract:

Chris Kennedy's 2017 film 'Watching the Detectives' has been described as a 'disjunctive montage' (Bloom, 2018) or in some cases as a 'slow building panic attack' (Sicinski, 2017). The "documentary", transferred from digital to grainy 16mm film, silently captures thirty-six minutes of what Kennedy calls 'the process of crowd sourcing culpability.' Kennedy unobtrusively documents a Reddit thread, led by internet sleuths attempting to identify the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers from still images of the crowds. Intentionally or not Kennedy has stripped his film back to nothing more than a slide show, and in doing so he has exposed what is at the core of many successful true crime documentary films, which is arguably the audience's inability to turn away from horror, no matter how unethically sound it is. This video essay will set out to critically deform Kennedy's anti-aesthetical film and speculate if it can be placed alongside the highly fetishised true crime genre or if it finds itself part of something entirely different. Is it possible that Kennedy has created something which reaches beyond genre, beyond documentary and places the audience in front of a mirror, reflecting back their own insatiable appetite for a twisted truth?

Bio:

Nina Jones is a practice lead PhD candidate at The University of Birmingham within the department of Film and Creative Writing. Her research area of expertise is in contemporary true crime documentary ethics and the post-true crime genre. She uses audio visual experiments to analyse complex ethical dilemmas within the production and consumption of true crime documentaries. Her background is in professional documentary film editing and she is also a film technician for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Her forthcoming documentary thesis is a reflection upon the complex nature of true crime documentary production and will challenge the role of the self when making conflicting ethical choices around narrative, aesthetics and representation.

Examples of her audio-visual work can be found here - <https://vimeo.com/ninajones>

Panel 3

Victoria Baltag, Queen's University Belfast

The Role Played by the Local in Global Cinema: Benjamin Fondane

Abstract:

Benjamin Fondane is a French, Romanian, Jewish film-maker, a pioneer of the avant-garde film. He is known for his activity in film debate and film production, scenography, poetry and philosophy.

Moreover, he is considered the Nostradamus of cinema as he talked about the 3D cinema and the colour cinema as early as 1933. Benjamin promoted a new relationship between sound and image making the audience deeply connected with their senses when watching a film. In his theory, sound was perceived to be an important complement to visual style.

Fondane shows his perspective in his critiques, but most importantly, in his films. In 1936, when he was 38 years old, he directed *Tararira*. The writer Gloria Alcorta, who was present at a private screening, rated it a "masterpiece".

Benjamin Fondane is known nowadays in France, Romania, Buenos Aires. This paper will explore the potential to move Fondane's works and critics from a regional cinema to the glocal one.

The paper also intends to stimulate reflection on Fondane's work in the frame of glocal and regional cinema in order to facilitate exchanges of Fondane's theories and encourage further approaches to this topic.

Bio:

Victoria Baltag is a film researcher, a film director and a film producer. She got a Merit for her MA in Film, History and Television in 2011, from University of Birmingham, UK. Currently she is studying her PhD in Film Studies from Queen's University Belfast. In 2018 Victoria Baltag got the Business Excellence Award, offered by the AI, UK, for her film social business. In 2013 she got the Popularity Prize Award offered by LSE at the Research Festival, with one of her documentaries. She gave talks to more than 50 conferences in the field and her publications are quoted in more than 100 papers (information provided by Academia.edu)

Gurkan Maruf Mihci, IUPUI Herron School of Art and Design

Turkish Fantastic Cinema Between 1950-1985

Abstract:

Fantastic films were a major part of Turkish Cinema between 1950 and 1985. The genre has more than 300 films. There are not only Ottoman/Turkish historical superheroes but also the local adaptations of the US and Italian superheroes fairy tales, westerns, horror, action, and comic book adaptations. These superheroes, mostly from comic books, are added to local elements and transformed into local heroes. Although major and minor film studios produced these films, these hybrid films are low-budget and fast productions. These more than 300 “cultural appropriations” can be seen as reflections of the Turkish society trying to adapt itself to the modern western world. In this research, I examine if this adaptation process can be called “Turkification”. There aren’t any one-to-one adaptations. Directors always added local elements, combinations, etc.. For instance: *Demir Yumruk* (Iron Fist, Dir. Tunc Basaran, 1970) character is a combination of Phantom, Batman, and Superman. Another example is *Vahşi Kan* (Wild Blood, Çetin İnanç, 1983) which is an adaptation of the First Blood but, it is not a one-to-one remake as it contains unique elements such as Motor Gang knows Karate, Human Hunters, and Zombies. This excessive mimicry is not the result of the simple adaptation process. It is the result of unbalanced power relationships, too. My aim to research the result of conflict between Turkish national identity and the adaptation process to western modernization. Consequently, this artificial and unnatural resistance occurs in the films. What is striking in this mimicry and tension relations in Turkish cinema was a closed economy, which was not supported by the government, national elites, or foreign capital. It always tried to survive with its resources. The audience, directors, and cast supported this movement. Therefore, it created its own methods to resist these economical structures while trying to survive.

Bio:

Gurkan Maruf Mihci is Assistant Professor and Co-Coordinator of Foundation Studies at IUPUI Herron School of Art and Design and pursues his PhD at Istanbul Institute of Design. He has his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Graphic Design (Bilkent University) and, Master of Arts in Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design (Sabanci University) with the concentration in Audio Visual Noise and Glitch. He has also Central European University Graduate Certificate in Culture and Politics and Maker Teacher Certificate in Robotics and 3D Printing. He is a board member of World Listening Project and member of World Forum for Acoustic Ecology and AIGA.

He exhibited his collective and individual audiovisual art and media works in festivals and exhibitions such as; Gallery 263; Boston, USA, Distopya Sound Art Festival; Istanbul, Turkey, Radio Zero Festival; Porto, Portugal, Monsters International; Montreal, Canada, Animatu Digital Animation Festival; Portugal, Conde Duque; Madrid, Spain, Mestre Film Fest; Venice, Italy, FILE – Electronic Language Festival; Sao Paulo, Brazil, 0090; Antwerp-Mechelen, Belgium, Greenpeace Artist onBoard Residency Program; Turkey, AkSanat Contemporary Artist Competition; Turkey, 10th Istanbul Biennale; Istanbul, Turkey, Apartment Project; Berlin, Germany, Istanbul International Experimental Film Festival.

Maria Seijo-Richart, University of Leeds

Between the Enxebre and the Cosmopolitan: Miss Ledyia (1916) and Galician Cinema.

Abstract:

Galicia (one of the “historical nations” of Spain, with its own language and culture) has an autochthonous audiovisual industry which, despite a convoluted history, goes back 120 years. In this presentation, I wish to discuss *Miss Ledyia* (1916, dir. José Gil), the first Galician fiction film. In contrast to the stereotypical perceptions of Galicia as a rural, low class culture, *Miss Ledyia* is set in the fashionable and opulent A Toxa spa. The plot, clearly influenced by the French *feuilletons* by Louis Feuillade, follows a group of bourgeois characters investigating a political conspiracy to kill the King of Suavia (Galicia’s mythical name).

This depiction of Galicia is by no means less ‘enxebre’ (meaning: ‘genuine and characteristic’). In fact, it is totally coherent with the ideals of the emerging Galician nationalist movement of the first half of the 20th century (nationalist politician and writer Castelao acted in the film). The movement focused on constructing a Galician national identity combined with becoming cosmopolitan, on defining a specific space for the nation within the international community. It aimed also to leave behind the marginalization of the language, proving that Galician could be spoken by any social class and in any field (including cinema).

Bio:

María Seijo-Richart obtained her PhD in English Philology (specialty in Film Adaptation) from the Universidade da Coruña in 2014. She also has a Masters in World Cinema from the University of Leeds, where she currently works. She has taught Media Adaptation seminars (film, television and video games) at Leeds Beckett University. Her research interests are audiovisual adaptation from one culture to another and cinema in minority languages (specifically the Galician audiovisual sector). She taught a History of Galician Cinema seminar at Instituto Cervantes (Leeds), published several articles and presented lectures at different Universities in the United Kingdom and Spain.

Panel 4

Will McKeown, University of Birmingham

Tenet: The Film That Couldn't Save Cinema but Could Save the World from Capitalism

Abstract:

It is proposed that criticisms of *Tenet* (Nolan, 2020) pertaining to it being incomprehensible, overly complex and difficult to follow are in part exacerbated by its billing as the 'film to save cinema'. No one film could ever save cinema in this way particularly in the midst of the most globally disruptive pandemic of the millennium. Moreover, *Tenet*'s inclusion of difficult but innovative concepts such as 'inverted time' have the capacity to alienate anyone who understands time as exclusively linear and is not open to the possibility that it is a cultural construct. It will be argued that representations of inverted time draw attention to time as a cultural construct, something that is not fixed in reality but something that comes about because of cultural narratives we subscribe to (such as religion and business hours). By deconstructing time as a linear construct, the inversion of time draws attention to how events occur out of sequence. This is at its clearest when it is revealed that the creators of the bomb are humanity's descendants who seek to erase the damage we have done to the planet from the future by wiping us from existence. This positions *Tenet* as an important ecocritical text but also a temporal analysis of ecocriticism that challenges constructions of capitalist time. *Tenet* would never be the film to save cinema because no film ever could be, but its complex and refreshing treatment of temporal paradoxes and how time is constructed could be a way into saving the world from capitalism.

Bio:

Will McKeown is a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham. His research interests include the representation of self-sacrifice and survival in post-apocalyptic narratives as well as contemporary critiques of neoliberalism. He has published with *Horror Studies* and *New Cinemas* on Spanish and Korean cinemas respectively and is part of an upcoming release to be published with Bloomsbury on the Netflix series, *Sense8*. Will is set to make further publications on *The Walking Dead*, the TV series, *Dying Light*, the video game and *The Last of Us*.

Andrés Buesa, University of Zaragoza

Local Settings, Global Awareness: The Child as Eco-Cosmopolitan Hero

Abstract:

The Romantic association of the child with the natural world has permeated representations of childhood across the history of cinema. Perceived to be in ‘a threshold between nature and culture’, the child is assumed to have a specific affinity with the environment (Randall 2017, xii). This paper draws attention to a tendency in contemporary world cinema—from *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Ben Zeitlin, 2012) to *The Wonders* (Alice Rohrwacher, 2014)—that deploys this connection between childhood and nature to explore alternative modes of being in the world, in opposition to an urban/consumerist lifestyle.

I aim to explore the role of these children as agents that negotiate tensions between the local and the global. Does the child convey a vindication of the local against the forces of globalization, an ‘antidote to anxieties about modernity’ (Martin 2019, 78)? Can his/her attachment to nature be understood in a more global dimension? Drawing on ecocriticism and cosmopolitan theory, this paper argues that the child comes to embody what Ursula K. Heise calls an “eco-cosmopolitan” awareness; that is, a form of belonging that sees ‘individuals and groups as part of planetary “imagined communities” of both human and nonhuman kinds’ (Heise 2008, 61). As the textual analysis of different films will show, the child understood as eco-cosmopolitan hero brings about an eco-centric worldview and a challenge to normative understandings of modernity and progress.

Bio:

Andrés Buesa is a PhD candidate in Film Studies at the University of Zaragoza. He holds a BA in English Studies from the University of Zaragoza, where he also completed a BA in Hispanic Philology, and an MA in Film and Television Studies (with Distinction) from the University of Warwick. His PhD thesis explores the representations of childhood in contemporary cinema, with an emphasis on the role of the child as a vehicle for discourses around globalization. His other research interests include film aesthetics, the representation of cities and landscapes in contemporary film, queer cinema, and Latin American cinemas.

Luis Freijo Escudero, University of Birmingham

Cosmopolitanism at the Urban Frontier: Discussing a Glocal Sense8

Abstract:

This paper discusses how the Netflix series *Sense8* (2015-2018) exists in a dynamic of local rootedness to the eight cities of its protagonists and the global relations between them, and how this dynamic configures a cosmopolitan stance. Drawing on Wilson and Dissanayake's "global/local configurations" (1996: 2), the analysis of *Sense8* is conducted in this paper by blending urban theory, frontier theory and cosmopolitan philosophy. I argue that the sensates narrate their respective cities locally, but that their connections through "transparent interstices" (Licari, 2011) have global consequences, namely, the creation of an abstract global frontier. Global contestation from the sensates to racism, transphobia, homophobia, drug dealing, corporate business corruption, Big Pharma unethical practices and religious fanaticism entails a violence which results in the creation of an abstract frontier, defined in this paper through Max Weber and Michel Foucault. Finally, this paper proposes that a coordinated action against these forms of violence from the sensates results in a frontier cosmopolitanism that produces an ethical form of political rationality that envisages a 'worlding' based on collaboration, collectivism, empathy and diversity. A cosmopolitan frontier is thus radically converted into a site of unity in diversity, where *amor vincit omnia*.

Bio:

Luis Freijo is a doctoral researcher in the Department of Film and Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham and holds an AHRC-funded Midlands 4 Cities Doctoral Scholarship. His research expertise is in the dynamics of World Cinema as it relates to genre studies and, in particular, the global Western. He has contributed chapters on the relation between genre filmmaking and politics to *The Routledge Companion to European Cinema* (2021), *Sense8: Transcending Television* (2021) and *Screening the Crisis: U.S. Cinema and Social Change in the 21st Century* (2021).