



Hong Kong-Malay Film Connections (1960s-1980s)
Malay James Bond, “New-style” Malay Films, and
Nanyang *Gong Tau* Horror Films

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This is a labour of love.

Abstract

This dissertation maps the Hong Kong-Malay film connections forged during the immediate post-studio era of the late 1960s to the 1980s. Hoping to allay the problem of a “Chinese preoccupation” in Hong Kong and Asian film network studies, as well as the prevalent tendency in Malay film studies to territorialize Malay film history narratives, this dissertation investigates how, and why, these transborder connections were being made during this time, extending inquiry into three key sets of films: the made-in-Hong Kong Malay James Bond films (1967-1968), Merdeka Film Productions’ “new-style” Malay films (1975-1980) and Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* horror films (1975-1980s). Through examining the different kinds of border-crossings that underpin these films, the dissertation illustrates how sociopolitical and industrial changes in Hong Kong and the Malay Peninsula during this highly fluctuating times provided the essential impetuses for these crossovers, and contends that the cultural and political distances therein were crucially bridged, though certainly not without conflict and contestation, through a reworking of the Malay body, an act of passing and the suturing together of the tourist and cinematic gaze. Putting shape to this particular dynamic of Asian cinema network history, this dissertation ultimately demonstrates that even beyond the relatively well-studied studio era, the histories of Hong Kong and Malay cinemas in fact remained entwined with one another, to some degree implicating each other’s processes of localization/nationalization and restructuration in the late twentieth century.

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Introduction

On 12th January 1967, renowned Malay film star Jins Shamsuddin left Singapore for Hong Kong. Arriving at the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) studio in Clearwater Bay, Jins found himself acting under the direction of famous Hong Kong director, Lo Wei, alongside Hong Kong film stars such as Fanny Fan and Tina Chin Fei, to produce a series of Malay James Bond films. Adapting to a very different film culture, the actor's experience in the Hong Kong studio gave these films a unique spin, bringing the Malay James Bond franchise to new territories. Recorded by some as a landmark event that enabled Jins to "rise to the ranks of international fame (nama Jins Shamsuddin sebaris dengan bintang filem bertaraf antarabangsa)", Jins' venture to Hong Kong clearly left a deep imprint on the actor who, upon returning to Malaysia, turned what he saw in the city into material for his second directorial work, *Behind The Scene* (Di Belakang Tabir, 1970).¹

Jins' account remains to date one of the few documented instances of crossovers between the Hong Kong and Malay film industries. Yet, his was certainly not an isolated case. Joining him were Malay film stars Sa'adiah Ahmad, Aziz Jaafar, Hussein Abu Hassan, as well as newcomers Nordin Arshad and Sharifah Aminah, who have variously traveled to Hong Kong between the late 1960s to the 1980s in response to acting engagements. Their travels culminated not only in the Malay James Bond films, but also a couple of horror films produced by Hong Kong film companies. Furthermore, in a reversal of flight itinerary, directors and technical staff from the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) studio had also traveled to Malaysia in the mid-1970s to help with producing Malay films that would purportedly meet "international standards". A phantom force behind the scenes, the Hong Kong crew essentially helmed the

¹ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Jins Shamsudin: Kembara Seorang Seniman*. Ampang, Selangor: Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia, 2007, p.58 and Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana: Biografi Jins Shamsudin*. Bangi, Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998, p.86.

production of a number of “new-style” Malay films in an alleged and highly contentious attempt to help rejuvenate the then ailing Malay film industry and a fledgling Malaysian cinema.

These instances suggest that there was an intensifying trend of movement between Hong Kong and Malay cinema, largely mediated through the Shaws, from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Undoubtedly, prior to this period, exchanges of resources were already taking place between the two film industries, with famous Malay singer-actor, P. Ramlee, for example, making a short cameo appearance in the 1963 Hong Kong film, *Love Parade* (花團錦簇). It is also well known that Malay cinema, initially based in Singapore and later in Malaysia and Indonesia, was first financed and managed by media conglomerates whose main businesses were based in Hong Kong. What makes the Hong Kong-Malay film connections forged during this period particularly fascinating, is thus not so much their apparent novelty but a much greater and deeper degree of transborder movements, both in terms of quantity and extent of intersection, the curiously convoluted pathways along which these movements and exchanges seemed to follow, as well as the surprisingly scant research attention they have hitherto received. Piqued by the peculiarities of these episodes, I embark on a journey to return to the scenes where these two cinemas once crossed paths, seeking answers to the question that forms the key inquiry of this research project: why, and how, did these crossovers take place?

A “Chinese preoccupation”

My probe for answers necessarily began with a look into presently available literature on Hong Kong film history. This, however, proved to be largely futile, as a paradigmatic preoccupation with “Chinese” themes and topics appears to afford little space to non-Chinese trajectories in Hong Kong film history narratives. Not too long ago, scholars lamented the lack of attention given to Hong Kong cinema. Motivated by a desire to fill this gap, pioneering work

sought to construct histories of Hong Kong cinema. Stephen Teo's 1997 *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimension*, widely considered to be the first comprehensive survey of Hong Kong film history, was groundbreaking in this respect, predated most notably by Ian Jarvie's 1977 book, *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and Its Audience*. Monographs by scholars such as Lisa Stokes, Michael Hoover, David Bordwell and Chu Yingzhi subsequently followed in quick succession one after another, consolidating, in the turn of the millennium, the systematic study of Hong Kong cinema and its history.²

These pioneering efforts laid the groundwork for future studies in the field, which have since proliferated into a considerable force, tackling and reflecting a wide variety of concerns and perspectives. As I delved into the corpus of existing literature, however, it dawned upon me that despite the vast array of topics and themes currently being explored, Hong Kong cinema is often treated as an unambiguously "Chinese" one, whether this term or signifier – "Chinese" – relates to the linguistic, ethnic, cultural, political, territorial or historical dimension.³ By and large narratives on Hong Kong film history tend to focus on films made in Chinese/Sinophone languages (namely Mandarin, Cantonese and Amoy-dialect) and research concerns conventionally center around issues such as Chineseness, the Chinese diaspora,

² Ian Charles Jarvie. *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and Its Audience*. Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1977; Stephen Teo. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. London: British Film Institute, 1997; Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hooves. *City On Fire: Hong Kong Cinema*. London: Verso, 1999; David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000; Chu Yingchi. *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

³ The debate on what it means by being/becoming "Chinese" or, what constitutes "Chineseness", is a saturated one boasting a long tradition. Some key works and writers on this topic include: Wang Gungwu, "Chineseness: The Dilemmas of Place and Practice", in Gary Hamilton ed. *Cosmopolitan Capitalists: Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at the End of the 20th Century*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, p.118-134; Leo Suryadinata, "Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia: Problems and Prospects", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.41, Issue 1 (1987): p.135-151; Ien Ang. *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*. London: Routledge, 2001; Rey Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem" and Ien Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm", *boundary 2*, Vol.25, No.3 (1998): p.1-24 and p.223-243; Allen Chun, "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity", *boundary 2*, Vol.23, No.2 (1996): p.111-138. The introductory chapter in Tan E. K.'s monograph provides quite a comprehensive summary on the academic debate of Chineseness (see *Rethinking Chineseness: Translational Sinophone Identities in the Nanyang Literary World*. New York: Cambria Press, 2013, p.1-54). Caroline Hau's impressive historically-grounded article also provides rich information and insights on the topic. See Caroline S. Hau, "Becoming 'Chinese' – But what 'Chinese'? – in Southeast Asia", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol.10, No.2, Issue 26 (2012): p.1-36.

Sinophonicity, Chinese history and Chinese politics.⁴ By implication, for a long time studies on the flow of capital, films, talent and technology to and from Hong Kong cinema remained concentrated within the realm of “Greater China”, i.e. the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as that of the Chinese diaspora and what some would call “cultural China”.⁵

The major paradigms under which Hong Kong cinema had variously been considered – Chinese cinema, Chinese national cinema, Chinese diasporic cinema, transnational Chinese cinemas, Chinese-language cinemas, Sinophone cinemas – well reflect this inclination.⁶ Each of these conceptual frameworks aspires to address the difficult question of “Chineseness” and “China” within the field of Chinese film studies and, through that, affirm and validate the study of Hong Kong cinema both on its own terms and as an indispensable node in a network linked together by shared linguistic or cultural affinities with the Chinese-speaking world or the

⁴ Surveying Hong Kong film studies bibliographies can be illuminating in this regard. See, for example, the “Hong Kong Cinema” entry in Oxford Bibliographies, last reviewed in April 2017. Gina Marchetti and Derek Lam. “Hong Kong Cinema”. *Oxford Bibliographies (Cinema and Media Studies)*. 28 April 2017. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0154.xml> Accessed 1 Dec 2020.

⁵ Poshek Fu and Gina Marchetti in particular have done voluminous exemplary work over the past few decades to lay out Hong Kong cinema’s connections with the wider Chinese-speaking and Chinese diasporic worlds both past and present. The first book-length academic study of the Hong Kong-based Shaw Brothers studio, *China Forever*, for instance, inaugurated the important study of the Shaws’ globalizing endeavours through a “pan-Chinese” cinema lens. *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong* takes a meticulous look on the interconnections between Shanghai and early Hong Kong cinema. See Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008 and Poshek Fu. *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Gina Marchetti has also done much work on Chinese diasporic cinema with a specific Hong Kong focus. Considering “Hong Kong, like Hollywood... [as a] Chinese version of the diasporic ‘dream factory’”, Marchetti contributed invaluable to the understanding of Hong Kong cinema within Chinese diasporic networks. See, for example, Gina Marchetti, “Cinemas of the Chinese Diasporas”, in Lim Songhwee and Julian Ward eds. *The Chinese Cinema Book (2nd Edition)*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing and British Film Institute, 2020, p.32; Gina Marchetti. *From Tian’anmen to Times Square: Transnational China and the Chinese Diaspora on Global Screens, 1989-1997*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006 and Gina Marchetti, “Transnational Exchanges, Questions of Culture, and Global Cinema: Defining the Dynamics of Changing Relationships” in Esther C. M. Yau ed. *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p.251-260.

⁶ Victor Fan notes that for Hong Kong film critics of the 1960s and 1970s, the soul-searching question of “what is Hong Kong cinema” was carefully concealed under the question, “what is Chinese cinema?”. In my opinion, this seems to have remained more or less the case up to this day. See Victor Fan. *Extraterritoriality: Locating Hong Kong Cinema and Media*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p.52. Charles Leary has also observed that “[t]erms specific to the global reach of Hong Kong cinema and its surrounding markets in Asia include ‘Chinese Cinemas’, ‘Transnational Chinese Cinema’ and ‘Chinese-language cinema’”. See Charles Leary, “The Shadow of an Airplane over East Asia: Worldly Hong Kong Cinema”, in Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-fai eds. *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2008, p.58.

Chinese diaspora.⁷ David H. Fleming and Maria Elena Indelicato aptly uses the term, “cinematic Chineseness”, to describe the organizing principle shared across these paradigms, noting that “such debates have engendered rich and conflicting political perspectives on what national/transnational Chinese cinemas is, as well as a plethora of equally competing paradigms attempting to foreground (or background) different aspects of *cinematic Chineseness* [emphasis mine]”.⁸

⁷ Sheldon Lu, proponent of “Transnational Chinese Cinemas”, alludes to Tu Wei-ming’s concept of “Cultural China” in discussing transnational Chinese cinemas, asserting that “the identification with China is not a matter of legal or territorial consideration but a matter of cultural affiliation... The idea of Cultural China fully articulates the ambition and reality of a new transnational Chinese culture in the making”. Lu also posits that the cinematic traditions of the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong “have developed in separate directions and yet all attempt to signify a shared object: ‘China’” (see Sheldon Lu, “Historical Introduction: Chinese Cinemas (1896-1996) and Transnational Film Studies”, in Sheldon Lu ed. *Transnational Chinese Cinema: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p.12 and p.17-19). Together with Emile Yeh Yueh-yu, Sheldon Lu later also pushed forth the concept of “Chinese-language film”, which seeks to “encompass, like the concept of transnational Chinese cinemas, film-making activities that are located in several geographical regions and yet share certain linguistic and cultural traits of ‘Chineseness’” (see Lim Songhwee, “Six Chinese Cinemas in Search of a Historiography”, in Lim Songhwee and Julian Ward eds. *The Chinese Cinema Book (2nd Edition)*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing and British Film Institute, 2020, p.43). Although Lu and Yeh emphasizes that the Chinese language is a force “fraught with tension and contention” at the same time as it “lends unity to the Chinese nation-state and more broadly to a sense of Chineseness among the diasporic populations”, discussions under the “Chinese-language film/cinemas” framework nonetheless tend to be overdetermined by topics and concerns relating to China and Chineseness, with its basic premise being: “in the least, language helps forge a fluid, deterritorialized, pan-Chinese identity among Chinese speakers across national boundaries” (see Sheldon Lu and Emile Yeh Yueh-yu, “Introduction”, in Sheldon Lu and Emile Yeh Yueh-yu eds. *Chinese-language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005, p.3 and p.5). In a trajectory that is not too different, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar’s *China on Screen* investigates the dialectic between national and transnational in Chinese cinema through cinemas of the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Chinese diaspora Singapore, demonstrating how films from the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora construct and contest different ideas of the Chinese nation, and Zhang Yingjin, in adopting a “Chinese National Cinema” framework, similarly cautions to “keep in mind all problematics or messiness – theoretical as well as geopolitical – surrounding ‘China’ and ‘Chineseness’ when examining these films and cinemas. While being attendant and cognizant about the messiness and constructedness of the concepts of China and Chineseness, these discourses nonetheless become primarily concerned with them (see Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar. *China On Screen: Cinema and Nation*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2006 and Zhang Yingjin. *Chinese National Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2004, p.5). All in all, whether by delineating or deconstructing Chineseness, these paradigms take on the notion of Chineseness as a key organizing principle. Indeed, Pang Laik-wan saliently points out that “ironically, problematizing ‘Chineseness’ invites the opposite effect of legitimizing it as a worthy area of scholarly analysis” (see Pang Laik-wan, “The Institutionalization of ‘Chinese’ Cinema as an Academic Discipline”, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol.1, No.1 (2007): p.59).

⁸ David H. Fleming and Maria Elena Indelicato, “Introduction: On Transnational Chinese Cinema(s), Hegemony and Huallywood(s)”, *Transnational Screens*, Vol.10, No.3 (2019): p.139. In another article, Indelicato, along with Fu Yongchun and Qiu Zitong, further explicates that most of the debate in English-language academy focused on defining Chinese cinema(s) is “concerned with the very first part of the conceptual corpus constituted by Chinese cinemas; namely, what constitutes ‘Chinese’ in the contemporary panorama of cinematic production, regardless of the lenses employed to investigate such a relation: those of the national, trans-, supra- and sub-national, localizational, situational or de-territorializational”. This is a concise way to put it. See Maria Elena Indelicato, Fu Yongchun and Qiu Zitong, “Research Notes Towards a Definition of Huallywood”, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol.10, No.1 (2016): p.55.

Such efforts at legitimizing Hong Kong cinema within the discursive milieu of “Chinese cinemas” are undoubtedly crucial and necessary in envisioning a more critical, inclusive and, from the way I see it, a more egalitarian field of study, but the limitation arises when, notwithstanding the multiple changes in theoretical specifications over the decades, China and fundamentally “Chinese” concerns clearly remain the elephant in the room. Tellingly, the anthology, *Chinese Connections*, attempts to rectify the problem that “previous collections deal[ing] with ‘connections’ within transnational, diasporic, migrant, historical, cultural, and political contexts” have “not extended their reach much beyond the so-called ‘three Chinas’: the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan and Hong Kong”. It laudably includes articles about Hong Kong-French and Hong Kong-American film connections, shining the spotlight on Hong Kong cinema’s presence in “France outside of traditional *Huaqiao* confines”, a “Par-Asian” imagination that morphs Parisian and Asian elements into a filmic culture, and the migration of Hong Kong talent and film traditions into Hollywood.⁹ These essays, as the editors assert, “make a compelling case for exploring broader connections involving ethnicity and culture across national and linguistic borders”.¹⁰ Yet, nonetheless, the volume reverts to paradigmatic rhetoric when, in justifying the logic that holds the essays together, it is explained that these works “bring to focus hot topics in transnational Chinese and Chinese diasporic cinemas”, “underscor[ing] common ground and expand[ing] the range of connections made among Chinese-language cinemas, films from the Chinese diaspora, and films made outside of the Chinese-speaking world dealing with Chinese themes”.¹¹ This is not

⁹ Tan See Kam, Peter X Feng, Gina Marchetti, “Introduction”, p.1-2; Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, “The *HK* Venture: The Francophone Cine-logocentric Nexus”, p.39; Grace An, “The Par-asian Cinematic Imaginary in Olivier Assayas’s *Irma Vep*”, p.24 and p.34; Peter X Feng, “False Consciousness and Double Consciousness: Race, Virtual Reality, and the Assimilation of Hong Kong Action Cinema in *The Matrix*”, p.9-21; Frances Gateward, “Wong Fei-Hung in *Da House*: Hong Kong Martial-Arts Films and Hip-Hop Culture”, p.51-67 and Gayle Wald, “Same Difference: Racial Masculinity in Hong Kong and Cop-Buddy ‘Hybrids’”, p.68-81 in Tan See Kam, Peter X Feng, Gina Marchetti eds. *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity, and Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.

¹⁰ Tan See Kam, Peter X Feng, Gina Marchetti, “Introduction”, p.4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.3-4.

unlike the case in one of the earliest edited volumes on Hong Kong cinema. Acknowledging Hong Kong cinema as “a transnational cinema, a cinema of pastiche, a commercial cinema, a genre cinema, a self-conscious, self-reflexive cinema, ungrounded in a nation, multiple in its identities”, *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity* includes important writings on the connections between Hong Kong cinema and America but opens with a distinctively Chinese-centric premise which, although undeniably true, lays down a set of limitative discursive parameters that is still commonplace today: “[s]ince its inception in the 1900s, the cinema of Hong Kong has been a significant part of Chinese film, which encompasses a multiplicity of cinematic sites and traditions... Until the 1970s, the city itself was too small to sustain a film industry; it was almost exclusively export oriented, but its products appealed mainly to the Cantonese-speaking communities along the southern coast of China and in Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, and the Americas”.¹²

The latest addition to this “plethora of equally competing paradigms” – Sinophone cinemas – highlights this problematic and expresses a desire to finally “see beyond Chineseness as an organizing principle”.¹³ But as critics have variously pointed out, while emphasizing border-crossings and the global reach of the Chinese language, the Sinophone configuration is “caught in an ontological paradox: it exists by distancing itself from China; and yet as China disappears, so does the Sinophone”; “the insistence that the Sinophone must sound – however hybrid, impure or creolized – like a Sinitic language, implies that the Sinophone’s potentialities will invariably be constrained because it must remain univocal and Sino-centric”, in this way

¹² Poshek Fu and David Desser, “Introduction”, in Poshek Fu and David Desser eds. *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Art, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.1 and p.5. In the same volume, see David Desser, “The Kung Fu Craze: Hong Kong Cinema’s First American Reception”, p.19-43 and Law Kar, “The American Connection in Early Hong Kong Cinema”, p.44-70.

¹³ Shih Shumei. *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, p.27. The Sinophone framework has been formally absorbed into film studies with the publication of Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo eds. *Sinophone Cinemas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, which culminated from a special issue in the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* in 2012. See Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo eds. “Special Issue on ‘From Diasporic Cinemas to Sinophone Cinemas’”, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol.6, No.1 (2012).

evoking, however unwittingly, another kind of Sinocentrism itself.¹⁴ This, in my mind, is not fundamentally different from a limitation inherent within the “Chinese-language cinema” model, in that both paradigms risk “keeping the issue of Chineseness intact by reinstating it in a larger, pan-Chinese, transnational framework”.¹⁵ In fact, from the outset the term “Sinophone” itself renders the professed goal of mitigating the stickiness of Chineseness rather unconvincing, since “the root for China is also Sina, so saying Sinophone or Sinitic or 華語 [note: *huayu*; meaning ‘Chinese-language’] rather than ‘Chinese’ cannot completely liberate the representation of the language from its centralization in an originary China or a mythic 中華 [note: *zhonghua*; loosely translated as ‘Greater China’]”.¹⁶ Furthermore, in its advocacy and analyses of creolization and interaction with non-Sinophone linguistic and cultural communities, Sinophone studies thus far seem to be gravitate towards Southeast Asia and Taiwan, where indigenous communities form an integral part of society. Hong Kong, on the other hand, remains by and large a case study of Sinophone localization understood and approached mainly in relation to mainland China and in terms of Chinese dialects.

On this note it is also worth mentioning here that, as recent as in 2014, yet another theoretical framework seeking to organize the study of “cinematic Chineseness” has been proposed (though it does not appear to have gained much traction so far). “Adopting the prefix ‘Hua’ (broadly meaning Chinese ethnic) as semantic matrix to hold people living in PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau as well as Chinese migrants and descendants together in one loose yet singular filmic discourse”, Zhejiang University’s Shao Peiren came up with the Mandarin

¹⁴ Feng Lan, “Book Review on *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.73, Issue 2 (2014): p.518 and Lim Songhwee, “The Voice of the Sinophone”, in Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo eds. *Sinophone Cinemas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p.72.

¹⁵ Lim Songhwee, “Six Chinese Cinemas in Search of a Historiography”, in Lim Songhwee and Julian Ward eds. *The Chinese Cinema Book (2nd Edition)*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing and British Film Institute, 2020, p.43.

¹⁶ Lucas Klein, “Book Review on *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, Vol.36 (2014): p.217.

term, “Hua Laiwu (華萊塢)”, translated into English as “Huallywood”.¹⁷ Briefly put, in Shao’s elaboration Huallywood encompasses films or cinematic traditions that regard *Huaren* (華人; ethnic Chinese people) as the main subject in, and/or of, film production, *Huayu* (華語; Chinese languages) as the basic film language, *Huashi* (華事; affairs concerning Chinese people or China) as major film topics, *Huashǐ* (華史; Chinese history) as a prominent film resource, and *Huadi* (華地; locations including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and Chinese communities living outside China) as production space and living environment.¹⁸ Despite its relatively late arrival to the “Chinese cinemas” debate, the Huallywood framework remains unsuccessful in breaking through the thick wall that its host of predecessors have run up against, having been rightly criticized as embodying “a schizophrenic-like split between a commitment to a de-territorialized Chineseness in definition, and a latent tendency to a national(istic) agenda in practice”, running the familiar risk of “reinstating mainland China as the imagined yet ineluctable centre due to its implicit conceptualization of transnationalism as a ‘higher level of unit and coherence’ and Chinese identity as a ‘cultural order that is transnational’”.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, Hong Kong cinema once again features prominently within this framework, with the editors of the *Transnational Screens* special issue entitled, “Situating ‘Huallywood’: Histories, Trajectories, and Positionings”, affording it a special position:

¹⁷ Shao Peiren (邵培仁), “*Hualaiwu Dianying Yanjiu de Xinshijie: Hualaiwu Dianying Yanjiu Congshu Zongxu* (華萊塢電影研究的新視界——《華萊塢電影研究叢書》總序)”, *Journal of Shandong University of Technology (Social Sciences)*, Vol.31, No.1 (2015): p.73-76; Shao Peiren, “*Shilun Hualaiwu Shiyu Zhong de Taiwan Dianying Wenti* (試析華萊塢視域中的台灣電影問題)”, *Journal of Jiangsu Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, Vol.41, No.3 (2015): p.153-160. See also David H. Fleming and Maria Elena Indelicato, “Introduction: On Transnational Chinese Cinema(s), Hegemony and Huallywood(s)”, p.137-147; Maria Elena Indelicato, Fu Yongchun and Qiu Zitong, “Research Notes Towards a Definition of Huallywood”, p.54-60 and David H. Fleming, “Third-culture Huàllywood: or, ‘Chimerica’ the cinematic return”, *Transnational Screens*, Vol.10, No.3 (2019): p.184-200.

¹⁸ As cited in Maria Elena Indelicato, Fu Yongchun and Qiu Zitong, “Research Notes Towards a Definition of Huallywood”, p.55.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.57 and David H. Fleming and Maria Elena Indelicato, “Introduction: On Transnational Chinese Cinema(s), Hegemony and Huallywood(s)”, p.142.

“Fittingly, Hong Kong and its complex history becomes the focus of this issue’s first article”.

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Understandably, it is only natural, perhaps also justifiable, that Chinese-centric concerns feature more prominently in Hong Kong film (history) studies, given Hong Kong’s history as an immigrant society (majority settling in from mainland China), its longstanding fraught relationship with mainland China, and the fact that Hong Kong population has always been Chinese-majority. As Victor Fan puts it, “[t]he cultural boundary and sense of ontological consistency of Hong Kong is, of course, constantly shaped and revised by its relationship with China”.²¹ On the “ideological” basis that “Hong Kong people believe that their community is an ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous society”, it has even been suggested that Hong Kong gangster movies’ treatment of the border, both visible and invisible, push forth the proposal that the “ethnic” concept can, instead, be invoked to demarcate the people of Hong Kong vis-à-vis mainland China, marking out “a relatively separate ‘ethnic’ identity of Hong Kong from China”, a uniquely-Hong Kong “symbolic ethnicity”.²²

I agree wholeheartedly that there are strong causes and reasons that warrant an urgent and constant (self-)reflection of Hong Kong cinema’s “Chinese” identity; this is an unnegotiable task that is arguably more pertinent now than ever. The constraint I wish to highlight here, however, lies less on the same plane as that of deconstructing or delineating “Chineseness” than in the long shadow cast by it. Paradigmatic parameters, organizing principles and prevailing academic discourses guide research directions and trends. When the construction of Hong Kong film history, particularly the cinema’s transborder features and endeavours, is almost routinely approached and examined through the lens of Chinese political

²⁰ David H. Fleming and Maria Elena Indelicato, “Introduction: On Transnational Chinese Cinema(s), Hegemony and Huallywood(s)”, p.143.

²¹ Victor Fan. *Extraterritoriality: Locating Hong Kong Cinema and Media*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p.8.

²² Lo Kwai-cheung, “A Borderline Case: Ethnic Politics and Gangster Films in Post-1997 Hong Kong”, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol.10, No.4 (2007): p.436 and p.442-444.

and migration history, alongside related experiences and trajectories of cultural and linguistic affinity, this “Chinese preoccupation”, as I would call it, overshadows non-Chinese trajectories in accounts of Hong Kong cinema’s origins and development, limiting the scope of understanding and inquiry that are no less pertinent and necessary to interrogate.

My view is that, notwithstanding professed theoretical goals, whether in the field of Hong Kong and Chinese film studies, or in film history more generally, much more still needs to be done to highlight the non-Chinese dimensions of Hong Kong cinema and its transborder dealings, not least because non-Chinese elements contribute significantly to Hong Kong cinema’s diversity and complexity. The relatively recent book on non-Chinese images in Hong Kong cinema, aptly titled *Vaguely Visible* (若隱若現), includes a long list of non-Chinese characters that appeared in Hong Kong films between the 1970s and 2010s. This preliminary sketch, itself representing one out of very few existing book-length attempts to have systematically taken on such a topic, gives an indication of the substantial scale of non-Chinese – in this case also minority – issues present within Hong Kong cinema that await further interrogation. Indeed, as persuasively pointed out in the book, all too often the PRC stands as the Other against or alongside which Hong Kong defines its Self in narratives on Hong Kong’s subjectivity; as a result, the role that minority ethnic communities play as the city’s internal Other is largely being neglected. To better understand Hong Kong’s subjectivity, it is necessary to also take a closer look at this side of Hong Kong society both onscreen and off-screen.²³ On a similar note, positing that “to more fully understand Hong Kong cinema’s global context”, “it is particularly productive to examine that cinema’s connections to Thailand”, Adam Knee illustrates how Thailand has been imagined in and by Hong Kong cinema from the 1960s to the 1990s, demonstrating that “stock-in-trade” cinematic representations of Thailand or, put

²³ John Nguyet Erni (陳錦榮) and Louise Ho Kin-chung (何建宗) eds. *Ruoying Ruoxian: Xianggang Dianying de Feihuaren Xingxiang (1970s-2010s)* (若隱若現：香港電影的非華人形象 (1970 至 2010 年代)). Hong Kong: Typesetter Publishing (手民出版社), 2016, p.75.

another way, the “clear symbolic value of Thailand within the Hong Kong cinematic discourse”, had effectively produced “a distinctive, Hong Kong-specific cultural discourse”, an “implicit self-apprehension of Hong Kong in relation to this warmer-climed other”.²⁴ Works such as these attest to the reality that Hong Kong’s cinematic imagination of the self, especially in relation to and *through interaction with* others is, in fact, much more multifaceted than is currently being recorded. In this light, shedding light on how a Nanyang – a Chinese term used to denote what we know today as the region of Southeast Asia – Orient is created in Hong Kong cinema by tapping on its Malay counterpart’s resources, my research on Nanyang *gong tau* films in this dissertation joins these works in seeking to further illuminate the “non-Chineseness” of Hong Kong cinema, particularly with regards to screen representation.

A “Chinese Southeast Asia”

In examining Malay-Hong Kong film connections, however, this dissertation seeks to also go beyond representation as method. My interest lies in mapping the industrial and material exchanges between the two cinemas. That is, to trace and make sense of the transfer and movement of resources between the two that took place via the production of Hong Kong-produced Chinese-language films with “Malay elements” as well as Malay films that were remade from Chinese-language films and produced by Hong Kong film companies.²⁵ I am interested in finding out what happened both onscreen and *offscreen* in the making of these films – the latter hitherto underemphasized by what I perceive as a longstanding privileging of textual analysis or close reading in film studies – and what this entwinement might mean for

²⁴ Adam Knee, “Thailand in the Hong Kong Cinematic Imagination”, in Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam eds. *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema: No Film is an Island*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, p.77-90.

²⁵ In this dissertation, I adopt the term “Malay cinema” and “Malay film” instead of “Malay-language cinema/film” in accordance with regular academic usage. In Malay (film) studies, the term is not subjected to similar concerns and critical interventions as in the case of “Chinese-language cinema(s)/film”.

both these industries in question. In this regard, within the field of Hong Kong and Chinese film studies, perhaps this dissertation comes closest in spirit to Lim Song-hwee's idea of a "minor Chinese film historiography". Seeking to "push the concept of Chinese cinema to its extremities and limits", Lim proposes a historiography that focuses on transborder (linguistic, national, ethnic, cultural, etc.) practices and that constantly troubles the identity and centrality of "Chinese cinema". It is a way of documenting film history that can "give voice to the multilingual polyphony that contemporary subjects increasingly inhabit", "expose the fissures and 'impurities' within the national body politic", "account for films made in any corner of the world that challenge the concept of Chinese-language cinema" as well as those that "represent a different mode of film-making because they do not take the centrality of Chinese languages and dialects as a given or privilege the nation in their narratives".²⁶ This self-reflexive, self-inventing and, indeed, almost self-contaminating (as opposed to self-contained) spirit is also propagated by Helena Hok, when she calls for "a form of critical impropriety that actively courts improper objects for the study of Chinese cinemas", noting that "a pressing challenge in the field is to *unthink* the notion of 'Chinese', and even that of 'cinema', as our ultimate critical parameters [emphasis in original]".²⁷ Betraying a similar sentiment, through her extensive work on border-crossings movements and border politics in Chinese cinema (or what she may prefer to call, cinema made with "Chinese elements"), Wang Yiman also "emphasize[s] the importance of *re-recognizing* Chinese cinema [emphasis in original]" which, to Wang, "means to problematize the reifying epistemological model fixated on the subject-object, Self-Other binary, and to refocus on their interweaving transactions and mutual constitution".²⁸

²⁶ Lim Songhwee, "Six Chinese Cinemas in Search of a Historiography", p.48-49.

²⁷ Helena Hok-Sze Leung, "Unthinking: Chinese • Cinema • Criticism", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol.1, No.1 (2007): p.71.

²⁸ Wang Yiman, "Made in China, Sold in the United States and Vice Versa – Transnational 'Chinese' Cinema between Media Capitals", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol.3, No.2 (2009): p.163.

These desires, seemingly driven by a dissatisfaction with Chinese cinema studies' navel-gazing tendencies, to unsettle the ontological stability of both a cinema and a field of study, find resonance in the expanding field of Asian cinema network studies, which I found to be particularly inspiring for my own research work. Increasingly scholars are paying attention to the vast and intricate cinematic network formed in the twentieth century after the second world war, when influential Asian studios initiated and forged numerous cinematic connections across different sites in Asia and beyond. A powerhouse in postwar Asian cinema, Hong Kong, for a long time represented most eminently by Cathay Organization and the Shaws, features prominently in this network. Casting sight on Hong Kong cinema's extensive reach within and beyond Asia, that inevitably cuts across varying kinds of geopolitical, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and industrial borders, productively guides us to better detect and pay more notice to the industry's channels of flows and engagement that may not be premediated or predetermined by apparent Chinese affinities or affiliations, as a growing body of scholarly works progressively show.²⁹

Jeremy E. Taylor observes that "the rediscovery of the global financial networks... has helped to move scholarship away from an undue [over]focus on what was 'Chinese' about

²⁹ It is timely at this point to address another burgeoning scholarly thought – Asia as method or inter-Asia cultural studies. Seeking to seize the opportunity of activating a deeper process of decolonization, deimperialization and de-Cold War-ization presented by the present moment of globalization, Chen Kuan-hsing advocates for inter-referencing between societies in Asia, that is, to shift and multiply existing sites and objects of identification by making societies in Asia each other's point of reference, so as to mobilize the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices in Asia as a means to draw alternative horizons and perspectives, conduct internal criticism and knowledge production that is unconfined within the Cold War knowledge production deadlock (i.e. the socialist/capitalist binary) and, ultimately, to transform the understanding of the self and rebuild subjectivity. The underlying assumption for this is that ignoring others (in Asia) who have experienced similar pressures and modernization trajectories makes it impossible to understand oneself. See Chen Kuan-hsing. *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, particularly p.4, p.9, p.112, p.212 and p.225. Although my work of uncovering historical connections between Hong Kong and Malay cinemas may, albeit on the periphery (since it is not in any strict sense an act of inter-referencing), contribute to this same end, but while Asia as method/inter-Asia cultural studies tends towards celebrating solidarity and comparing similar experiences of pressure and trauma for the worthy pursuit of collective healing and self-transformation, on the contrary, my research, as readers will soon discover, largely highlights the friction and conflict that occur between sites in Asia, and records a history of inter-Asia contestation in the development of cinemas in Asia.

‘Chinese cinemas’”.³⁰ Where Hong Kong cinema is concerned, one major trajectory that has hitherto been carved out in this regard is, perhaps unsurprisingly, Hong Kong cinema’s foray into Hollywood. A number of edited volumes have undertaken the task of charting Hong Kong-American film connections, with a sizeable portion focusing on the influx and influence of Hong Kong *kungfu* films in the States beginning from the mid-1970s.³¹ Another area that has attracted considerable research attention is the cinema’s engagement with other film industries based in East Asia. Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting, Tezuka Yoshiharu and Stephanie DeBoer, for example, document in remarkable depth the complex connections forged between the Japanese and Hong Kong film industries from the 1930s through to the 1970s.³² Lee Sangjoon, on the other hand, delves deeply into the connections forged between the South Korean and Hong Kong film industries after the second world war up till the 1970s. In his doctoral thesis, Lee proposed the theory of a “Transnational Asian Studios System (TNASS)”, suggesting that TNASS could be a salient theoretical framework through which one could perceive the myriad of transborder cinematic operations happening throughout Asia during that period. At the time of writing, Lee’s latest monograph, *Cinema and the Cultural Cold War: US Diplomacy and the Origins of the Asian Cinema Network*, is currently in press. The book promises to explore the ways in which postwar Asian cinema was shaped by transnational collaborations and competitions between newly independent and colonial states at the height of Cold War politics.

³⁰ Jeremy E. Taylor. *Rethinking Transnational Chinese Cinemas: The Amoy-dialect Film Industry in Cold War Asia*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p.8.

³¹ The topic features prominently in Gina Marchetti and Tan See Kam eds. *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and the New Global Cinema: No Film is an Island*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007 and Lisa Funnell and Yip Manfung eds. *American and Chinese-language Cinemas: Examining Cultural Flows*. New York: Routledge, 2015. See also Wang Yiman. *Remaking Chinese Cinema: Through the Prism of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Hollywood*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013.

³² Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting. *Japanese and Hong Kong Film Industries: Understanding the Origins of East Asian Film Networks*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010; Yoshiharu Tezuka. *Japanese Cinema Goes Global: Filmmakers’ Journeys*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011 and Stephanie DeBoer. *Coproducing Asia: Locating Japanese-Chinese Regional Film and Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. See also D.W. Davis and Emilie Yeh Yueh-yu, “Inoue at Shaws: The Wellspring of Youth”, in Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003, p.255-271.

³³ To a much lesser extent, some work has also been done to investigate Hong Kong cinema's connections with South Asian film industries. Most notably, Srinivas S. V. has written rather extensively on Hong Kong cinema's relationship with the Telugu film industry and the Southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh in particular. ³⁴

Over the past few decades, effort has also been expended to delineate the relationship between Hong Kong cinema and Southeast Asia. Individual articles in edited volumes centering on Hong Kong film studios such as *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, *The Cathay Story* and *The Glorious Modernity of Kong Ngee* have variously recorded and examined cinematic interactions between Southeast Asia and Hong Kong, particularly early Hong Kong cinema's reliance on Southeast Asian finance and film markets.

³⁵ Similarly, mainly through charting the developmental trajectories of the Shaw Brothers and

³³ Lee Sangjoon, "The Asia Foundation's Motion-Picture Project and the Cultural Cold War in Asia", *Film History*, Vol.29, Issue 2 (2017): p.108-137; "Creating an Anti-Communist Motion Picture Producers' Network in Asia: the Asia Foundation, Asia Pictures, and the Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.37, Issue 3 (2017): p.517-538; "Destination Hong Kong: The Geopolitics of South Korean Espionage Films in the 1960s", *Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol.22, Issue 2 (2017): p.343-364; "Martial Arts Craze in Korea: Cultural Translation of Martial Arts Film and Literature in the 1960s", in Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting ed. *East Asian Cinema and Cultural Heritage: From China, Hong Kong, Taiwan to Japan and South Korea*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p.173-195; "Seoul-Hong Kong-Macau: Love with an Alien (1957) and Postwar Korea-Hong Kong Co-production", in Wendy Su and Jin Dal Yong eds. *Asia-Pacific Film Co-productions: Theory, Industry and Aesthetics*. London: Routledge, 2019, p.256-274; "The Transnational Asian Studio System: Cinema, Nation-state, and Globalization in Cold War Asia". PhD thesis, New York University, 2011 and *Cinema and the Cultural Cold War: US Diplomacy and the Origins of the Asian Cinema Network*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2020 (forthcoming). Additionally, Lee has also written about the first momentous Hong Kong-British co-production horror film. See "Dracula, Vampires, and Kung Fu Fighters: *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* and Transnational Horror Co-production in 1970s Hong Kong", in Sophia Siddique and Raphael Raphael eds. *Transnational Horror Cinema: Bodies of Excess and the Global Grotesque*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p.65-80.

³⁴ See Srinivas S. V., "Hong Kong Action Film in the Indian B Circuit", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 1 (2003): p.40-62; "Chinaman, Not Hindustani: Stereotypes and Solidarity in a Hong Kong Film on India", in Joseph Tse-Hei Lee and Satish Kolluri eds. *Hong Kong and Bollywood: Globalization of Asian Cinemas*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p.85-103 and "Hong Kong Action Film and the Career of the Telugu Mass Hero", in Meaghan Morris, Li Siu-leung and Stephan Chan Ching-kiu eds. *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005, p.111-124. See also, in the same volume, Valentina Vitali, "Hong Kong-Hollywood-Bombay: On the Function of 'Martial Art' in the Hindi Action Cinema", p.125-150.

³⁵ Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008; Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Cathay Story*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002 and Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Glorious Modernity of Kong Ngee*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2006. See also, John A. Lent. *The Asian Film Industry*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, p.97-99 and I. C. Jarvie. *Window on Hong Kong: A Sociological Study of the Hong Kong Film Industry and its Audience*. Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1977, p.35-47 and p.72.

Cathay Organization, in *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-cultural View* Law Kar and Frank Bren map out in some detail, the cinematic crossovers between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (or “Nanyang”, as the region is referred to in this book).³⁶

This dissertation’s examination of Malay-Hong Kong film connections comes into direct dialogue with this Hong Kong-Southeast Asian branch of study. Existing literature undeniably provide valuable information and insight on the topic but a glass ceiling now seems to hang over this area of research. A prolonged lopsided focus on the Chinese diasporic side of Southeast Asia and on Hong Kong cinema’s postwar studio era period (1940s-1960s) has, by now, crystallized a dominant, oft-cited narrative that runs through majority of these works: early Hong Kong cinema was sustained in large part by diasporic Chinese capital in Southeast Asia, and a global “pan-Chinese dream” – a kind of “cultural China” or Chinese modernity linking Chinese diasporic communities in capitalist Asia together – was created by Hong Kong cinema, particularly through the major studios, throughout much of the postwar twentieth century.³⁷ Poshek Fu’s use of the memorable phrase, “China Forever”, to encapsulate the philosophy and nature of the Shaw studio’s far-reaching transborder operations is perhaps most emblematic of this.³⁸ Relatedly, when they do appear, mentions of Hong Kong cinema’s engagement with “non-Chinese” Southeast Asia tend to scratch at the surface of the often tokenistic “Nanyang flavour” or “Nanyang colour (南洋色彩)” that frequently embellish Hong Kong films of the 1950s and 1960s (more in Chapter 4).

³⁶ See, in particular, “Part 3: Border Crossings” in Frank Bren and Law Kar. *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-cultural View*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004, p.183-230, and within that section, “Expansion in Nanyang – Shaw Brothers versus Cathay”, p.191-200.

³⁷ Majority of the articles in *China Forever* discusses the Shaws’ interaction with Southeast Asia under the frameworks of “pan-Chinese” business networks and “pan-Chinese” culture and imagination (see Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Sek Kek uses the term “China Dream” (see Sek Kek, “Shaw Movie Town’s ‘China Dream’ and ‘Hong Kong Sentiments’”, in Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003, p.37-47).

³⁸ Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Habitually perceiving Southeast Asia in exclusively Chinese terms through the lens of studio expansion, here the Chinese preoccupation in Hong Kong film (history) studies appears to overflow into research on Hong Kong-Southeast Asian film connections. In this respect, what needs to be supplemented in order to “more fully understand Hong Kong cinema’s global context” – and, I would add, postwar Asian cinema’s extensive and enduring network – is Hong Kong cinema’s engagement with Southeast Asia beyond the 1960s and beyond the discursive framework of Chinese migration and diasporic history. Indeed, that these frameworks have rather firmly barricaded the study of Hong Kong-Southeast Asian film connections can be seen from two most recent publications – one about Hong Kong-Singapore film connections between 1950-1965, the other on processes through which cinema contributed to the building of Hong Kong’s postwar community and identity – which, without a doubt, add new and important insights to the discussion but nonetheless work visibly within these well-established boundaries.³⁹

Such gravitation towards a “Chinese Southeast Asia” leaves much room for exploration because from the outset, Hong Kong cinema’s dealings with Southeast Asia were never just an exclusively Chinese affair. For one, Hong Kong cinema was heavily invested in the Malay film industry based in the Malay peninsula from the 1950s through to the 1980s. Film moguls such as Cathay Organization and the Shaw Brothers created each own’s Malay film powerhouses with Cathay-Keris and Malay Film Productions at the same time as they monopolized the region’s Chinese film industry. Resources from their Chinese film bases in Hong Kong flowed into their Malay counterparts and vice-versa, forming an intercultural Malay-Chinese affinity and connection that were inherent and consequential to both the Malay and Hong Kong film industries. That is to say, although their arrival to Southeast Asia did indeed follow the familiar

³⁹ Grace Mak (麥欣恩). *Hong Kong Cinema and Singapore: A Cultural Ring Between Two Cities, 1950-1965* (香港電影與新加坡：冷戰時代星港文化聯繫，1950-1965). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018 and Chang Jingjing. *Screening Communities: Negotiating Narratives of Empire, Nation and the Cold War in Hong Kong Cinema*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019, in particular Chapter 5.

Chinese migration and diasporic route, the place that they encountered, and the endeavours they eventually embarked on, were certainly not structured or directed exclusively by Chinese affinities or within familiar Chinese(-speaking) territories. Indeed, the collective endeavours of Cathay-Keris and the Shaws' Malay Film Production even ushered in the golden age of Malay cinema that is still fondly remembered by many in Southeast Asia today. This important historical episode forces us to look beyond the "Chinese" side of the story in examining Hong Kong-Southeast Asian film connections, and to consider what happens when Hong Kong cinema extends its reach to film industries and film cultures that it bears little apparent cultural and linguistic affinity and affiliation with. As Timothy Barnard observes,

[m]ore than 150 Malay-language films – more than 250 if the films produced at Cathay Keris are included – were produced in Singapore over a twenty-year period between 1947 and 1967. However, these efforts have been largely overlooked in the scholarship of Asian cinema. They are even marginalized within the Shaw Brothers' empire. This is understandable considering the impact the Shaw Brothers made on Chinese cinema and business. Despite being overshadowed in the larger history of Chinese businessmen in Southeast Asia, it reflects the power that such shadows can have not only on the movie screen but also in the story of the society they encompass.⁴⁰

In his article on the Shaws' "territorialization" strategy in Southeast Asia, with a focus on the company's work in Cantonese and Mandarin cinema within the region, Yung Sai-shing similarly remarked that the area of Malay cinema has admittedly been neglected in "Shaw

⁴⁰ Timothy P. Barnard, "The Shaw Brothers' Malay Films", in Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008, p.170. So far only Timothy Barnard has produced consistent work about Malay cinema within the branch of Hong Kong film/Shaw studies.

Studies”.⁴¹ Yung and Barnard made these statements nearly twenty years ago. More light has since been shed on Hong Kong’s film connections with Southeast Asia via Malay cinema, but progress has nonetheless been too slow and too little – a situation lamentably exacerbated also by Malay film studies’ apparent lack of interest in the same topic.⁴²

Territorialization and isolation

If a “Chinese preoccupation” obscures the involvement of Malay cinema in studies of Hong Kong film history and Asian film connections, correspondingly a longstanding territorialization tendency within Malay film studies customarily affords little emphasis to studies of the industry’s outward ventures. Research on Malay cinema situates the industry and its history within the boundaries of the Malay Peninsula and that of the broader Malay Archipelago when Indonesian cinema is brought into the picture. The oft-repeated narrative centres around three main sites: Singapore, Malaysia (historically Malaya) and Indonesia. More will be explicated in Chapters 2 and 3 but for now, a brief outline of this familiar story is as follows: Malay cinema was built up in the early 1930s by Chinese financiers, Indian directors and Malay performers. Originally intending to dabble only in film distribution and exhibition, the Shaws (who just migrated to Singapore/Malaya from Shanghai) and Cathay’s Loke Wan Tho (who was Singaporean/Malayan himself) quickly recognized the potential of producing Malay talkies in Malay-dominant Singapore and Malaya, thus officially forming the Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Keris in 1949 and 1953 respectively. This took place even

⁴¹ Yung Sai-shing, “Territorialization and the Entertainment Industry of the Shaw Brothers in Southeast Asia”, in Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008, p.149.

⁴² From the 2010s onwards, studies of Hong Kong-Malay film connections are mainly found in works on Malay film history. The most notable example is Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle: A Century (and a Bit More) of Wayang*. Petaling Jaya: Merpati Jingga, 2013. However, as will be explained in the following section and throughout the dissertation, this remains an underexplored area even in the realm of Malay film studies, and much of these “new” works nonetheless tend towards recycling an established narrative.

before the founding of the two Hong Kong-based Chinese-language film production studios that the Shaws and Cathay are best known for today – the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) and Motion Picture & General Investment (MP&GI) studios – which were formally established in 1958 and 1956 respectively. Home to the two biggest Malay film production studios, Singapore eventually became the centre of Malay film production, in tandem with the city's development into a Malay intellectual and cultural centre in Southeast Asia.

By the 1950s, strong and steady output in terms of quantity and quality from the studios ushered in the fondly-remembered golden age of Malay cinema, but by the 1960s, turbulent geopolitical changes swiftly and fundamentally reconfigured the Malay film industry. Most prominently, the separation of Singapore and Malaysia into two distinct nation-states prompted a shift of Malay cultural production centre from Singapore to Malaysia since, with the split, Singapore now became a demographically Chinese-majority nation on its own. Malay film workers and financiers migrated their businesses into the new nation-state of Malaysia and Malaysian politicians and cultural workers were, in varying degrees, becoming invested in developing Malay cinema into Malaysia's national film industry. At the same time, Indonesia was also quickly rising as a centre of Malay cultural production in its own right, with film production activities rapidly picking pace following policy and regulatory changes put in place to help support local filmmaking, thus turning from a passive importer (and a large one at that) to becoming a strong exporter of Malay films, posing strong competition to the Malay film industry of the Malay Peninsula now operating in newly-independent Malaysia.

Studies of Malay cinema and its history tend to circle around this main narrative, with attention concentrated almost exclusively on the industry's activities within and between these three sites. Works that attempt to mine deeper for more diversified stories nonetheless tend to look and probe within this same overarching frame, focusing either on individual figures, films

or movements bound within these spatial boundaries.⁴³ What is very much lacking in current state of research is an outward-looking perspective in conceptualizing and approaching the industry. Different from the case of Hong Kong film history, however, inter-ethnic and cross-cultural interactions, particularly the Chinese-Malay dynamic within the industry itself, actually constantly draw significant scholarly attention, likely as a direct implication of Malaysia's consistently polarizing racialized politics. The insularity of the field here relates more to the trend of conducting Malay film (history) studies by and large within the geopolitical boundaries of the Malay Archipelago – a territorializing tendency that poses imaginative limitations to current understandings of Malay cinema, forestalling opportunities to discover and interrogate other forms of transborder experiences, particularly episodes where the industry engaged or attempted to engage with film cultures and industries based outside the Malay Archipelago.⁴⁴ Even with regards to the relatively well-studied studio era, i.e. the golden age of Malay cinema in the 1950s and 1960s, films such as the first Malay film that was partially shot in Japan alongside a Japanese cast – *Holiday in Tokyo* (Melanchong Ka-Tokyo, 1964), and the curious case of the famous *Pontianak* (1957) film being dubbed into Cantonese and exhibited in Hong Kong remain almost completely unattended to in current Malay film studies.

⁴³ For example, Budiawan recently traces the Malaya-Indonesian interflows that influenced the Malayan literary movement – ASAS 50, of which many Malay filmmakers also partook in. See Budiawan, “Cultural and Political Relations Between Malay(sian) Writers and their Indonesian Counterparts, 1950-1965”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol.16, Issue 1 (2015): p.85-95. Jonathan Driskell's article, “*Majallah Filem* and Stardom in the Golden Age of Malay Cinema” includes a section titled, “Malay Cinema: Singapore and Beyond”, which accurately describes the circulation of Malay films and Malay film magazine *Majallah Filem* across Singapore, Malaya, Borneo and Indonesia, but nonetheless remain focused on studying Malay cinema within these parameters (although this is no doubt also necessary and important) (see Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman eds. *Star Attractions: Twentieth-century Movie Magazines and Global Fandom*. Iowa: Iowa University Press, 2019, p.111-122). Biographical and star/celebrity studies works are also common additions to the oeuvre, particularly with Malay film icon, P. Ramlee, as main subject. An early publication by Timothy White on Japanese stylistic influences in Malay cinema and William van der Heide's monograph on Malaysian film history with a focus on the cinema's connections with other film cultures stand as relatively rare attempts of examining Malay cinema beyond these boundaries (see Timothy White, “Historical Poetics, Malaysian Cinema, and the Japanese Occupation”, *Kinema*, Nov. 1996, no page number and William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Border Crossings and National Culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ Such insularity may also be an implication of the way Southeast Asian film studies and film industries operate in general. See Khoo Gaik Cheng, “Introduction: Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945-1998)”, in Khoo Gaik Cheng, Thomas Barker and Mary Ainslie eds. *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945-1998)*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, p.11-14.

In the chapters that follow, more will be explicated about Malay film studies' inertia in examining outward-bound connections or, put another way, its general disinterest in entertaining the past and present prospect of Malay cinema traveling beyond Malay-dominated locales. Accordingly, it is the hope of this dissertation to address such a gap and to stretch the boundaries of the field through tracing the Malay-Hong Kong film connections embodied in the Malay James Bond films, "new-style" Malay films and the Nanyang *gong tau* films. Placing Malay and Hong Kong cinema on the same plane of vision by focusing on the connections *between* them, on a broader level this research project hopes to bring the hitherto largely isolated Malay film studies into the scope of Asian cinema network studies, so as to reach a deeper understanding of these interconnected film industries, film histories and film cultures. In this light, at the same time as this dissertation probes the "transnationalism" of Southeast Asian cinemas through the case of Hong-Malay film connections, it is, in itself, also an act of transnationalizing Southeast Asian cinema studies.

Transnationalizing Southeast Asian cinemas

In their seminal article, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies" published in 2010, Will Higbee and Lim Songhwee explain that in film studies, the transnational concept is most commonly used to delineate: (a) the movement of films, filmmakers and differences in audience reception across national borders; (b) film cultures and national cinemas which invest in shared cultural heritage and/or geopolitical boundary (for example the aforementioned "transnational Chinese cinemas"); and (c) diasporic, exilic and postcolonial cinemas that challenge national cinema as stable entities. Acknowledging that "within the discipline of film studies, the concept of transnational cinema is certainly now an established area of enquiry", the authors affirm the critical deployment of

“transnational” as a productive way of interrogating transborder film connections and flows. It remains a salient descriptive and conceptual marker that is useful in investigating the interface between global and local, national and transnational, in studies of films.⁴⁵

Such advocacy for the transnational, however, is carefully tempered with a note of caution. Higbee and Lim stress that, unless the aesthetic, political or economic implications – or, the question of imbalances of power – in transnational exchanges are kept well in sight, the “transnational” risks losing its critical purchase and would become “merely descriptive” or “purely prescriptive”. In their words,

Transnational film studies parallels the trajectories and power dynamics of transnational cinema: while border-crossing is the *raison d’être* of both transnational cinema and its studies, borders continue to be heavily policed and entry often comes with a price tag which can sometimes be waived if in possession of the right papers [...] [A]ll border-crossing activities are necessarily fraught with issues of power.⁴⁶

In the study of films, a critical transnationalism does not *ghettoize* transnational film-making in interstitial and marginal spaces but rather interrogates how these film-making activities negotiate with the national on all levels... In examining all forms of cross-border film-making activities, it is also always attentive to questions of postcoloniality, politics and power, and how these may, in turn, uncover new forms of neocolonialist practices in the guise of popular genres or auteurist aesthetics. It scrutinizes the tensions and dialogic relationship between national and transnational, rather than simply negating one in favour of the other. Moreover, it refuses to see the

⁴⁵ Will Higbee and Lim Songhwee, “Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies”, *Transnational Cinemas*, Vol.1, No.1 (2010): p.7-21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.17-18.

flow or exchange within transnational cinema as taking place uniquely between national cinemas [emphasis mine].⁴⁷

Examining the transborder activities between Hong Kong and Malay cinemas, particularly the politics and power relations involved therein, this dissertation is both an exhibition of transnational(izing) cinemas and an exercise of critical transnationalism. Yet, aside from the broad field of transnational film studies, I believe this project stands most meaningfully on the ossified border of Southeast Asian film studies, where the transnational remains a largely obscured and understudied concept and phenomenon. In Higbee and Lim's usage, the word, "ghettoization" (quoted above), refers to the then-enclosed and marginalized state of transnational forms of study in film studies that has, for a long time, been dominated by the national paradigm. In the context of transnational Asian cinema studies, the same word – indeed, the same predicament – can be used to describe the state of "Southeast Asian cinemas". The aforementioned paucity of scholarship on film connections involving the region in studies of Asian film networks adequately reveals its minor status in prevailing research frameworks. A survey of monographs and edited volumes dealing with the "transnational Asian cinema/film" subject also reveals that research is largely concentrated within the scope of East Asian cinemas, particularly on intra-regional connections and flows. At conferences of Asian (film) studies, it is also certainly not uncommon to find a panel or two bearing the words, "Southeast Asia", in their titles whereas the rest of the panels tend to be organized around thematic concerns.

This problem is both illuminated and compounded by the prevalent "sum of parts" approach in Southeast Asian film studies. Vast majority of currently available anthologies and monographs on "Southeast Asian cinemas" treat the concept as a collection of national cinemas,

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.18.

often adopting the organizing principle of “one-nation-a-chapter” and rarely making connections between or beyond them.⁴⁸ Correspondingly, focused work on border-crossing or transnational aspects of Southeast Asian cinemas, whether inter- or intra-regionally and particularly in terms of film history, remain sparse. Indeed, as recent as in 2019, V. Metaveevinij makes the fair and accurate comment that “there are still relatively few studies of transnational cinema in South East Asia”.⁴⁹ In a recent attempt to summarize the state of the discipline, Khoo Gaik Cheng succinctly points out that:

[M]ost studies of cinema culture and filmmaking produced within Southeast Asia prior to the late 1990s were contained within the framework of national cinemas, as nation-building and modernity were and continue to be major themes. Even more are produced for domestic audiences in their own languages or, in the case of English publications in the Philippines, are poorly circulated outside of the country. This perhaps reflects the insular nature of these national film industries where, although films were occasionally sent to festivals abroad, producers largely focused upon domestic audiences.⁵⁰

This situation is also compounded by the general tendency to homogenize the Asia region, and specifically to amalgamate Southeast Asia with other more dominant parts

⁴⁸ Examples include Jose F. Lacaba. *The Films of ASEAN*. Quezon: ASEAN Committee of Culture and Information, 2000; May Adadol Ingawanij and Benjamin McKay eds. *Glimpses of Freedom: Independent Cinemas in Southeast Asia*. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2012; Tilman Baumgartel ed. *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012 and Khoo Gaik Cheng, Mary Ainslie and Thomas Barker eds. *Southeast Asia on Screen: From Independence to Financial Crisis (1945-1998)*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. These are all solid works on Southeast Asian cinemas but all of them carry the same focus on the national. Having said that, some of these works do include research that adopt global or transnational perspectives, but these are mostly about contemporary Southeast Asian films and their engagements with international film festivals.

⁴⁹ Veluree Metaveevinij, “Negotiating Representation: Gender, City and Nation in South East Asian Transnational Cinema”, *South East Asia Research*, Vol.27, No.2, p.136.

⁵⁰ Khoo Gaik Cheng, “Introduction”, in Khoo Gaik Cheng, Mary Ainslie and Thomas Barker eds. *Southeast Asia on Screen*, p.11.

of Asia... Most of the time, articles on cinema in this region are corralled under “East Asia” or become token representations of cinema in the region.⁵¹

This tendency to keep cinemas of Southeast Asia within closed national doors both in Asian and Southeast Asian film studies runs the danger of compartmentalizing them as “given wholes”: disparate, bounded, self-contained entities. More than just a simple lack of attention, what I find more concerning about this “ghettoization” situation is thus the disturbing reminiscence of the universal/particular divide that is characteristic of centre/periphery dynamics in uneven (power) relationships. That the “fixing” of *rigid* boundaries unto research subjects in knowledge production is oftentimes a manifestation of (neo)imperialism has long been rigorously criticized across multiple academic disciplines, most prominently by postcolonial scholars such as Partha Chatterjee and Edward Said.⁵²

I am not equating the situation at hand here with that of postcolonial studies, but I do think that there are overlapping areas worthy of reference. Said’s conceptualization of a different paradigm for humanistic research is particularly relevant here. In his understanding, a paradigm that does not depend upon the totalizing nature of border logics and warring essences requires one to cease “looking for uniquely original essences, either to restore them

⁵¹ Ibid., p.13.

⁵² For example, in counteracting Eurocentrism in studies of Indian (colonial) history, Partha Chatterjee posited that “it is political discourse of the ‘modern’ kind which insists that these collectivities have a fixed, determinate, form, and, if there are several to which an individual can belong, that there be a priority among them”. Opposed to this, Chatterjee hoped to restore the enabling imaginative possibilities of “fuzziness” (“fuzzy communities”, in his context) that has been obliterated by the adherence to modern (i.e. modeled after the West) standards of politics and knowledge production. See Partha Chatterjee. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.222 and p.225-227. Edward Said also emphasized the need to recognize “overlapping experiences” in order to “de-imperialize” knowledge production and historiography: “if at the outset we acknowledge the massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences – of women, of Westerners, of Blacks, of national states and cultures – there is no particular intellectual reason for granting each and all of them an ideal and essentially separate status... a comparative or, better, a contrapuntal perspective is required in order to see [for example,] a connection between coronation rituals in England and the Indian durbars of the late nineteenth century. That is, we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others”. Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994, p.38.

or to set them in a place of unimpeachable honour”; “what matters a great deal more than the stable identity kept current in official discourse is the contestatory force of an interpretative method whose material is the disparate, but intertwined and interdependent, and above all overlapping streams of historical experience”.⁵³

The same case can perhaps be made about the study of Southeast Asian cinemas. There is a need to uncover and study, more actively, occurrences where national or territorial boundaries have been transcended so that knowledge production about Southeast Asian cinemas cease relegating them solely to “specialized and separatist knowledge” that is potentially reifying and could potentially “clear the space for a sanctioned rhetoric of national cultural purpose”.⁵⁴ Foregrounding transnational dimensions of Malay cinema through examining its entwinement with Hong Kong cinema, this dissertation makes an intervention into the longstanding problem of ghettoizing and over-nationalizing Southeast Asian cinemas. On the level of transnational (Asian) film studies, the project restores to sight the porosity of Southeast Asian film borders and the politics involved, casting the transnational net wider such that the extent and complexity of Asian transnational networks can be better appreciated. More importantly, it brings Southeast Asian film studies into dialogue with its East Asian counterpart – “the more dominant part of Asia”, in Khoo’s words. In this way, the dissertation transnationalizes Southeast Asian *film studies* itself, dismantling the academic ghetto of Southeast Asian cinemas in the field of transnational Asian film studies, and lifts the isolating national container long held over Southeast Asian film studies.

⁵³ Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*, p.400-402.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.411.

Hong Kong-Malay film connections

This dissertation is structured into three main chapters. Each chapter takes a focused look at a set of films that transpired from connections forged between the Hong Kong and Malay film industries. As each set of films possesses its own unique specificities, every chapter is designed as a standalone case study that can be read independently from one other but are internally threaded together by the central question of why, and how, were different kinds of borders being crossed, both onscreen and offscreen, to facilitate the contact, transfers and exchanges involved. Unpacking the stories within, in each chapter I reconstruct the scenes where these connections were initiated and materialized, focusing on the circumstances and transborder processes involved. I also attempt to discern where each set of films stands against the larger narratives of Hong Kong and Malay film histories, in the process revealing and addressing some limits of current film history narratives. Read together, these chapters put shape to this particular dynamic of transnational Asian cinema and demonstrate that, even beyond the well-studied studio era that ended in the late 1960s, the histories of Hong Kong and Malay cinemas remained entwined with each other, to some degree implicating each other's processes of localization/nationalization and restructuration in the late twentieth century.

The first case study in this dissertation deals with a series of made-in-Hong Kong Malay James Bond films. Chapter 2 examines three Malay James Bond films (1967-1968) – part of the popular Zain series – that were filmed and produced in Hong Kong. These include: *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanitta 001* (no English title), *Shadow of Death* (Bayangal Aja) and *Danger Valley* (Jurang Bahaya). The cast of these films were sent to Hong Kong to work in the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) studio and each of these films were shot in tandem with the Mandarin versions: *Angel With The Iron Fists* (鐵觀音, 1967), *Summons To Death* (催命符, 1967) and *Angel Strikes Again* (鐵觀音勇破爆炸黨, 1968). In this chapter, I demonstrate that market and labour

complications in postcolonial Singapore provided key impetuses for the convergence of the Shaws' Malay Film Productions studio and its Hong Kong counterpart in the making of these films, and that the political and cultural distances present within were primarily bridged via a reworking of the Malay body.

Chapter 3 then turns to look at a group of Malay films produced by the Shaw Brothers' Merdeka Studio based in Malaysia between 1975 to 1980. In 1974, Merdeka Studio announced plans to make seven films that would inaugurate "a new age" for Malay cinema. They are: *The Last Wish* (Permintaan Terakhir), *The Restless Youth* (Jiwa Remaja), *A Night in Malaysia* (Semalam Di Malaysia), *My Beloved Child* (Sayang Anakku Sayang), *Love and Songs* (Cinta Dan Lagu), *The Death Bell* (Loceng Maut) and *Pampered Child* (Adik Manja). Many of these films are actually remakes of earlier Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) box-office hits such as *Susanna* (珊珊, 1967), *Dead End* (死角, 1969), *The Younger Generation* (兒女是我們的, 1970), *The Bells of Death* (奪魂鈴, 1968) and *Whose Baby is in the Classroom?* (女校春色, 1970). Besides source materials, directors and technical crew were also transferred from Hong Kong to Malaysia to help with producing these "new-style" Malay(sian) films. In other words, the purported "new age" of Malay cinema and, by implication, the formation of Malaysian cinema, in the late 1970s were in some ways inaugurated through the mediation of Hong Kong cinema. In this chapter, I investigate the working relationship between the two industries in the making of these "new-style" films (particularly four directed by Jamil Sulong), demonstrating that the Shaws used the concept of "internationalist nationalism" as a vehicle to facilitate the crossover and, ultimately, as a "passing" strategy to tide their Malay filmmaking enterprise over from Singapore to Malaysia.

Chapter 4 examines a group of Mandarin and Cantonese films that I refer to as "Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films (港產南洋降頭片)". In this chapter I introduce these films as constituting a horror subgenre in 1970s-80s Hong Kong cinema, positing that during

its formative years, pioneers of this subgenre mobilized their prior experience with, and access to, the Malay film industry to create the subgenre's defining feature, that is, a Nanyang Orient. This crossover, which includes a transfer of human, narrative and imaginative resources from Malay cinema to Hong Kong cinema, was in large part a response to the rise of international tourism and localization movements in Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, and was prominently facilitated through a suturing of the cinematic gaze with the tourist gaze.

Chapter 5 is an attempt to summarize the nature of these Hong Kong-Malay film connections through the lens of the "media capital" theory. Taking into consideration Hong Kong's established status as a prominent media capital of Asia, this concluding chapter suggests that the connections forged between the Hong Kong and Malay film industries in the late twentieth century ultimately tell a story about a mismatch of desires surrounding media capital status in Asia: as a media capital with expansionist ambitions, Hong Kong most certainly did try to transcend cultural and linguistic familiarity in extending its reach by sustaining its Southeast Asia-based Malay film enterprise as a subsidiary. However, as preceding chapters would have shown, this venture ended up with limited success, proving the unsustainability of this Hong Kong-Southeast Asian transfer model and suggesting, on the part of Hong Kong media conglomerates, an uncharacteristic misreading of industrial patterns and a rather unexpected inability to deftly grapple with the region's changing socio-political conditions. To some extent, this failure reveals the limits of Hong Kong-as-media capital's transborder operations, illuminating a fundamental misalignment of desires about film and media development, between Hong Kong and Malaysia, that reflect contesting Cold War ideals. Viewed this way, more than an exhibition of the enduring entwinement between Hong Kong and Malay film histories, the connections and *disconnections* between the two cinemas thus also tell a story of the historical restructuration of dynamics between media capitals in Asia during those transformative decades.

The dissertation finally closes with a concluding chapter that condenses the key points and observations raised in this dissertation.

Chapter 2

The Zain Film Series and the Reworking of the Malay Body

Since the first James Bond film premiered in 1962, the British Bond franchise has inspired numerous spin-offs worldwide. In the Philippines, for example, there is Weng-weng, the miniature secret agent played by Ernesto de la Cruz; in India, there is Krishna Ghattamaneni, the “Andhra James Bond”; in Italy and France, the many Eurospy films; in Malaysia and Singapore, Jefri Zain and Nora Zain, the Malay James and “Jane” Bond played by Jins Shamsuddin and Sa’adiah Ahmad. While each of these Bond-inspired films and parodies deserve a closer look than is currently afforded, it is the Zain series that forms the core concern of this chapter, not only because it has yet to be made the subject of any focused study despite its longstanding popularity and significance in Malay, Singaporean and Malaysian film histories, but also because it embodies a curious transborder mode of production that has similarly yet to be well-documented and studied.

With the exception of the first installation, the Zain series was produced in Hong Kong in tandem with its Mandarin counterpart, marking the first time Malay films were filmed entirely in Hong Kong and predominantly with Hong Kong resources. This happened at a time when one of the most prominent bases for Malay filmmaking at that time – the Shaw Brothers’ Malay Film Productions (MFP) in Singapore – was on the verge of an imminent shutdown amidst sociopolitical instability that would change the course of Malay filmmaking in the region. In other words, the Zain series is the product of a crossover between the Malay and Hong Kong film industries at a critical transitional juncture in Malay, Singaporean and Malaysian film histories.

Packed with action and novelty, these films were highly popular among Malay cinema audiences, a rare feat for MFP at that time. As soon as the first Zain film premiered in 1966,

the Zain figures became cultural icons and this collective cultural memory even persisted into the new millennium. In 1966, for example, along with what they called a “Beatles high neck” pullover, a sartorial company’s advertisement in Singapore-based newspaper *Berita Harian* also promoted a “Jefri Zain high neck” pullover.⁵⁵ Half a century later, in 2011, *The Secret Life of Nora Zain*, a comedy musical inspired by and with constant referencing to the 1967 film, *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001*, hit the stages of Malaysia, evidencing just how resilient the memory of these Zain films is to communities in Singapore and Malaysia, as well as the impact they must have had, back in the late 1960s when they first made their appearances.

Thus occupying a notable position in film and cultural history, the four Zain films – *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* (Jefri Zain Dalam Gerak Kilat, 1966), *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001* (1967), *Shadow of Death* (Bayangan Ajal, 1968) and *Danger Valley* (Jurang Bahaya, 1968) – particularly the last three films, warrant greater documentation and analysis than current literature is able to provide. In Malay film history narratives, the three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films are often casually dismissed or completely neglected on the grounds that they are not actually “Malay” films. In *Malay Film List: 1933-1993* (Daftar Filem Melayu: 1933-1993) published by Malaysia’s National Film Development Corporation (FINAS; Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia), *Nora Zain*, *Shadow of Death* and *Danger Valley* are simply labelled as “dubbed Hong Kong film (filem Hong Kong dubbing)” and there is no mention of the Zain stars’ activities in Hong Kong under the section, “Annual chronology of Malay/Malaysian filmmaking activities (Kronologi tahun yang ada hubungan dengan aktiviti perfileman Melayu/Malaysia)”.⁵⁶ In *The History of Malay Motion Pictures* (Sejarah Filem Melayu), *Malay Film: Past and Present* (Filem Melayu: Dahulu dan Sekarang) and *Memoir of Hamzah Hussin: From Keris Film to Merdeka Studio* (Memoir Hamzah Hussin:

⁵⁵ “Halaman 2 Iklan Ruangan 1”, *Berita Harian*, 22 October 1966, p.2.

⁵⁶ Jamil Sulong, Hamzah Hussein and Abdul Malik Mokhtar eds. *Daftar Filem Melayu: 1933-1993*. Ampang, Selangor: Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia, 1993, p.38 and p.10-14.

Dari Keris Film ke Studio Merdeka), these films are nowhere to be found.⁵⁷ Even the most comprehensive text currently available on Malay cinema history in my opinion, *The Malay Cinema (1948-1989): Early History and Development in the Making of a National Cinema* by film veteran and academic Hatta Azad Khan, also neglects to mention them.⁵⁸

This is to some degree understandable considering how difficult it is to categorize these films. On one hand, they are Malay films insofar as the Malay language is used throughout and the leading actors are well-known Malay film stars. On the other hand, the overpowering Hong Kong element in these films spanning place of production, production company, technical crew, cast, director and script, renders them too hybridised to fit neatly into any paradigmatic boxes, making it difficult to resolutely qualify them as “Malay” films. Furthermore, it is not difficult to detect, from their writings, that many of these authors come from a position of Malaysian Malay nationalism, wherein Malay supremacy reigns and has been the dominant sociopolitical trend in contemporary Malaysia since the founding of the nation-state.⁵⁹ It is thus not surprising that these hybridised Zain films are by and large not included into a Malay cinema heritage claimed by Malaysia today and by those who identify with this ideology.

At the same time as the Zain films may not be “Malay enough”, they are also oftentimes not “Hong Kong” nor “Singaporean” enough. Although all three films were produced by Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) company, by and large they are not recognized in Hong Kong film history narratives. None of the major works mentioned these films.⁶⁰ Similarly, they do not

⁵⁷ Sharifah Zinjuaher H.M. Ariffin, Hang Tuah Arshad. *Sejarah Filem Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Sri Sharifah, 1980; Abi. *Filem Melayu: Dahulu Dan Sekarang*. Kuala Lumpur: Marwilis Publisher & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 1987 and Hamzah Hussin. *Memoir Hamzah Hussin: Dari Keris Film ke Studio Merdeka*. Bangi, Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1997.

⁵⁸ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989): Early History and Development in the Making of a National Cinema”. Ph.D. Thesis. School of Theatre and Film Studies, University of New South Wales, 1994.

⁵⁹ More on this in Chapter 3.

⁶⁰ These include: Stephen Teo. *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. London: BFI Publishing, 1997; Chu Yingchi. *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland and Self*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2009; Poshek Fu and David Desser eds. *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000; Law Kar and Frank Bren. *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2004.

feature prominently in writings of Singapore cinema history, despite the fact that the Zain stars – Jins Shamsuddin and Sa’adiah Ahmad – were stars of the Singapore-based MFP. There is no mention of the films in *Latent Images: Film in Singapore*, whereas in *Singapore Cinema*, no further elaboration is given although the author acknowledges that “it is worth noting that the sequels, *Bayangan Ajal* (lit. Overshadowed by Doom) and *Jurang Bahaya* (lit. Caught in between Two Dangers), shot largely in Hong Kong, were directed by Lo Wei, a young filmmaker recruited by the Shaw brothers in Hong Kong”.⁶¹ Such exclusions and undervaluation in various film histories obscured and trivialised the existence of these Hong Kong-produced Zain films. By implication, no detailed study has also been conducted on these one-of-a-kind films.

Falling through the cracks of historical narratives is a common predicament for films that embody a transborder mode of production since film historiography has, for a long time, been dominated by the national paradigm. This is acknowledged and addressed to some extent by William van der Heide when he wrote *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Border Crossings and National Culture*. In the book, van der Heide posits that Malaysian cinema history is necessarily transnational, encompassing various “lines of connectedness” that link different film cultures together.⁶² He briefly mentions the made-in-Hong Kong Zain films in his discussion on the decline of the film industry in Singapore and Malaysia, thereby writing, albeit hastily, this part of history into existence within the national framework.⁶³ *The Beginnings of Malay Films* (Bermulanya Filem Melayu) published by FINAS also does mention Jins

⁶¹ Jan Uhde and Yvonne Ng Uhde. *Latent Images: Film in Singapore (2nd Edition)*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009; Raphael Millet. *Singapore Cinema*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2004, p.39.

⁶² William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Border Crossings and National Culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002, p.26.

⁶³ William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.141-144.

Shamsuddin's departure to Hong Kong to make these films, providing some helpful preliminary information from which more work can commence.⁶⁴

An alternative historiography that circumvents the limits of the national framework is to shift the focus onto film studios. What may now be recognized as "Shaw Studies" is one such example. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, research on the Shaws' massive entertainment enterprise have shed light on their border-crossing practices. Yet, despite the excavation of these refreshing pathways, perhaps due to the dominant association of the Shaw Brothers as typical "diasporic Chinese capitalists", the Malay filmmaking branch of Shaw's expansive film network is hitherto still left largely out of the picture.⁶⁵ The fact that the Shaws were also a mogul in Malay filmmaking, having owned one of the most prominent Malay filmmaking studios in Singapore, is often overshadowed by the glitter and glamour of their Chinese counterpart in Hong Kong. Only Timothy Barnard has been notably producing work on the MFP and even so, very little has been written about the *connections* between the MFP and the Shaws headquarters in Hong Kong. When this does happen, what is provided is often a fleeting mention lacking in substantial detail.⁶⁶

Another inadequacy arising from the sidestepping of the company's Malay filmmaking endeavour in Shaw Studies is the unilaterality of MFP studio history narratives. It is by now well-known that the Shaws attempted to salvage the dwindling MFP in the 1960s by producing the high-budget, all-colour, widescreen *The King With Fangs* (Raja Bersiong, 1968), with the intervention of the man who would eventually become the first Prime Minister of Malaysia –

⁶⁴ Aimi Jarr and Mohd. Zambari A. Malek. *Bermulanya Filem Melayu*. Ampang, Selangor: Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia, 2009, p.103.

⁶⁵ Darrell William Davis, "Questioning Diaspora: Mobility, Mutation, and Historiography of the Shaw Brothers Film Studio", in *Chinese Journal of Communication*, Vol.4, No.1 (2011): p.42.

⁶⁶ Timothy P. Barnard, "The Shaw Brothers' Malay Films", in Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008, p.154-173; "Film, Literature, and Context in Southeast Asia: P. Ramlee, Malay Cinema, and History", in Cynthia Chou and Vincent Houben eds. *Southeast Asian Studies: Debates and New Directions*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore Press, 2006, p.162-180 and Timothy P. Barnard and Jan van der Putten, "Malay Cosmopolitan Activism in Post-War Singapore", in Michael Barr, Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki eds. *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008, p.132-153.

Tunku Abdul Rahman.⁶⁷ This is the usual, if not the only, narrative of how the MFP put up a last-ditch struggle towards the end. However, there exists at least another tune to this MFP swansong that has yet to be properly recorded and discussed. Plans and attempts were actually made at that time to begin internationalizing Malay filmmaking. The MFP-SB (HK) crossover embodied in the Zain series is one such example. Another prominent case, as briefly mentioned previously, is that of MFP stars Sa'adiah Ahmad and Kadarisman going to Japan to make *Holiday in Tokyo* (Melanchong Ka-Tokyo, 1964) together with a Japanese cast that includes Asao Mastsumoto, Keiko Shima and Kyoko Takasahi.⁶⁸ At the same time as transborder connections involving the MFP are instructive to furthering our understanding of the Shaws' expansive cinematic network, they are also indispensable to the constructing of MFP studio history narratives.

Recognizing the significance of the Zain series and hoping to fill at least part of these research lacunae, this chapter sets out to reconstruct the scenes where the MFP made, or tried to make, inroads into Hong Kong in the 1960s – the crossover that brought about the last three Zain films. Drawing mostly from biographical records, newspapers and movie magazines, I seek to document and analyse why and how the Zain crossover happened, contending that market and labour complications in 1950s-1960s Singapore and Malaysia provided the necessary conditions, and that the crossover was materialized onscreen primarily through corporeal means, that is, through the workings and reworkings of the physical body.

To do this, I will first provide an outline of what I have thus far been calling, the “Zain film series”. Thereafter, in a bid to understand the key motivating factors behind the Zain crossover, I will delineate the historical trajectory that laid the grounds for it. Finally, through close readings of and comparisons between the Zain films and their Mandarin counterparts, I

⁶⁷ Timothy P. Barnard, “The Shaw Brothers’ Malay Films”, p.168; Jan Udhe and Yvonne Ng Udhe. *Latent Images*, p.27 and Raphael Millet. *Singapore Cinema*, p.64.

⁶⁸ “Saadiah-kadar ke-Tokyo”, *Filem Malaysia*, No.13, August 1963.

will demonstrate how the actualization of this crossover was largely a corporeal affair, asserting that the body was the principal stage on which negotiations took place to facilitate the entrance of the Hong Kong Mandarin Bonds into the realm of Malay cinema, giving birth to the now-iconic Malay James and “Jane” Bonds.

Jefri Zain and Nora Zain: Malay Bonds Made in Hong Kong

Starring Jins Shamsuddin and Sa’adiah Ahmad, the Zain series includes: *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* (Jefri Zain Dalam Gerak Kilat, 1966), *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001* (no English title available, 1967), *Shadow of Death* (Bayangan Ajal, 1968) and *Danger Valley* (Jurang Bahaya, 1968).⁶⁹ Modelled after the British James Bond series of the same time, these spy films reproduced, in the Singapore/Malaysia Malay context, the same concoction of key elements such as high-tech gadgets, beautiful women, fast cars – “a formula of excess that blends together consumerism, tourism, and elitism with chauvinism, sexism and voyeurism”.⁷⁰ Novel in the sixties and campy to some in retrospect, these films ushered Shamsuddin’s Jefri Zain and Sa’adiah’s Nora Zain into the popular collective memory of Malay communities in Singapore and Malaysia and, interestingly, these screen icons were to a large extent “made in Hong Kong”, representing the first time Malay filmmaking was brought out of the Malay Archipelago into the East Asian city.

⁶⁹ Timothy P. Barnard considers *Death Trap* (Jebak Maut, 1967) to be a sequel to *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* (“The Shaw Brothers’ Malay Films”, p.169). I do not concur with this as *Death Trap* is significantly different from the four Zain films. Firstly, and most fundamentally, the film does not feature a “Zain figure” (neither Jefri Zain nor Nora Zain). It also lacks the high-tech gadgets, sophisticated settings and sexual scenes characteristic of the Bond and Zain films. Furthermore, in a newspaper article about *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001*, the film is labelled as “the second Malay James Bond type of film to be shot by Shaws” after *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning*, indicating that there existed a consensus about a Shaw-produced spy series that specifically takes the Zain characters as protagonists and that does not include *Death Trap*. In this light, although *Death Trap* may be regarded by some as another Bond-style Malay film, I do not regard it as a sequel to *Jefri Zain* and do not include it as part of the Zain series (“Sa’adiah to Play Female 007 in Malay Film”, *The Straits Times*, 16 June 1966, p.11). For similar reasons, the parody film, *Mat Bond* (1967), is also not included as part of the Zain series.

⁷⁰ Christoph Lindner, “Introduction”, in Christoph Lindner ed. *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* (2nd Edition). Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014, p.1 and p.3.

The first Zain film *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* premiered in 1966 and is one of the last few films produced by the Shaw Brother's (SB) Malay Film Productions (MFP) in Singapore. Filming begun on 22nd March 1966 and was done mainly on location in places such as the then famous Changi Beach and Serangoon Garden.⁷¹ Produced by Vee Meng Shaw, this black-and-white film was directed by Jamil Sulong, with assistant director Kemat Hassan and cinematographer Abu Bakar Ali. The story, written by Jamil Sulong in collaboration with MFP's spokesperson Jaafar Abdullah, tells of secret agent Jefri Zain's (played by Jins Shamsuddin) adventure, in which the death of another secret agent led him to an underground crime syndicate led by Commander Jeeman, of whose information he must seek to gather.⁷²

A spy film that explicitly capitalizes on the British Bond phenomenon, *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* established Jins Shamsuddin's star image as "Jins Bond".⁷³ Clear allusions to the contemporaneous British Bond films abound in the film, including the opening music sequence, the characteristic Bond pistol, a gadgetry inventor cum advisor to the Bond figure, a crime syndicate similar to SPECTRE, etc. The film was also publicized as a "film in the style of James Bond (filem ala James Bond)" and Jins Shamsuddin was given the title, "Malay James Bond (James Bond Melayu)" and "Singapore's own Bond" (see Fig. 1), amidst what was touted as an "international" cast including Sarimah, Salleh Kamil, Salim Bachik, Rita Cheong, Sylvia Koh, Rene Richardson and Margaret Clougher.⁷⁴ All these shaped Jins into the Bond of Singapore, Malay cinema and, later, of Malaysia as well, though not so much in film history narratives but more within the popular domain.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Gerak Kilat", *Mastika Filem*, No.46, April 1966, p.6-7.

⁷² Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana: Biografi Jins Shamsudin*. Bangi, Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998, p.62.

⁷³ "Rough and Ready: Rahmah Rahmat is Deadly Bait for Jins Bond", *The Straits Times*, 15 April 1966, p.18.

⁷⁴ "Jins Dapat Mempermainkan Adegan2 Yang Chemas", *Berita Harian*, 2 April 1966, p.7; "Advertisements: Column 2", *The Straits Times*, 13 September 1966, p.4; "Halaman 8 Ikan Ruangan 1", *Berita Harian*, 6 September 1966, p.8 and "Kissing to Stay In. Singapore's First James Bond Film", *The Straits Times*, 27 April 1966, p.20.

⁷⁵ Subhadra Devan, "Jins Was Riding High as the Malaysian James Bond". *I Remember When*, <http://nsuntirw.blogspot.com/2011/08/jins-was-riding-high-as-malaysian-james.html>. Accessed 20 October 2018; Josh Robbins, "Jins Shamsuddin, Malaysia's James Bond, Chokes to Death on Banana Fritter". *International*



Figure 1. Jins Shamsuddin as Singapore's James Bond

With a charming Jins Bond taking the lead, *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* was an instant hit at the time of its premiere, prompting the Shaw Brothers to ride swiftly on this “rare success of MFP at that time” by following up with more Zain films, this time bringing the secret agent and his filmmaking adventures out of MFP, Singapore into the SB headquarters in Clearwater Bay, Hong Kong.⁷⁶ In a 1969 issue of *Majallah Filem*, it was reported that to date, the Shaw Brothers had made seven Malay-language films in colour and three of them were “outputs from Hong Kong (3 dari-nya keluaran Hong Kong)”.⁷⁷ The article did not specify which three films these were but it is likely that they refer to the three Zain films following

Business Times, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/jins-shamsuddin-malaysias-james-bond-chokes-death-banana-fritter-1609428>. Accessed 20 October 2018; “Legendary Actor Jins Shamsuddin Dies”. *The Star Online*, <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/03/01/legendary-actor-jins-shamsudin-dies/>. Accessed 20 October 2018; Mustafar A.R., “Jins Shamsuddin Tidak Boleh Lari Daripada Bayang-bayang P. Ramlee”. *Filem Klasik Malaysia*, <http://filemklasikmalaysia.blogspot.com/2012/12/jins-shamsudin.html>. Accessed 20 October 2018.

⁷⁶ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Jins Shamsudin: Kembara Seorang Seniman*. Ampang, Selangor: Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia, 2007, p.58 and Timothy P. Barnard, “The Shaw Brothers’ Malay Films”, p.169.

⁷⁷ *Majallah Filem*, No.117, December 1969, p.37.

Operation Lightning, all of which were made in colour and in Hong Kong, even bearing the SB (HK) opening logo.⁷⁸ “The second Malay James Bond type of film to be shot by Shaws”, *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001* is a “female James bond-style (berchorak ‘wanita James Bond’)” film.⁷⁹ An alternative to the “Jins Bond” model, *Nora Zain* stars Sa’adiah Ahmad as Nora Zain, a secret agent who is summoned to Hong Kong to help bust an international female-led crime syndicate headed by “Boss” (played by Hong Kong film star Tina Chin Fei) and of which Dolly, Tiger and A40 respectively played by Fanny Fan, Aziz Jaafar and Nordin Arshad are members of. Befitting indeed of this narrative, on 20th June 1966 Sa’adiah, Aziz and Nordin left for Hong Kong and the trio – said to be handpicked by Runme Shaw himself – would eventually stay there for a duration of three months.⁸⁰ Premiering in Singapore in January 1967, *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001* became the first Malay movie that was filmed completely in Hong Kong.⁸¹

Just as the success of *Operation Lightning* spurred the making of another Bond-style spy film, *Nora Zain* set the precedent for two more films to be shot in the same way. In the same month of *Nora Zain*’s premiere, *Berita Harian* ran an article entitled, “Jins Goes to Hong Kong”, reporting that “actor Jins Shamsuddin and 19-year-old actress Che Sharifah Aminah binte Said Abdullah will leave for Hong Kong today to act in a film there (seniman Jins Shamsuddin, dan seniwati Che Sharifah Aminah binte Said Abdullah 19 tahun, telah bertolak ka-Hongkong hari ini untuk berlakon dalam filem di-sana)”.⁸² This said film would turn out to be a third Zain film – *Shadow of Death*, which premiered a year later in 1968.

⁷⁸ Although *Danger Valley* also bears the SB (HK) opening logo, a company named “Shaw Film Productions Sendirian Berhad” is also credited in this particular film. Nevertheless, the mode of operation for this film does not appear to deviate from its previous two made-in-Hong Kong predecessors, as I will show later in this section.

⁷⁹ “Sa’adiah to Play Female 007 in Malay Film”, *The Straits Times*, 16 June 1966, p.11; “Pemileman ‘Wanita James Bond’: Pengarah dan Bintang2 Filem ka-H.K.”, *Berita Harian*, 18 June 1966, p.7.

⁸⁰ “Saadiah Bawa Watak Lasak”, *Berita Harian*, 29 June 2000, p.10; “Nora Zain – Ajen Wanita 001 Filem Unsur James Bond yang Lebih Hebat Dari Gerak Kilat”, *Berita Harian*, 10 December 1966, p.7; “Pemileman ‘Wanita James Bond’: Pengarah dan Bintang2 Filem ka-H.K.”, *Berita Harian*, 18 June 1966, p.7.

⁸¹ “Sa’adiah to Play Female 007 in Malay Film”, *The Straits Times*, 16 June 1966, p.11; “Sa’adiah James Bond Wanita”, *Berita Harian*, 16 June 1966, p.1; “Nora Zain – Ajen Wanita 001 Filem Unsur James Bond yang Lebih Hebat Dari Gerak Kilat”, *Berita Harian*, 10 December 1966, p.7.

⁸² “Jins ka-Hongkong”, *Berita Harian*, 12 January 1967, p.1.

Originally named *Jefri Zain in Hong Kong* (Jefri Zain di-Hongkong), *Shadow of Death* tells the story of Jefri Zain helping Mei Ling (played by Singaporean Peranakan actress Landi Chang) to search for the other half of a treasure map that her late brother had left for her. Danger dawns when a villain couple (played by Fanny Fan and Huang Chung Hsin) who owns the other half of the map come searching unscrupulously for Mei Ling's map in order to find the treasure. Like *Nora Zain*, *Shadow of Death* was "completely shot in Hong Kong (keseluruhan gambar ini di-ambil di-Hong Kong)", together with other Hong Kong film stars such as Chiang Kuang Chao and Ku Feng.⁸³ Newcomer to Malay cinema Sharifah Aminah played only a minor role as the lover of an assistant to Mei Ling's late brother played by Chiang.

After filming for *Shadow of Death* wrapped up, Sharifah Aminah returned to Singapore whereas Jins stayed on to shoot another Jefri Zain film, *Danger Valley*.⁸⁴ In this final installation of the Zain series, Jins once again starred alongside Singaporean actress Landi Chang and Hong Kong stars such as Shen Yi. This time Jefri Zain works together with secret agent Aisi (Landi Chang) to bust an international syndicate based in Hong Kong that uses a kind of nano-explosive technology to extort and terrorize big enterprises. Jins eventually left Hong Kong on 11th November 1967, with *Danger Valley* premiering in the following year.⁸⁵

Filmed completely in Hong Kong, *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001*, *Shadow of Death* and *Danger Valley* are unique not only because they mark the first time Malay films were shot entirely outside the Malay Archipelago in Hong Kong, but also because the mode of production with which they were being made was unprecedented in Malay filmmaking at that time. As mentioned, all three films open with the SB (HK) logo instead of the MFP label usually expected of a Malay film made by the Shaw Brothers. This means that Hong Kong was more than just a film location for these films – the SB studio in Hong Kong controlled and provided

⁸³ "Halaman 10 Iklan Ruangan 1", *Berita Harian*, 8 February 1969, p.10.

⁸⁴ Mohd. Zambari A. Malek. *Suria Kencana*, p.66.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.68.

the means of production. In all three Zain films, Lo Wei (羅維), who would shortly after bring Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan to fame, is credited as director and he was supported by a technical crew from SB (HK). More fundamentally, the Zain storylines themselves were directly borrowed from the Mandarin James and Jane Bond films produced by SB (HK) during the same time. *Nora Zain: Ajen Wanita 001* shares the same basic narrative as *Angel With the Iron Fist* (鐵觀音, 1967), *Shadow of Death* has the same storyline as that of *Summons to Death* (催命符, 1967) with Lo Wei being credited as screenplay writer for both, and *Danger Valley* is based off the script of *Angel Strikes Again* (鐵觀音勇破爆炸黨, 1968), both of which are said to be co-written by Fang Loong Hsiang and Lo Wei, according to the films' credit titles.

What sets the Shaw's Malay and Mandarin Bond series apart from the model of adaptation and remake is that these films do not just share similar narratives.⁸⁶ Comparing each set of films shot by shot, it becomes clear that the same sets, locations, props and supporting cast members were being used in both films (see Fig. 2-4). In *Nora Zain*, for example, Nordin Arshad plays the same role as he did in *Angel With the Iron Fist*. Fanny Fan and Huang Chung Hsin also play the exact same roles in *Shadow of Death* as they did in *Summons to Death*. In both *Danger Valley* and *Angel Strikes Again*, Shen Yi plays the dual role of chief villain and undercover agent Xiang Xiang. The director and technical crew credited in the three SB (HK) Mandarin Bond films are also largely the same as that of their Malay counterparts, with Lo Wei (director), Chiang Hsing Loong (editor), Wong Yung Hua (sound recorder), Oscar Tung/Tung Shiao-liang (photography), Liu Liang-hua (costumes), Johnson Tsao (art director), Fang Yuen (make-up), Wang Fu Ling (music composer) participating in the making of all six films. From the look of it, it is highly probable that the

⁸⁶ I will use the term, "Mandarin Bond", throughout this chapter to denote the three SB (HK) Mandarin films, *Angel With The Iron Fist*, *Summons to Death* and *Angel Strikes Again*. The films most likely premiered in Mandarin, and are now also released in Mandarin online and in VCD/DVD, though there are reports stating that at the time of making, they were also produced in Cantonese. Presumably, the Cantonese versions would have been the exact same films dubbed over in Cantonese.

two versions were shot at the same time, scene by scene. Several shots are even exactly the same in both films, indicating that the same footage was used in the editing of both the Mandarin and Malay versions. Importantly, there are sequences that are present in the Mandarin versions but not in their Malay counterparts, signifying that in all three cases, the Mandarin versions were the basis from which the corresponding Zain films were made. More tellingly, in a dialogue in *Nora Zain*, the name “Chow Chee Seng” suddenly pops up somewhere in the middle of the film.⁸⁷ Chow Chee Seng is actually a character in the Mandarin version, *Angel Strikes Again*; this character has been renamed “Ah Wang” in *Nora Zain*. The sudden mention of “Chow Chee Seng” thus appears to be an oversight in rewriting the script from Chinese to Malay, revealing that the Zain films were based off the scripts of the Mandarin Bond films rather than the other way around.

⁸⁷ This is the line where the name appears in *Nora Zain*: “dulu Chow Chee Seng telah masuk kumpulan kami”.



Figure 2. Lily Ho is simply replaced by Sa'adiyah in *Nora Zain*



Figure 3. Landi Chang and Jins Shamsuddin replace Tina Chin Fei and Tang Ching in *Shadow of Death*



Figure 4. Lily Ho and Tang Ching are replaced by Landi Chang and Jins Shamsuddin in *Danger Valley*

According to Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek, at that time Jins was appointed assistant director to help Lo Wei out since the latter could not understand English and spoke mainly Cantonese. The script was written in English and Chinese and three versions were ultimately produced based on each of these scripts: Mandarin, Cantonese and Malay dubbed versions.⁸⁸ Aside from assuming the role of main lead and assistant director, Jins Shamsuddin was also made director of dubbing, responsible for dubbing *Shadow of Death* and *Danger Valley* in

⁸⁸ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana*, p.66.

Malay.⁸⁹ Jins was also tasked with supervising the editing of these two films, making sure that the final products were culturally appropriate for a Malay audience – a point I will come back to later in this chapter. All these took place in the Merdeka Studio in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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Although a first in the history of Malay filmmaking, it should be noted that this was not the first time this cost-efficient mode of production was adopted in Hong Kong cinema. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was common practice for Chinese dialect films to be shot alongside each other or their Mandarin counterparts in Hong Kong. Many Amoy-dialect films, for example, were filmed in tandem with their Mandarin and Cantonese versions in the same studios with basically the same scripts, including *The Eight Immortals Cross The Sea* (八仙過海, 1957), the Amoy-dialect version of a Cantonese film, *The Eight Immortals in Jiangnan* (八仙鬧江南, 1957). Scholar Stephanie Chung aptly describes such mode of production as “one film two languages (一片兩語)”.⁹¹ However, it must be noted that there are key differences between the two scenarios that render them not entirely similar. Unlike the Zain films, the Chinese-language films produced under this mode do not necessarily share the same directors, crew and cast. Furthermore, at the same time as the Zain films’ “one film two languages” situation transcended industrial borders (MFP and SB (HK)), it also facilitated the crossover between two cultures that bear little apparent affinities with one another.

In the case of Chinese-language cinemas’ “one film two languages”, although linguistic and cultural differences undoubtedly exist, the “cultural distance” to be overcome is arguably less pronounced in comparison with the MFP-SB (HK) case at hand, given that Mandarin and Chinese dialect films ultimately form part of what Chua Beng Huat calls, “pop culture China”

⁸⁹ Mohd. Zambari A. Malek. *Suria Kencana*, p.66.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.66 and p.79.

⁹¹ Stephanie Chung Po-yin (鐘寶賢), “Minqiao de Haiwai Wangluo yu Xiayu Yingye (閩僑的海外網絡與廈語影業)”, in Wu Yujun (吳君玉) ed. *Xianggang Xiayu Dianying Fangzong* (香港廈語電影訪蹤). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2012, p.57.

– the “dense flow of cultural-economic exchanges between geographically dispersed Chinese populations”, evidenced by the “constant circulation and crisscrossing of geographical boundaries of practitioners and their products” among them.⁹² In this network, pluralities of experiences, sentiments and meanings are “highly interactive” because “the different spoken variations of the Chinese language can be made mutually understood via the presence of the common written script itself”.⁹³ This means that, compared to the Zain crossover, there is more linguistic and cultural affinity in cases of Chinese-language cinemas’ “one-film two languages” to begin with.⁹⁴ Such peculiarities render the last three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films unique in their own right, prompting the questions: What could have compensated for this lack of affinity and seemingly wide cultural distance? How much of this distance had been accounted for and what complications may have arisen as a result thereof? More fundamentally, why, and how, did this crossover take place?

Malay Bond-ing in Hong Kong

The search for answers necessarily begins with a historical inquiry into the twilight years of MFP because the Zain crossover was not just the result of a simple creative venture – it was conceived most directly as a response to market changes and labour complications in 1950s-60s Singapore and Malaysia/Malaya. With the MFP embroiled in labour movements

⁹² Chua Beng Huat, “Pop Culture China”, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol.22, No.2 (2001): p.114.

⁹³ Ibid., p.121.

⁹⁴ This is not asserting that the Chinese diaspora is a community defined by a “bounded shared past and shared culture”. As Chua Beng Huat also cautions, such would be the imagining of promoters of the so-called Chinese diaspora, allegedly unified by grand philosophical traditions, particularly Confucianism, which is constructed “at the expense of the different historical trajectories of each segment of the globally dispersed overseas Chinese”. “Such a configuration of cultural unity quickly rubs against the reality of difference that crisscross this dispersed and diverse population – one marked by pluralities of experiences, sentiments and meanings that reflect the differences of the localities that each segment of this dispersed population inhabits” (Ibid., p.120-121). What the concept of a pop culture China acknowledges and illuminates, is the frequent flow and interactions of pop cultures between dispersed Chinese populations by virtue of a relative ease in understanding each other linguistically and often also culturally, and this must not be confused with the strand of co-optative Chinese diaspora discourse that Chua mentions.

and struggling to make profits by the mid-1960s, the crossover appears to be a way through which the Shaw Brothers redistributed resources between the two major bases of their cinema empire in order to finally shut down the Singapore-based MFP and to both circumvent and intervene in the then-precarious labour situation in Singapore.

The Singapore-based MFP, owned by the Shaw Brothers, had been one of Malay cinema's major filmmaking base. Its main markets were Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia, the latter being the largest and most lucrative. However, in 1956 Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture established the Indonesian Film Council (Dewan Filem Indonesia), which pushed for import restrictions to be imposed on Singapore and Malayan films.⁹⁵ This drastically shrunk the Malay film market for the MFP and the situation worsened when political relations between Malaya and Indonesia began to strain following talks on the formation of the independent Federation of Malaysia, which begun in 1961. Tension between the two rose rapidly and Indonesia eventually declared a state of confrontation (Konfrontasi) on Malaysia (1963-1966). What this rupture of diplomatic ties spelt for Malay cinema was the closure of the Indonesian market for films produced in Singapore and Malaya.⁹⁶ For the first time in Malay film history, what was once a cinematic network linked together by a shared linguistic and cultural affinity within the Archipelago began to segregate into discrete industries defined primarily in terms of the nation.

Several other factors also impacted market conditions for the MFP from the mid-1950s onwards but particularly relevant to our discussion here is the role of labour movements.⁹⁷ Founded in 1954, the film workers union – Persatuan Artis Malaya or Malayan Artists Union (PERSAMA) – was first headed by renowned MFP film star P. Ramlee, with directors Salleh

⁹⁵ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.137-8 and p.272.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.272.

⁹⁷ This primarily includes the relocation of Malay filmmakers *en masse* from Singapore to the Federation of Malaya, the introduction of television, an economic downturn and intense competition from popular Indonesian, Indian and Hong Kong films.

Ghani and Jamil Sulong serving alongside as main officers. PERSAMA's main goals were to improve the wages of its members and act as a representative for negotiations between employers and employees. By February 1957, PERSAMA was organized enough to approach the Shaw Brothers to ask for an increase in wages and a new structure for contracts. However, in response to these demands, on 3rd March 1957 the Shaw Brothers instead fired three PERSAMA members from the MFP: Musalmah, Omar Rojik and H. M. Rohaizad. When the protest continued, two of the most vocal agitators, S. Kadarisman and Syed Hassan Safi, both assistant directors at MFP, were also fired on 5th March 1957.⁹⁸ A strike consequently broke out on 16th March 1957. Over 120 MFP employees picketed the front of the Jalan Ampas studio. Film stars were also seen picketing Queens Cinema in Geylang, where MFP films were being shown, and mass protests occurred at popular gathering places for the Malay community. Finally, after two days of negotiation, on 7th April 1957 the strike was officially resolved.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, resentment over labour issues lingered and over the next few years numerous strikes, work disruptions and protests still took place at the MFP.¹⁰⁰

With such market and labour turmoil destabilizing the foundations of the MFP studio, the Shaws became perceptibly weary and wary of their Malay filmmaking business in Singapore. Particularly after 1957, subsequent actions by the Shaws sent a more-than-subtle signal that the company was about to give up the business of Malay filmmaking in Singapore. In October 1967, after a decade of tug-of-war with local authorities and labour unions, nearly all the staff at the studio were fired and in December that same year, the Shaws officially folded the MFP. This time the decision was final and the management no longer entertained attempts by the union to rope in Malaysian ministers to help with negotiation. Water and electricity supply to MFP artistes' quarters were cut off and the quarters returned to the Singapore's

⁹⁸ Timothy P. Barnard and Jan van der Putten, "Malay Cosmopolitan Activism in Post-War Singapore", p.146.

⁹⁹ Timothy P. Barnard, "Film, Literature, and Context in Southeast Asia", p.172-3.

¹⁰⁰ Timothy P. Barnard and Jan van der Putten, "Malay Cosmopolitan Activism in Post-War Singapore", p.149.

council.¹⁰¹

Despite such expressed resolution, however, two MFP artistes – Sarimah Zulkifli and Jins Shamsuddin – oddly did not receive notice of termination.¹⁰² In a newspaper article dated 4th October 1967, Sarimah expressed confusion and surprise about the mass layoff because she was not personally informed of it. In fact, she would have preferred to be fired together with the others so that she could stand in solidarity with her friends and comrades.¹⁰³ If Sarimah’s exemption was unexpected and unreciprocated by the actress, things appeared to be the very opposite in the case of Jins Shamsuddin. A newspaper report in October 1967 explicitly states that Jins did not receive notice of termination because he was *in the midst of* working in Hong Kong for the Shaws, having been there since January.¹⁰⁴ When the official closure of MFP became a hard fact in December that same year, Jins himself further revealed that he is still “under contract with the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) (saya maseh mengikat kontrak dengan Sharikat Shaw Brothers di-Hong Kong)” for dubbing *Shadow of Death* and *Danger Valley*, and that “after dubbing is completed, he might head back to Hong Kong (bila selesai kerja2 tersebut dia mungkin pergi ka-Hong Kong sa-mula)” instead of moving to the new Merdeka Studio in Kuala Lumpur.¹⁰⁵ Not only was Jins safely tucked away from the chaos at a time when most of his peers were caught by surprise by the sudden termination, he also seemed more than willing to carry on working for the Shaws in Hong Kong. In a letter written to *Berita Harian*, the actor expressed that he was happy to be able to play a part in a foreign film and to have the chance to learn filmmaking techniques in one of the most advanced film studios in Asia.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989), p.146-147.

¹⁰² “Sharikat Filem Shaws Jalan Ampas Tutup”, *Berita Harian*, 28 October 1967, p.5; “Shaw: Kami Terpaksa Tutup Jalan Ampas”, *Berita Harian*, 7 October 1967, p.2; “Studio MFP Tetap Di-tutup”, *Berita Harian*, 19 October 1967, p.1; “Bintang2 Di-Notis: Studio Shaw Akan Di-tutup”, *Berita Harian*, 3 October 1967, p.1; “Studio Jalan Ampas Tutup: Sarimah dan Jins Mungkin Ka-Kuala Lumpur”, *Berita Harian*, 1 December 1967, p.2.

¹⁰³ “Sarimah Bingong Tidak Terima Notis Berhenti”, *Berita Harian*, 4 October 1967, p.2.

¹⁰⁴ “Jins Tidak Terlibat Dalam Tindakan Majikan”, *Berita Harian*, 27 October 1967, p.5.

¹⁰⁵ “Jins: Saya Mahu Membujang Lagi”, *Berita Harian*, 23 December 1967, p.7.

¹⁰⁶ “Jins Tidak Terlibat Dalam Tindakan Majikan”, *Berita Harian*, 27 October 1967, p.5.

It is in this special treatment afforded to Jins at such a critical moment that opens a window to understanding the impetuses behind the Zain crossover. This is because Jin's unusual treatment and reaction inevitably raise suspicions and beg further inquiry considering his role in Singapore's labour politics at that time: Jins was the third president of PERSAMA, who led the local film industry to demand for better working conditions with the company, even bringing the union to join the socialist Singapore General Employee Union (SGEU) with himself joining the SGEU Central Committee (which comprised of prominent political figures such as Dominick Puttucheary and James Puttucheary). He was also the most outspoken figure in criticizing renowned Malay film star P. Ramlee's earlier attempts to make Malay films in Hong Kong, positing (among other reasons) that the self-serving move would only divide PERSAMA's unity and fundamentally sell out Malay filmmaking.¹⁰⁷ In this light, that Jins would agree so cooperatively to being sent to Hong Kong just a couple of years later, and especially at a time when the rest of his comrades were abruptly being laid off, is nothing short of mind-boggling.

Timothy P. Bernard suggested that Jins relented "because he had seen MFP releases dwindle to barely one a year, and he was offered the position of assistant director and access to the more modern equipment available at the Shaw Brothers' studio in Hong Kong".¹⁰⁸ However, there seems to be more than meets the eye. It is plausible that the Shaw Brothers sent Jins to Hong Kong under their banner and that Jins went along with it to save himself from being arrested by the Singapore government and, from the company's perspective, to weaken the PERSAMA. After Singapore gained independence from Malaysia in 1965, the artists' and workers' unions in the country became disenfranchised. Authorities began to crack down on

¹⁰⁷ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana*, p.238; Jamil Sulong. *Jamil Sulong: Warisan Dan Wawasan*, p.170; Aimi Jarr, Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Bermulanya Filem*, p.103, p.236 and p.325 and James Harding and Ahmad Sarji. *P. Ramlee: The Bright Star*. Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 2002, p.185. Jins himself wrote an opposition letter to the newspapers under the name "Bintang Kecil" at that time. See "Trajidi Perusahaan Filem Melayu Di-Tanah Ayer: Kemajuan P. Ramlee Patut-nya Satu Ingatan Kapada Majikan", *Berita Harian*, 27 July 1963, p.4.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy P. Barnard. "The Shaw Brothers' Malay Films", p.169.

labour unions and their leaders. Dominic Puttucheary, founding member of Singapore's Barisan Socialis and a prominent trade union leader who had always been publicly supportive of PERSAMA's actions against the Shaws, was arrested together with other union leaders.¹⁰⁹ Jins also received warning to quit his role in PERSAMA or risk being put in jail for at least two years.¹¹⁰ In Jins' own words, at that time the Shaw brothers were trying to protect him from being arrested by sending him away and providing him with a job in their Hong Kong studio.¹¹¹

Looking at the list of Malay film stars who played a role in the three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films, this does indeed sound credible. It is too much of a coincidence that many of the Malay cast members in *Nora Zain*, *Shadow of Death* and *Danger Valley*, said to be handpicked by Run Run Shaw himself, were in fact prominent leaders of labour movements (although their participation and roles remain hitherto largely undocumented).¹¹² Besides Jins Shamsuddin, who brought his popular screen personality – Jefri Zain – into *Shadow of Death* and *Danger Valley*, Aziz Jaafar, who was deputy to Shamsuddin during the latter's presidency term and who took over as President of PERSAMA for a short while thereafter, was also given the role of leading male star in *Nora Zain*.¹¹³ Nordin Arshad, who co-starred with Jaafar in the same film, was actually the leader of the workers' branch of PERSAMA (Jins and Jaafar

¹⁰⁹ Puthucheary had supported PERSAMA's cause. See "A Threat By Jins", *The Straits Times*, 13 January 1963, p.12 and "Saadiah Joins Jins In Film Contracts Dispute", *The Straits Times*, 21 January 1963, p.8.

¹¹⁰ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana*, p.238.

¹¹¹ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.152 and Aimi Jarr, Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Bermulanya Filem Melayu*, p.205.

¹¹² Interestingly, Sa'adiah, Jins Shamsuddin and Aziz Jaafar once held a press conference together. See "Empat Soal Yang Di-Tentang", *Berita Harian*, 27 January 1963, p.5. The three also held another one jointly with Nordin Arshad at the Singapore General Employee Union headquarters. See "Seniwati Sa'adiah Na' Koyak Kontrek", *Berita Harian*, 20 January 1963, p.1. All four of them were also fired during the Shaws' first attempted mass layoff back in 1965, attesting to their prominence in the labour battle against the Shaws and hinting that their exemption in the 1967 layoff were probably due indeed to circumstantial reasons. See "Nasib Bintang2 dan Pekerja2 Studio di-Jalan Ampas Sekarang Cherah Balek", *Berita Harian*, 8 June 1965, p.3. Decades later, cultural worker and renowned Malay lyricist Yusnor Ef also confirmed that Jins Shamsuddin, Aziz Jaafar and Nordin Arshad were indeed key union leaders in the MFP at that time. See Yusnor Ef, "Gerakan Buruh Naikkan Kos Filem", *Berita Harian*, 22 September 2001, p.26.

¹¹³ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana*, p.240-241 and Yusnor Ef, "Gerakan Buruh Naikkan Kos Filem", p.26.

headed the artists' branch), and he was actually not an actor but an assistant director at MFP.

¹¹⁴ A newspaper report highlighted this when it stated that besides “actress Sa’adiah Ahmad (seniwati Sa’adiah Ahmad)” and “actor Aziz Jaafar (seniman Aziz Ja’afar)”, “assistant director Nordin Arshad (penolong pengarah Nordin Arshad)” will also be heading for Hong Kong, giving the impression that in this film, Nordin Arshad will be behind rather than in front of the screen. ¹¹⁵ To pick a technical staff to fly to Hong Kong to act in a film does not appear to be a very astute decision, especially for a businessman as shrewd as Run Run Shaw, unless other extra-filmic factors were taken into consideration and in this case, it seems quite clear that the crackdown on labour activists in Singapore at that time had a crucial part to play.

Concurrently, there are also some who were and still are of the opinion that the Zain crossover was just a ploy to weaken the PERSAMA so that it would be easier for the Shaws to finally shut down the MFP, something they have wanted to do for a long time now. This is because by removing the influential and outspoken Jins Shamsuddin as well as the other leaders from the country, they would conveniently be removing their main and strongest opposition forces in the studio whom they have thus far had to wrestle with carefully for fear of further complications. ¹¹⁶ It thus seemed, reasonably, to some, that the Shaws were seizing the opportunity brought about by a change in Singapore’s political situation to bring film union advocates out of the country, giving them employment and protection in Hong Kong, as a way of taming their contenders and wrapping up their Malay filmmaking business in Singapore. In this regard, the shift to Hong Kong via the Zain crossover was a way for the Shaws to completely shut down MFP operations and empty out its resources from its Singapore base to

¹¹⁴ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.152. It was also noted in a newspaper report that Nordin Arshad was a PERSAMA leader alongside Jins Shamsuddin. See “‘Artis Kechil’ Shorkan Badan Baharu”, *Berita Harian*, 23 November 1966, p.7. Yusnor Ef further asserted that after Jins Shamsuddin and Nordin Arshad assumed leadership positions of the union in MFP, their demands and calls for change were made louder and clearer to the employer. See Yusnor Ef, “Saat Akhir Sebelum Shaw Tutup Studio Jalan Ampas”, *Berita Harian*, 15 June 2002, p.24.

¹¹⁵ “Pemileman ‘Wanita James Bond’: Pengarah dan Bintang2 Filem ka-H.K.”, *Berita Harian*, 18 June 1966, p.7.

¹¹⁶ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.152. Yusnor Ef is also of this opinion. See Yusnor Ef, “Saat Akhir Sebelum Shaw Tutup Studio Jalan Ampas”, *Berita Harian*, 15 June 2002, p.24.

that in Hong Kong. The recalibration of MFP through connecting the two studios essentially meant a “death by merger” for the MFP.

In light of these events, the Zain crossover was, in effect, an intervention into newly-independent Singapore’s labour activism situation and not simply a response to it. At the same time as the three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films represent the Shaws’ attempt to channel MFP resources to SB (HK) in the former’s twilight years in order to circumvent worsening market and labour conditions, they were also byproducts of the changes in Singapore’s labour activism situation in the mid- and late-1960s, for the Zain crossover essentially served as a kind of political asylum for several important activists. All in all, whether out of good intentions to help Jins and the others, or in a deliberate move to formally close down the studio or, most likely, a combination of both, Jins Shamsuddin would eventually be the only MFP artist who did not witness firsthand the dissolution of the studio.¹¹⁷ In an uncanny twist, the very person who initially fought vehemently against the idea ultimately became the representational figure of the Shaws’ Malay filmmaking-in-Hong Kong initiative.

Nationalizing the body

The sections above delineated the motivations and operations of the Zain crossover on an industrial level. However, as mentioned earlier, the crossover took place between two cultures that bear little apparent affinity with one another. The question thus remains: what was done to overcome this cultural distance so much so that the Hong Kong-version of James and Jane Bonds not only entered the realm of Malay cinema, the resultant Zains even became longstanding cultural icons in Malay communities? What could have compensated for the lack of affinity and seemingly wide cultural distance? Adding to this complexity is the fact that

¹¹⁷ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.71.

significant political differences at that time further disassociated the two sites of exchange from each other. At the time of production, Hong Kong remained a British colony whereas Malaysia and Singapore had just gained independence from the same colonial master, becoming sovereign nation-states in 1957 and 1965 respectively. Did this political difference, made more palpable by the recency of events at that time, matter in the making of these films and if so, what was done to bridge this incompatibility?

Comparing the made-in-Hong Kong Zain films with their corresponding Chinese counterparts, in this section I posit that the crossover was primarily a corporeal affair. This goes beyond the obvious that these transborder productions encompassed the aforementioned transporting of personnel from one place to another. What I mean is that cultural and political differences were here bridged most prominently through the workings and reworkings i.e., the reinscription of the physical Malay body, an operation that includes three key procedures: nationalizing the body, revolutionizing the hero body and fortressing the female body. These bodily modifications assuaged the problem of cultural and political incompatibility between a predominantly Chinese colonial Hong Kong and a newly independent Singapore and Malaysia.

The Shaw enterprise, which had its bases in Singapore and Hong Kong, was formed at a time when both these sites were still under British rule. Understandably, this structural foundation made it logistically and administratively easy for them to shift resources from Singapore to Hong Kong and to conveniently adopt the “one film two shoots” mode of production. However, the making of the Zain films took place at a peculiar time. Singapore and Malaysia had just undergone the momentous event of gaining national independence from the British. If the company wished to attain commercial success with a newly decolonized Malay cinema audience, some act of balancing surely needed to be made in order to make Malay films in colonial Hong Kong at this time – films that are, moreover, based off the scripts of Hong Kong productions.

A look into the characterization of the Zains will reveal that the people behind “Malay-izing” the Mandarin Bond films (chiefly Jins Shamsuddin who, as noted, was specifically tasked to do this) were indeed sensitive to this political complication, as the Malay Bonds are inscribed with a national identity that is absent in the Mandarin Bonds. Conversely, direct political traces of Britishness in the Mandarin Bonds are also removed from their Malay counterparts. These can be seen preeminently from the cases of *Angel with the Iron Fist/Nora Zain* and *Angel Strikes Again/Danger Valley*. In *Angel With the Iron Fist*, “Jane” Bond 009 Luona’s (though her real name is Aisi) identity is revealed in the words of the villain: “that person sent from London (倫敦派來的那個傢伙)”. This “London” detail is conspicuously removed in the corresponding line of *Nora Zain*: “the agent from the headquarters is here (orang headquarters da sampai)”. 009 Aisi appears again in *Angel Strikes Again*, her identity made even clearer this time: an Interpol agent (國際警探) trained in London (在倫敦受訓) sent from Tokyo (從東京派來的). This identity is completely changed in the corresponding Malay version, where Aisi is a government agent (agen kerajaan) sent from an unspecified country to Hong Kong: “the government has sent an agent to track our movement. Her name is Aisi (kerajaan telah menghantar seorang agen untuk menjejak gerakan kita. Namanya Aisi)”.

Similarly, the identity of the male Bond in *Angel Strikes Again* is also drastically different from that in *Danger Valley*. In *Angel Strikes Again*, Aisi’s supporting Bond, Deng Lei, is an “unemployed (無業游民)”; “an owl who likes to meddle in other people’s affairs (多管閒事的貓頭鷹)”. The chief villain summarizes his character as: “neither a police officer, nor a foreign agent, even more so not an Interpol agent. You are just like me, someone who does not follow the law (你不是本地的警探，也不是外国的特务，更不是国际警察。你跟我一样，根本就是捞偏门的人物)”. In contrast to this part-flâneur part-Robin Hood character, Deng’s Malay counterpart Jefri is a government agent in the likes of Aisi. This is

revealed when Aisi asks Jefri, “What do you work as, Jef? There must be a reason why you are following me (apa perkerjaan kau, Jef? Tentu ada sesuatu sebab kau mengikut aku)”, to which Jefri replies, “The frog jumps into the pond”. This phrase is used by Aisi throughout the film as a secret code to identify other agent colleagues in Hong Kong. Jefri’s government agent identity is also reinforced through the words of the villain: Jefri Zain is “very wise and well-trained and he is also a government agent in here. He was specially sent to destroy our organization (dia sungguh bijak dan cukup terlatih dan dia juga ketua agen kerajaan di sini. Beliau dihantar khas untuk menghancurkan pertubuhan kita)”.

Juxtaposing *Angel With the Iron Fists* with *Nora Zain* and *Angel Strikes Back* with *Danger Valley*, the key differences in Bond identities between the Mandarin and the Malay Bond versions become apparent: the Mandarin Bonds serve international organizations, are UK-trained and possess individual agency; the Malay Bonds, on the other hand, serve governments, are unrelated to the UK and, crucially, always represent a larger body, that is, they never work solely for their own interests or glory. It is my contention here, that such changes made to the Malay Bonds amplify the supremacy of the nation and nullify that of the British empire – two effects that are in fact mutually reinforcing and that culminate in the “nationalization” of the Zain bodies.

By “nationalizing”, I am here referring to the Zain bodies becoming extensions of a larger, bounded governing body, acting on behalf of a higher ruling authority most likely that of a nation-state, even if nation and state are here invoked only on a generic level. This has to do with the peculiar choice of the word, “kerajaan”, to replace “guoji (國際, international)” in signifying their identity and object of allegiance. Most fundamentally, the dropping of the “international” concept altogether hints at a disapproval of making the Malay Bonds nation-less. The term “international” actually has a readily available Malay translation – “antarabangsa” or “internasional”, both of which were already in wide circulation at that time.

¹¹⁸ Rejecting to make this convenient translation implies a refusal to inherit the Mandarin Bonds' international status, pointing to a reluctance to shape the Malay Bonds as heroes who are not defined by national boundaries or who simply transcend them. The subsequent use of "kerajaan" to replace this trait then further signals a preference for the Zains to be grounded in a particular political system, or to owe their allegiance to singular, bounded governing bodies rather than to some sort of abstract international network or, in Tan See Kam's words, "network of 'trans-ness'" like the Interpol. ¹¹⁹

Commonly translated as "state", "kingdom" or "government", "kerajaan" is a keyword that encapsulates traditional Malay political experience. ¹²⁰ Although the term is used today to refer unambiguously to the government of a nation-state, its meaning was not always so straightforward. Before colonialism imported new political ideas and institutions into the region, people in the Malay Peninsula considered themselves to be living not in states or under governments, but in a kerajaan – the condition of having a raja (king; the root word for "kerajaan"). ¹²¹ At the center of this civilizational logic is the idea of "subjecthood": "rakyat (subjects/people)" of a kerajaan are expected to pay full allegiance to the king and his royal rule; what determines the identity of the rakyat is not so much the territorial space occupied by the raja (territorial boundaries were very fluid in those days) than the raja himself whom the rakyat follows. ¹²² However, this institutional structure would become fundamentally destabilized by the political upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when colonialism, urbanization, the Japanese Occupation, and the British proposal of a Malayan

¹¹⁸ See for example, "P. Ramlee Hendak Buat Filem Bentok Yg Baru di-Hong Kong", *Berita Harian*, 2 July 1963, p.2; "10 Pelakon ka-Hongkong Untuk Penggambaran Filem P. Ramlee", *Berita Harian*, 10 July 1963, p.7. In fact, these words were used to describe the Zain films in publicity materials: "Halaman 8 Iklan Ruangan 1", *Berita Harian*, 4 May 1967, p.8; "Nora Zain – Ajen Wanita 001", *Berita Harian*, 10 December 1966, p.7; "Filem Jefri Zain Akan Di-Jadikan Bahan Pasaran Antara Bangsa Oleh Studio MFP", *Berita Harian*, 23 April 1966, p.7.

¹¹⁹ Tan See Kam, "Shaw Brothers' *Bangpian*: Global Bondmania, Cosmopolitan Dreaming and Cultural Nationalism", *Screen*, Vol.56, Issue 2 (2015): p.209.

¹²⁰ Anthony Milner. *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982, p.114.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Anthony Milner. *The Malays*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p.66 and p.99.

Union casted the rajas' competency into question.¹²³ Coupled with the rise of Malay ethnonationalism that gathered momentum particularly since the formation of the UMNO party in the 1940s, the interests of the rajas gradually became “subordinated to the demands of Malayism” and “the institution of sultans is [still] important...but important as a guarantee and symbol of Malay *kebangsaan* vis-à-vis the foreign *bangsa* in Malaya”.¹²⁴ In other words, the traditional political norm of being subject to the *kerajaan* (royal rulership) was, at that time, losing popularity to the new idea of being a subject of the “*bangsa Melayu* (Malay-nation)” – an idea that would eventually become the cornerstone of a “Malay Malaysia” helmed by Malay-dominant ruling party UMNO. In fact, towards the end of the nineteenth century, intellectuals have already begun to redefine the word “*kerajaan*”, separating rajaship from it, with newspaper *Utusan Melayu* using “*kerajaan ramai* (kerajaan of the populace)” to describe a “republic” even as the rajas were still well in existence (and they still are today, having been organized into a constitutional monarchy system in 1957).¹²⁵

In this light, the characterizing of the Malay Bonds as agents of a “*kerajaan*” is an intriguing one indeed. This is not only because this very concept and term was becoming increasingly ambivalent at that time, but also because at the same time as “*antarabangsa/internasional*” was not selected despite it being a readily available choice, its complementary opposite notion of “*kebangsaan* (nationality)”, which was also already in popular circulation by that time and which would have been equally germane to the context,

¹²³ Ibid., p.71 and p.114; Donna J. Amoroso. *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2014, p.100-116 and p.141-142 and Ariffin Omar. *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community, 1945-1950*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.27, p.36 and p.49-53.

¹²⁴ Ariffin Omar. *Bangsa Melayu*, p.53. See also Donna J. Amoroso. *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya*, p.159-160 and p.164.

¹²⁵ Anthony Milner. *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.104. Donna J. Amoroso notes that the new primacy of “the people” in relation to the rulers can be read as an implementation of progress occasioned by the postwar political crisis (particularly the opposition to the Malayan Union) in Malaya, and that the Malay masses or common Malays (*rakyat Melayu jelata*) were now regarded as paramount in the Malay states/Malay land (*tanah Melayu*). See Donna J. Amoroso. *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya*, p.154.

was similarly not invoked.¹²⁶ With this choice of “kerajaan” made over other more rigorously defined and trending keywords, it seems to me that this is an intentionally ambiguous choice which serves to circumvent political sensitivities at a time when terms and conditions of the “bangsa” and “kebangsaan” in the Malaysian context were very much in negotiation, while simultaneously affirming the existence and supremacy of a Malay(sian) political system nonetheless.¹²⁷ The employment of this word conjures the idea of a polity without necessitating further specification.

However, despite this ambiguity, it is nonetheless possible to detect a vague “national” character of this polity. Although there is not enough evidence to conclude convincingly that “kerajaan” in these films alludes specifically to the Malaysian or Singaporean nation-state or the idea of “Melayu bangsa”, there is a crucial hint in *Danger Valley* that suggests that this political system relates to the modern concept of a territorially-bound nation-state. In the film, it is stated explicitly that the “kerajaan agen”, Aisi, is to go over to Hong Kong to investigate the organization that is blackmailing corporations “di negeri ini”, which means, “within this state”. This makes clear that at stake here, or the key concern here, is the peace and stability of “this state” as opposed to the broader international order in the Mandarin versions. In the Malaysian context, “negeri” by this time relates to contemporaneous European notions of the “state”; its usage possessed clear territorial implications, something relatively absent from the traditional kerajaan.¹²⁸ By inference, this means that rather than denoting the traditional

¹²⁶ On “kebangsaan”, see Joel S. Kahn. *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2017, p.113-4. Ariffin Omar describes the ambiguity of “kerajaan” in the Malayan context: “In Malaya, some Malays questioned the absolutism of the *kerajaan* and the lack of popular participation in the governing of the state. They...demanded that the *kerajaan* should rule on the basis of popular consensus through elected councils. By the standards of Malay political culture, these demands were revolutionary. But the Malays were unwilling to break completely with the past. The *kerajaan* were not seen as feudal nor were they categorized as such for to have done so would have implied that the *kerajaan* was a stage in the evolutionary development of government – a stage which had to be left behind”; “Although *bangsa* became a potent symbol in the Malay community...it displaced the sultans and rajas without doing away with the institution of the monarchy” (see Ariffin Omar. *Bangsa Melayu*, p.188 and p.197).

¹²⁷ “Bangsa” and “kebangsaan” were new and contested concepts at that time. See Joel S. Kahn. *Other Malays*, p.109-114.

¹²⁸ Anthony Milner. *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, p.104-5 and Ariffin Omar. *Bangsa Melayu*, p.4.

concept of “rajaship”, “kerajaan” as used in these Zain films relates more closely with the modern constitutional idea of a “(national) state government” – one that governs over a specific territorial state and the people within it.¹²⁹ Hence, although it is unspecified which government do Aisi and Jefri actually work for, what is certain is that the change from “international” to “kerajaan” denotes a desire for the Malay agents to be representative of and working for a ruling body that has authority over a territorially-bounded populace, rather than as individualistic employees of an abstract international corporate network. Instead of embodying cosmopolitanism in the sense of transcending borders like their Mandarin counterparts, the Zain Bonds are inscribed with a grounded sense of belonging akin to a national identity.

Angel Strikes Again/Danger Valley provide a powerful case in point. In *Angel*, Deng Lei rescues Aisi from a close shave and the two take the opportunity to fake Aisi’s death at the scene. Deng then brings Aisi to his home where she changes into his dressing robe, cross-dressing into – in Deng’s words – a “suave young man (好漂亮的一位翩翩公子)” – a character she will continue to play in the second half of the film. The two then settle down on a round-shaped sofa, where Aisi finally asks Deng about his reason for following her. This is when Deng reveals that he is just an idle unemployed who is protecting her only because she had saved him before and because he finds her irresistible. The increasing proximity both in

¹²⁹ In this regard, the use of kerajaan here is very similar to how it was used in *Hikayat Johor* (first printed in 1908, republished in 1911, 1919 and 1930), which according to Anthony Milner, meant one of the earliest attempts by rajas themselves to reconceptualize the traditional kerajaan system. It is worth quoting him in length here to better understand the complexity involved in using the terms “kerajaan” and “negeri”: “Like the newspapers of the colony, the text separates kerajaan from raja and, as a result, raises questions about the meaning of kerajaan. If the term once meant the ‘condition of having a raja’, it was now, in theory, possible to consider kerajaan independently of rajaship. Moreover, the signification of kerajaan was pruned back in a second direction. The emphasis in the *Hikayat Johor* on the territorial state as distinct from its ruler also limits the scope of kerajaan. It may have been the case that the model of the evolution of the British monarchy was a consideration in making this second distinction between kerajaan and ‘state’”; “the Malay phrase which the *Hikayat* uses to convey ‘constitution’ makes the point with clarity: it is called an ‘undang undang tuboh kerajaan’. Undang means “laws” and tuboh is defined as ‘body in the anatomical sense’. In a literal sense, then, the constitution gives ‘body’ or ‘substance’ to the kerajanan... Just as the individual could no longer be defined in what seemed like superficial terms, so the kerajaan was now to be given new substance or ‘body’ in the form of a constitution. The tuboh kerajaan, proclaimed in 1895 and given prominence in the *Hikayat Johor*, would help to establish a new meaning for a word which by now had begun to be stripped of much of its earlier significance. By the same token, it would strengthen the notion of ‘government’ as a phenomenon existing independently of monarchy” (see Anthony Milner. *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*, p.214-6).

terms of their physical sitting distance and in terms of shot distance then further conveys a sense of intimacy and subtle flirtation that is supplemented by low-key lighting (with a hint of red) and a jazzy saxophone tune playing in the background (see Fig. 5). This scene is important because it clearly frames the relationship between the two Bonds firmly within the parameters of romance and eroticism; at bottom, this is a story about two romantically mutually-attracted people who decide to work together for each own's individual reasons.

In *Danger Valley*, however, because of the crucial difference made to Jefri's identity, things become much more complicated than this. In this same scene, when Aisi and Jefri sit down on the same sofa, Jefri reveals that, like her, he is also a government agent. This drastically changes the way in which the Malay narrative is to be interpreted. While the actors' bodily performances, proximity in both physical and camera distance, low lighting and jazz music no doubt suggest love/sexual interest in the same way as they do in the Mandarin version, Jefri's revelation in this scene, however, frames his actions and relationship with Aisi not only within the boundaries of romance and eroticism but also within that of national interest. With this revelation, Jefri's saving of Aisi in the preceding scene can no longer be interpreted simply as an act of saving a damsel in distress (as it is with Deng Lei); it becomes one of collaboration and of saving a comrade as well. The subsequent act of Aisi changing into Jefri's clothing and transforming into a man now also triggers the visual recognition of the two coming together as a working team; at this moment, Aisi and Jefri become equals – comrades in solidarity and not just a flirting couple.

This point is accentuated when the romantic atmosphere of this scene (see Fig. 6) is abruptly interrupted by the striking of the owl clock. In *Angel*, this scene ends with Aisi receiving a call to her headquarters but in *Danger*, a cutaway shot to the clock puts a halt to the romance brewing between the two and Jefri then proceeds to switch on the lights so that they could prepare to go out and carry on with their mission (see Fig. 7). The striking of the

clock and coming back on of lights remind the Malay Bonds and their audiences that there is no time to talk and dream all about romance here; there is still serious work to be done, a nation to be saved. Through these ways, it is made particularly clear in this scene that unlike their Chinese counterparts, Jefri and Aisi are not simply heroic individuals. Both individually and collectively as a team, they represent a nation on a mission; their actions, success and glory are motivated by and representative of a nation(-state) at large.

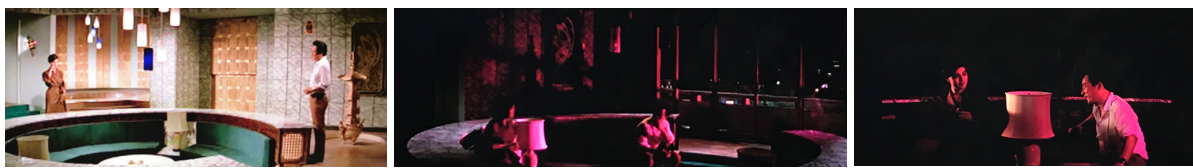


Figure 5. Increasing proximity in sitting and shot distance in this scene (*Angel Strikes Again*)

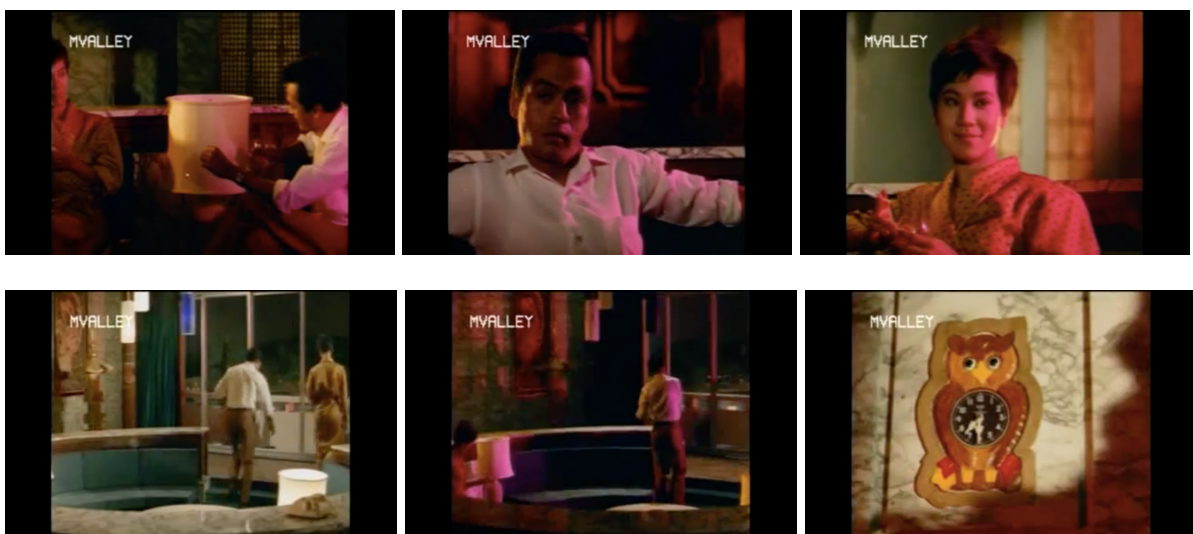


Figure 6 and 7. (clockwise) Romance between Aisi and Jefri interrupted by a cutaway shot and an owl-cooing clock

This nationalizing of the Zain bodies addresses a fundamental political difference when bringing the Hong Kong Bonds over into the realm of Malay cinema, because just as the Hong Kong Bonds' predisposition to internationality well befits Hong Kong's then-status of being a cosmopolitan "space of flow" led by a colonial "non-intervention policy" or, in Ackbar Abbas's words, a "space of transit", an "inter-national city" that transcends national borders,

inscribing nationality – even if just the generic concept of it – onto the Zain bodies captures and feeds into the heat and expectations of Malay nationalism at that time, appealing to a newly-independent Malay peninsula.¹³⁰ Similarly, removing British markers – being trained or based in the UK – from their bodies also achieves the same effect. It should require little elaboration that in the immediate context of Malaysia/Singapore gaining independence through decolonization, disavowing British political influence is tantamount and, in fact, imperative to establishing national subjectivity and sovereignty. Under this climate, characterizing the Zains as being UK-trained and -based like their Hong Kong Mandarin counterparts would unwittingly make them subordinate once again to a British system and rule, symbolically affording reverence and dominance to the ex-colonial master yet again. Sensitively removing traces of Britishness from the identities of the Malay Bonds and reframing their background and mission to ensure zero political reliance and allusion to the empire is, therefore, an astute move to tailor the Malay versions to contemporaneous political aspirations. Such erasure reinforces the effect of amplifying national supremacy through nullifying that of the British, helping thus to overcome the political divide inherent in the Zain crossover.

Revolutionizing the male hero body

Political differences aside, there is also a host of cultural differences that needs to be addressed and this, I contend, is done both through resolving and reinforcing these differences, the former achieved by revolutionizing the Malay hero body and the latter by fortressing female Malay bodies. Despite the careful eradication of direct political references from the Malay

¹³⁰ Steve Tsang. *A Modern History of Hong Kong*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2007, p.172; Elizabeth Sinn, “Lesson in Openness: Creating a Space of Flow in Hong Kong”, in Helen Siu and Agnes Ku eds. *Hong Kong Mobile: Making A Global Population*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008, p.13-44 and Ackbar Abbas. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997, p.4.

Bond bodies, cultural influences tend to escape unscathed. In the case of Jefri Zain, “swinging Britain” made its mark on the body of the Malay hero through a detour via the Mandarin Bond films and under the mediation of “pop yeh yeh” youth culture, constituting a new kind of Malay onscreen masculinity and revolutionizing the ideal Malay hero type – a position traditionally held by the previously undisputed folk hero, Hang Tuah. In other words, at the same time as removing political markers of Britishness aids with crossing the divide between colonial Hong Kong and independent Singapore and Malaysia, sharing contemporary British cultural markers with their Hong Kong counterparts, made possible under a “pop yeh yeh” climate, generates cultural affinity between the Mandarin and Malay Bonds, closing the cultural gap between them.

The Malay hero archetype has long been dominated by the figure of Hang Tuah. Since the fifteenth century when he was first written into existence in *The Malay Annals* (Sejarah Melayu), which is a collection of tales about the rulers’ family of Melaka that became a key Malay cultural text of dynastic storytelling and “one of the main foundation texts for Malay-Muslim identity in Malaysia”, Hang Tuah has been regarded as the ideal Malay hero.¹³¹ The later appearance of what would become the “national Malay epic” of Malaysia – *Epic of Hang Tuah* (Hikayat Hang Tuah), coupled with incessant promotion of the Hang Tuah tales via literature, television, film, theatre and school textbooks in Malaysia, further propagated the popular image of Hang Tuah as epic, ideal Malay hero up till this day.¹³² Simply put, Hang Tuah is a man who experiences the rise, glory and demise of the Sultanate (King) of Melaka. Born in Riau of commoner descent, he becomes one of the main courtiers who attends to the

¹³¹ Wong Soak Koon, “Gender, Islam and the ‘Malay Nation’ in Fatimah Busu’s *Salam Maria*”, in Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied eds. *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness*. Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2011, p.171-2 and Hendrik M.J. Maier, “*Melayu* and Malay: A Story of Appropriate Behavior”, in *ibid.*, p.393.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.393-5 and Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat: Contemporary Malaysian Film and Literature*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005, p.29.

Melaka Sultan and is also a naval commander who often goes on long sea voyages to places such as India, Java, Turkey and China.¹³³

Conventionally, Hang Tuah is best known and mobilized for his absolute loyalty to the Sultanate.¹³⁴ However, in the realm of cinema, aside from personality traits, the need to visually characterize Hang Tuah becomes equally pertinent. Khoo Gaik Cheng's description of "authentic masculinity" (also known as "traditional masculinity") in Malay cinema, epitomized by the character of Hang Tuah played by P. Ramlee in the first Hang Tuah-type Malay film – *Hang Tuah* (1956), is especially germane here in illustrating how this hero is represented onscreen (see Fig. 8).¹³⁵ "In film", asserts Khoo, "(the authentic male) is distinguished from the ordinary man by his use of symbols of traditional Malayness. Authentic masculinity is performed or staged not only through the actor's actions; it is also aided by bodily accessories or props that signify his Malay maleness. That is, he is armed or 'manned' with traditional weapons like the badik and keris".¹³⁶ Additionally, "the authentic male has a pendekar, or warrior-like image. He has knowledge of or skill in the Malay martial arts, Silat...the authentic Malay man's toned (rather than overly muscular) physique, a result of disciplined martial arts training and practice in the gelanggang silat, not to mention his graceful or purposeful comportment, all testify to this warrior-like image".¹³⁷

¹³³ Hendrik M.J. Maier, "*Melayu and Malay: A Story of Appropriate Behavior*", p.393.

¹³⁴ Wazir-Jahan Begum Karim. *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1992, p.39 and p.41-2.

¹³⁵ Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.169.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.164-5.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.165.



Figure 8. P. Ramlee's (front right) image as Hang Tuah (1956)

With this image in mind, it becomes instantly apparent from the looks of it, how overwhelmingly different Jefri Zain is from traditional conceptualizations of the ideal Malay hero. It is safe to say that Jefri does not – at all – don any “symbols of traditional Malayness” nor assume a warrior-like image ala a Silat fighter. Instead of carrying the badik and keris, and instead of exhibiting grace and discipline through the spiritual art of Silat, Jefri carries a host of modern technological gadgets, wears an impeccable suit all the time, drinks whiskey and brandy, moves around in swanky sports cars and peppers his conversations with English slangs such as “well” and “of course”. Even when he fights, he does so more with wit and technology than with physical or spiritual strength, as Hang Tuah would have traditionally done. In fact, he does not display any knowledge of Silat at all. Furthermore, Jefri Zain is always surrounded by beautiful, often seductive, women with whom he entertains with pleasure. From his flirtatious behaviors to actual physical intimacy with sexy female characters, it is clear that

Jefri delights in sensual and sexual pleasures. In this sense then, he is perhaps more like the antihero in the Hang Tuah tales – Hang Jebat, who embodies extreme sensualism and hedonism in contrast to the rational Hang Tuah, who always exercises great self-control and caution.¹³⁸ As such, the accessories and props (women included) that Jefri Zain wears and wields equip the Malay hero body with a new kind of masculinity that is drastically different from the traditional/authentic masculinity embodied by Hang Tuah.

This (re)constituted masculinity is instead more closely aligned with the Mandarin Bond whose character is, in turn, evocative of the British Bond who rose to popularity against the backdrop of British youth (counter)culture and its attendant “swinging” aesthetics of the 1960s. Brought into onscreen existence in the “Swinging Sixties” of Britain – an era characterized by consumerist-led change and youth counterculture, Sean Connery’s James Bond is “the first screen action hero to embody and address the new, fragile pleasure of the commodity, where both his own form and the objects he encounters are ‘mundane objects of desire’”.¹³⁹ The films articulate a “new sensibility focused on ‘style’” and “an emerging ‘modern’ outlook that placed a premium on individual action”, prompted by “an anger and contempt for ‘the spiritual torpor that had been induced’ by situations and structures for which the older generation was responsible”.¹⁴⁰ In short, as Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott succinctly put it, “in the context of ‘swinging Britain’, Bond provided a mythic encapsulation of the then prominent ideological themes of classlessness and modernity”.¹⁴¹ His high-tech gadgets, leisure and consumption preferences, and hedonistic attitude towards sex rendered Bond a hero who embodies swinging Britain’s celebration of science and technology, conspicuous consumerism and the sexual revolution, shaping his masculinity into one that is

¹³⁸ Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.43.

¹³⁹ Toby Miller, “James Bond’s Penis”, in Christoph Lindner ed. *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader (2nd Edition)*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, p.295.

¹⁴⁰ Cynthia Baron, “Doctor No: Bonding Britishness to Racial Sovereignty”, in *ibid.*, p.156

¹⁴¹ Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, “The Moments of Bond”, in *ibid.*, p.23.

“defined by freedom from marriage, an easy familiarity with brand names that are the accompaniments to a consumer lifestyle” and “fetished [sic] onto machinery”.¹⁴²

Embodying the same stylish combination of fast cars, branded goods, modern technology, never-ending booze and liberal attitude towards sex, both the Mandarin and Malay Bonds are, to a large extent, inscribed with the same kind of masculinity as the British Bond. However, and perhaps uncannily, these two Asian Bonds bring the swing of the sixties to even greater heights than the British Bond himself. This is achieved primarily on the level of aesthetics. Although Sean Connery’s Bond reflects the values of swinging Britain in ways delineated above, swinging aesthetics are not immediately apparent to the eye in the 1960s British Bond films. By contrast, the “modern” or, if you may, “countercultural” character of the Mandarin and Malay Bonds are accentuated by the youthful swinging aesthetics of the world in which they inhabit. This world, aesthetically shared by both the Mandarin and Malay versions since for the large part they share the same sets, props and cast, is a distinctly swinging one (see Fig. 9). Miniskirts, pantsuits and the turtleneck make their appearances as everyday-dress in the films. Bright colours and bold designs fill walls and furniture. The Twist and the Agogo are danced in clubs and dancehalls. Even some of the films’ opening titles are made in psychedelic styles.



¹⁴² Michael Denning, “Licensed to Look: James Bond and the Heroism of Consumption”, in *ibid.*, p.73 and Martin Willis, “Hard-wear: The Millennium, Technology, and Brosnan’s Bond”, in *ibid.*, p.174.



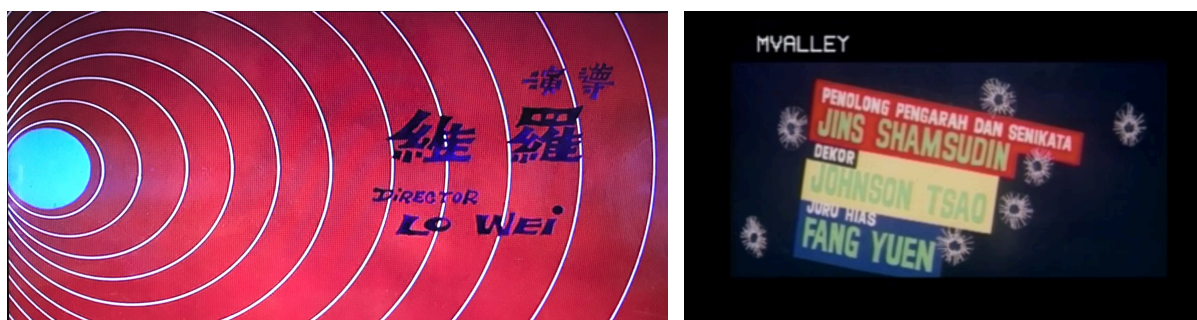


Figure 9. The swinging world shared between the Mandarin and Malay Bond films

A particularly animated example of Jefri's swinging masculinity can be found in the scene where he first appears in *Shadow of Death*, waking up to the cooing sounds of his owl clock, beginning to groom himself. Stepping into the bathroom, Jefri removes his bright red pajamas and enters a closet-like machine. Steam emits from within and a pair of lifelike feminine hands attached to it gives Jefri a head massage (or caresses his face) (see Fig. 10). The scene then cuts to a closeup shot of a row of electrical buttons on Jefri's bedroom wall. Jefri enters the frame wearing a tight-fitting singlet and hits on one of these buttons, leading to a crisp white collared shirt being delivered to him by a machinery from the ceiling. He puts on the shirt and walks to the wardrobe, in the process revealing that, waist-down, Jefri only has his boxer shorts on. As if anticipating his arrival, the wardrobe automatically opens, delivering a pair of trousers and a coat. Jefri then sits on his bed and the ground beneath him slides open, delivering a pair of well-polished shoes (see Fig. 11). Now fully dressed – complete with a bowtie and watch, Jefri is all set to go but before that, he does not forget to stop by the Greek goddess-looking figure by the main door and gives her a deep, long kiss. As Jefri pulls away from her lips, lo and behold! A lighted cigarette is now in his mouth. Leisurely exhaling a puff of smoke, he steps out of his house and the door that is operated by a passcode lock automatically closes behind him. Finally, Jefri is ready to leave, stepping into an elevator looking impeccable in his three-piece suit (see Fig. 12).

This approximately three minutes-long sequence of Jefri's grooming process well illustrates the swinging masculinity that clothes his body. From start to end, Jefri hardly lifts a finger. The process is completely automated. All he has to do is to look great and groove along, with the camera following him from his living room (with geometrically-designed doors and cylindrical hanging lights), to the bathroom (painted in sky blue colour), to his bedroom (lined with lilac wallpaper). The emphasis on appearance, automation and the often-gendered designs of the machineries in this scene perceptibly illuminates how Jefri's masculinity is anchored in style, commodity, technology, sensuality and sexuality. The wide-angle shots also give the audience a tour of his house, highlighting the swinging modern aesthetics of Jefri's personal space and, relatedly, of his style preference. In fact, that the film would spend a good three minutes just exhibiting this styling process, getting Jefri's body dressed as a means of introducing him is, in itself, a clear sign of commodity and corporeal worship (or fetish, if you may), highlighting the new kind of masculinity that is inscribed unto this hero of his times.



Figure 10. (clockwise) Jefri wakes up and grooms himself in *Shadow of Death*



Figure 11. (clockwise) Jefri's automated grooming process



Figure 12. (clockwise) A goodbye kiss to a cigarette-giving Greek goddess and Jefri is ready to go

Such swinging character of the Mandarin and Malay Bond films has to be understood in light of the international reach of swinging Britain. The fall of Britain as colonial superpower coincided with its rise as an influential center of pop culture. Upon taking its home ground by storm, “swinging Britain” quickly became the cultural trendsetter for much of the capitalist

“Free World”, exporting swinging aesthetics most prominently through music, fashion and leisure activities.¹⁴³ Through the export of such countercultural expressions of youthful liberation, the idea of self-fashioning also began to take root among youths elsewhere in the world – an attitude that complemented the many youth-led sociopolitical rebellions that were taking place during the “long sixties” not only in the States and in Britain but also in other parts of the world. In Hong Kong, for example, “foreign influence was extremely strong in the 1960s. Western movies, TV series, books, and magazines were very popular; Western pop music particularly reached a climax in the mid-1960s with the visit of bands such as The Beatles”.¹⁴⁴ This coincided with the “coming of age of the first post-war generation” who “started to search for their own sense of identity” – an often “much agonized soul-searching” process, that was bolstered “by the traumatic disturbances of 1967, a series of events that could have posed a fundamental challenge to the survival or at least the legitimacy of the colonial regime”.¹⁴⁵

The same took place in Malaysia and Singapore, culminating in a phenomenon that would eventually acquire a name of its own – “pop yeh yeh”. Pop yeh yeh, in a nutshell, is “swinging Britain” localized. In the 1960s, postwar baby boom-generation youths in Singapore and Malaysia took pride and joy in reproducing the beat music of British bands such as The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Shadows, as well as the aforementioned swinging fashion statements such as the miniskirt made popular by London’s Mary Quant. Tea dances in dance halls, the Twist and the Agogo dance style became the youths’ favourite pastime.¹⁴⁶ The name “pop yeh yeh” itself, is said to be inspired by the popular Beatles’ song, “She Loves You”, with its catchy refrain, “yeah yeah yeah”. Hence, although Singapore and Malaysia were dissociating themselves politically from Britain in the 1960s, but culturally, the youths of these

¹⁴³ Cynthia Baron, “*Doctor No*: Bonding Britishness to Racial Sovereignty”, p.156.

¹⁴⁴ Leung Ping-kwan, “Urban Cinema and Cultural Identity of Hong Kong”, in Poshek Fu and David Desser eds. *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.233.

¹⁴⁵ Steve Tsang. *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, p.182-3.

¹⁴⁶ Adil Johan. *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music of the Independence Era*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018, p.191-210.

two nations were visibly aligning themselves with the trending youth culture of Britain that had travelled well outside its initial boundaries. As Adil Johan puts it, “the establishment of Malayan youth music signified a degenerate or ‘pornographic’ cultural expression that was also modern and translatable across national boundaries. The articulation of pop yeh yeh culture represented a threatening sexual freedom along with a borderless cultural practice that could not be bound by the rigid confines of a national culture and traditional morality”.¹⁴⁷ Drawing inspiration from swinging Britain and against a brand-new political backdrop, pop yeh yeh ushered in a new generation of Malaysian and Singaporean youths who embrace youth agency and novel embodied practices of self-fashioning.¹⁴⁸

It is this “borderless” youth culture climate in the sixties that, I contend, is crucial in enabling the crossing over of Bonds from one film culture to another. Without doubt, youth cultures of the 1960s in different parts of the world were not entirely similar to one another. Pop yeh yeh, for instance, was not a wholesale transplant of Western counterculture onto Malaysian and Singapore soil. Although obvious references to British pop abound, Malay “kugiran” bands of the mid-1960s, for example, were unique in their original compositions and “asli (indigenous)” Malay singing style.¹⁴⁹ Yet, despite these differences, it is difficult to deny that there existed certain commonalities or rapport shared by youths of that transformative era, an observation that many today refer to as the “global sixties” or “global 1968”.¹⁵⁰ It is also widely acknowledged, not least by critics of cultural imperialism or neoimperialism, that swinging Britain was at that time a leader alongside the United States (“Americanization”) in

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.195.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.224.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p.200.

¹⁵⁰ A massive volume on the topic has recently been published: see Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young, Joanna Waley-Cohen eds. *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-building*. London: Routledge, 2018.

disseminating (pop) culture to other parts of the world, as the example of pop yeh yeh saliently illustrates.¹⁵¹

Situating the made-in-Hong Kong Zain films in this context, I am suggesting here that this “borderless” zeitgeist created a sort of transnational zone across Britain, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, wherein trending cultural symbols and styles were shared and consumed to fulfill each own’s different yet not completely dissimilar needs. In other words, it was with the necessary mediation of pop yeh yeh that the key cultural markers used to fashion the Mandarin Bond managed to find their way relatively smoothly onto the body of the Malay hero – cultural markers that, in turn, also style the body of swinging Britain’s James Bond. This is not to say that the three Bonds are made completely out of the same mold, for the extent to which these shared markers are mobilized differ across the different Bonds and activate different functions: while the British Bond, as some have reasonably noted, takes on only a partial embodiment of swinging Britain thus displaying partial commitment to the counterculture of his time and a slight nostalgic nod to the polite society of the past, the acquisition *and* accentuation of youthful “swingingness” in the Mandarin and Malay versions by contrast place these Bonds in a progressive position within their societies which, at that time, often simply deem anything “Western” as a challenge and threat to local values and traditions.

¹⁵² In this way, the Mandarin and Malay Bonds are proponents of cultural rebellion in their respective societies, sharing both a mission in pushing boundaries as well as the means through

¹⁵¹ This forms part of the wider phenomenon that Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad had famously called “Westoxification” in the 1960s (Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Trans. R. Campbell. *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. Berkeley: Mizan Berkeley Press, 1984). The term would later be picked up and used aggressively by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

¹⁵² Indeed, it has been noted that the British Bond is at best ambivalent in his attitude towards counterculture and swinging Britain. For example, Clare Hines rightly points out that “on the one hand, 007 still represented ‘a conservative hero’, whose patriotism and imperialism helped to define a nostalgic Britishness apparently untouched by recent colonial decline. On the other hand, Chapman argues that Fleming was ‘at some pains to portray Bond as a modern, to some extent classless, hero’ whose meritocratic professionalism was a sign of consumerist-led change in Britain”. See Claire Hines, “‘Entertainment for Men’: Uncovering the *Playboy* Bond”, in Christoph Lindner ed. *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader (2nd Edition)*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014, p.90.

which to do so, even if this progressiveness may stem simply from a corporate intention to capitalize on the raging countercultural climate of the time. In other words, I am positing here, that it was the need and desire to refashion or revolutionize the Malay hero archetype in accordance with the changing, swinging times of Malaysia and Singapore, complemented by a “global sixties” consensus in youth culture and style trends across Britain, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, that generates cultural affinity and closes the distance between Mandarin and Malay cinemas in the making of these films. Further testifying to this point is the fact that perhaps for the first time in history, in 1959 the previously undisputed status of Hang Tuah as ideal Malay hero was cast into doubt when socialist Kassim Ahmad established Hang Jebat as the modern hero rebelling against colonialism and feudalism.¹⁵³ Timothy Barnard and Jan van der Putten opine that in fact, a year earlier in 1958, a radio play by Ali Aziz entitled *Tragedy of Hang Jebat* (Tragedi Hang Jebat, later made into a stage play entitled *Hang Jebat Commits Treason* (Hang Jebat Menderhaka)), had already signified the shift towards Jebat as hero in the struggle against the old forces obstructing the full development of an independent Malay nation.¹⁵⁴ A Hang Tuah/Hang Jebat debate subsequently gained momentum in the 1960s with Malaysia’s transition into a modern nation-state, renegotiating the traditional ideal Malay hero type in its most fundamental terms. The time seemed more than ripe indeed, for the swinging entrance of a new Malay hero, James Bond-Deng Lei-style.

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¹⁵³ Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.29.

¹⁵⁴ Timothy P. Barnard and Jan van der Putten, “Old Malay Heroes Never Die: The Story of Hang Tuah in Films and Comics”, in Ian Gordon, Mark Jancovich and Matthew P. Mcallister eds. *Film and Comic Books*. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2007, p.262.

¹⁵⁵ In the interest of space, this section has focused more on the visuality of swinging culture and of pop yeh yeh than the aural aspect of it. A quick note is in place here to acknowledge the important role that music plays in shaping Jefri Zain’s “new-style” masculinity. Admittedly much more can still be said about the transformations of masculinity in Malay cinema as mapped through shifts in *musical* styles. Pop Yeh Yeh in these Zain films, for example, displaced the international Latin big band style that premeated early Malay films and which the famous crooner and film star, P. Ramlee, stood for. The youthful disinterest in such crooning style, coupled with the rise of the Pop Yeh Yeh music trend, not only ended a particular style of music in Malay cinema, fashioning a new type of onscreen idol/hero, it also effectively spelled the end of P. Ramlee’s film and singing career. This leaves a topic for another day. I thank Khoo Gaik Cheng for pointing me to this.

Fortressing the female body

With this new Malay hero clothed in transgressive aesthetics, cultural incompatibility is addressed through resolving differences. The question now follows: what about female Malay bodies in the Zain films then? Was the crossover from the Mandarin Bond films to the Malay ones made less traumatic culturally also through a similar process of revolutionizing the Malay female body? In this section, I will demonstrate that female Malay bodies perform a completely different function in these films. If the body of Jefri Zain responds progressively to sociocultural changes, transcends cultural boundaries and challenges Malay conventions, facilitating the Zain crossover by generating cultural affinity and resolving differences, in contrast female Malay bodies serve as fortresses of Malayness, reinforcing cultural differences and provide a counterbalance to Jefri's self-fashioning subversiveness, thereby alleviating the moral anxiety triggered by the crisis of authentic/traditional masculinity that Jefri activates. Fortressing the female Malay body with Malayness restores the Malay/non-Malay, Muslim/non-Muslim divide that Jefri transgresses, offsetting some anxiety involved in realizing the Zain crossover.

This is made most apparent with the observation that any hint of Malayness is exclusively inscribed onto the bodies of female characters played by actresses who represent Malay cinema in these Zain films.¹⁵⁶ While Jefri lacks a badik or a keris, Nora Zain, Aisi, Mei Ling and even the nameless calefare character played by Sharifah Aminah in *Shadow of Death* (see Fig. 13) have all donned the traditional Malay dress – the kebaya at least once in the films. Although these Malay female characters do not, for the large part, share the same outfits as

¹⁵⁶ I am using “Malay cinema”, “Malay characters” and “Malay cast” henceforth to refer to these actresses as being representatives of Malay cinema vis-à-vis Hong Kong cinema. It is not used as an indicator of the actresses’ actual ethnicity or nationality – Landi Chang is actually a Peranakan Singaporean.

their Mandarin counterparts understandably because they are, and will surely be, considered as too revealing and therefore inappropriate for the predominantly Muslim Malay audiences, certain scenes nonetheless suggest that this was not the only consideration in making this sartorial choice. In *Shadow of Death*, for example, in the scene where Mei Ling and Jefri met for the first time, even though in the Mandarin version Mo Li's attire is not at all revealing in this scene, instead of conveniently wearing the same dress as she does elsewhere in other points of the film, Mei Ling nonetheless shows up in an elegant white kebaya (see Fig. 14). Similarly, in *Nora Zain*, even though Nora wears a combination of shirt and pants most of the time, she nonetheless first appears in the film donning a red kebaya, reappearing again in kebaya fashion at several other points including a long fighting sequence towards the end of the film (see Fig. 15). It thus seems as though there is an insistence on including the kebaya at least once in each of these films and especially in the case of *Nora Zain*, this sartorial choice is not exactly self-explanatory as it is an ankle-length form-fitting dress designed to accentuate feminine grace; it is not easy to make big movements much less fight in it. Evidently then, the kebaya plays more than the role of covering up bare flesh in these films. Its function here, I believe, has also to do with the symbolism of this dress.



Figure 13. Sharifah Aminah in a kebaya in *Shadow of Death*



Figure 14. Even though Mo Li's (middle picture) outfit is not revealing, Mei Ling (bottom) does not

wear the same in *Shadows of Death*, donning a white kebaya when she first meets Jefri instead



Figure 15. Nora often wears a kebaya and can even fight in it

The kebaya is a readily recognizable symbol of Malayness. Although the styles, materials and embellishment differ from place to place, kebayas are common, “traditional ethnic clothes” worn by Malay women and Nyonyas (Peranakan women) in Southeast Asia.

¹⁵⁷ Donned not infrequently in this representative dress, the Malay female cast thus instantly stand out as bearers and performers of Malay cultural tradition against an otherwise completely “un-Malay” backdrop. Unlike Jefri and other Malay male characters in the films who are not (expected to be) clothed with “symbols of Malayness” and a “warrior-like image” ala authentic/traditional Malay masculinity, the responsibility of carrying the visual image of Malayness therefore seem to instead fall entirely on the shoulders of female Malay characters. Arguably, the form-fitting quality of the kebaya fits into the pop yeh yeh style, but it would still be a stretch to consider these female characters as posing the same threat to Malay tradition as Jefri Zain does, not only because they embody the *only* trace of visual Malayness in these films, but also because unlike the newly-styled hero Jefri with his mix of technology, suits, booze and sex, the lady-in-kebaya type is already a fairly common sight in earlier Malay films.

¹⁵⁸ In this light then, even though they are also (“Jane”) Bonds in their own right, flaunting the most advanced technology like never before, nonetheless their function cannot be understood in the same way as with their male Bond counterpart. On the contrary, they represent a fortress of Malayness, safeguarding Malay traditions at the same time as their male counterpart challenges them.

Taking this further, female Malay bodies are also fortified by means of contrast vis-à-vis other non-Malay female bodies in the films. One of the most defining ingredients of the Bond genre – female sexiness and heterosexual sex or, in short, female objectification – is exclusively embodied and performed by Hong Kong Chinese actresses in the Zain films. In

¹⁵⁷ Zarina Yusof, Norwani Md Nawawi and Asliza Aris, “Malay Kebaya: The History and Influences of Other Silhouette”, in Rusmadiyah Anwar, Mulyadi Mahamood, D'zul Haimi Md. Zain, Mohamad Kamal Abd Aziz, Oskar Hasdinor Hassan, Shahrman Zainal Abidin eds. *Proceedings of the Art and Design International Conference (AnDIC 2016)*, Singapore: Springer, 2018, p.448.

¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that men in suits indulging in sex and booze were also already a common sight in Malay cinema. For example, Stephen Teo points out that cultural materialism is a recurring theme in P. Ramlee's Singapore-period films (see Stephen Teo, “Malay Cinema's Legacy of Cultural Materialism: P. Ramlee as Historical Mentor”, in Liew Kai-khiun and Stephen Teo eds. *Singapore Cinema: New Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017, p.3-19). The Zain figure is a fresh sight in that, unlike such characters of the past, Jefri Zain is a liberal hero who actually does save the day rather than being an anti-hero portrayed in a negative light. The embellishment of technology is also a new addition to such a character.

contrast to the kebaya-clad Malay characters, female characters played by Hong Kong ethnic Chinese actresses are provocatively dressed. Whereas the Malay characters rarely share the same clothes as their Chinese counterparts as mentioned above, whenever the same Hong Kong actresses appear in both versions, there is, to the contrary, no change in their outfits at all. Here it is illustrative to focus particularly on the figure of Fanny Fan, who starred in four of these Mandarin and Malay Bond films. In all four films without exception, whenever she crosses over to the Malay version to play the same role, her attire remains the same. The same sexy outfits she wears and the ways in which she flaunts them in the more sexually explicit Mandarin versions stay on her curvaceous body in the Malay versions (see Fig. 16). Retaining the outfits of Hong Kong female characters – that is, of not covering up or Malayizing them as per the kebaya – effectively carries their function as vessels (or vases, in Chinese cultural terms) of sexiness from the Mandarin versions over to the Malay ones. It is particularly worth noting here that Fanny Fan was known as the “sex bomb (肉彈)” in Hong Kong entertainment circles. By the mid-1960s she had already been typecasted as a sex symbol in the vein of Marilyn Monroe through her film roles and publicity image. Thus, by bringing Fanny Fan, *unchanged*, over into the Zain films, it is plain to the eye what the intended function ascribed to Hong Kong female bodies vis-à-vis their Malay counterparts is: they embody sexual desire and desirability.

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¹⁵⁹ It must be mentioned that in the Malay context, the kebaya is no doubt a “sexy” attire for married women. Aside from cooking, childbirth and healthcare, the Malay woman is also expected to intensify sexual pleasure after marriage to retain her husband’s interest. On special occasions, married women “dressed up in close-fitting, semitransparent jackets (kebaya) and batik sarongs. A lacy shawl (selendang) draped loosely over the head and shoulders could be used as a sunscreen and, occasionally, as a means of flirtation. Emphasizing their sexual charms, married women’s clothing was in sharp contrast to the modest attire required of unmarried girls” (see Aihwa Ong, “State Versus Islam: Malay Families, Women’s Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia”, in Aihwa Ong and Michael G Peletz eds. *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1995, p.141). However, the point made here is related to the degree of skin-baring as a foremost assessment for sexiness rather than what kinds of feminine sexuality caters or appeals more to the Malay community.



Figure 16. Fanny Fan wears and flaunts the same sexy outfit in *Summons to Death* and *Shadow of Death*

Hong Kong female bodies not only display sexiness, in the Zain films they engage in sexual activities as well – again, something that resolutely does not happen with their female Malay counterparts. Physical intimacy is always performed with Hong Kong female bodies. Aisi in *Danger Valley* and Mei Ling in *Shadow of Death* do not come into sexual contact with Jefri Zain unlike Aisi and Mo Li do with Deng Lei in the Mandarin versions, and Nora does not come into close romantic physical contact with anybody in *Nora Zain* except in one scene where she needed to seduce Tiger as part of her mission. The only other notable example I could find across all three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films where Malay female characters come into close contact with a male body is when Sharifah Aminah cuddles with her lover in *Danger Valley* (see Fig. 17). Equally, any hint of sexual activity (or foreplay) only ever takes place with characters played by Hong Kong actresses. Jefri Zain only flirts physically with characters played by Fanny Fan and Shen Yi and there are many scenes that serve exclusively to showcase and highlight the sexual allure and seductiveness of these non-Malay female bodies (see Fig. 18). A good example would be the scene in *Nora Zain* where Tiger (played by Aziz Jaafar) returns to Dolly's (played by Fanny Fan) house after realizing that Nora could be the mistress of a rich imprisoned man. As Tiger enters the house, the audience hears the sound of running water on top of a jazzy ambience music. Tiger makes his way through the living room into Dolly's bedroom, removing his coat and tie. He then stops in front of an opened door, lights a cigarette and, with a knowing, frivolous smile, walks into the bathroom. Tiger leans against the wall beside the shower curtain, gazing up and down at what is behind the curtain (see Fig. 19). The scene then cuts to an over the shoulder shot, revealing the object of Tiger's gaze: Dolly taking a shower. Realizing that Tiger is here, Dolly turns around and, presumably fully undressed, faces Tiger full front (see Fig. 20). Tiger and Dolly begins a partly serious partly flirtatious conversation filmed in a shot-reverse-shot manner, leading the audience to

believe that Tiger (and therefore, Aziz Jaafar) is looking at Dolly in full nakedness (see Fig. 21). Dolly then requests Tiger to hand her a towel and as he did, he projects a lustful head-to-toe gaze unto her once more (see Fig. 22). Getting out of the bathtub wrapped in a small towel and still wet from the shower, Dolly walks into her bedroom with Tiger following behind. This is shot in wide angle, exhibiting Dolly's sparkling bare skin in almost its full entirety (see Fig. 23). This scene clearly illustrates Hong Kong actresses' deftness in demonstrating sexual allure and confirms Malay male characters' readiness to get steamy with Hong Kong female characters rather than with their Malay counterparts for, in the same film, when she tries to seduce Tiger as part of her mission, Nora is fully dressed in a modest white shirt (see Fig. 24). Tiger's reaction to Nora here is also more demonstrative of love than lust as throughout that scene, the only place unto which he casts his gaze is into Nora's eyes, repeating in a much more earnest manner than with Dolly that it is her (Nora) that he truly loves.



Figure 17. Sharifah Aminah cuddling in *Shadow of Death*

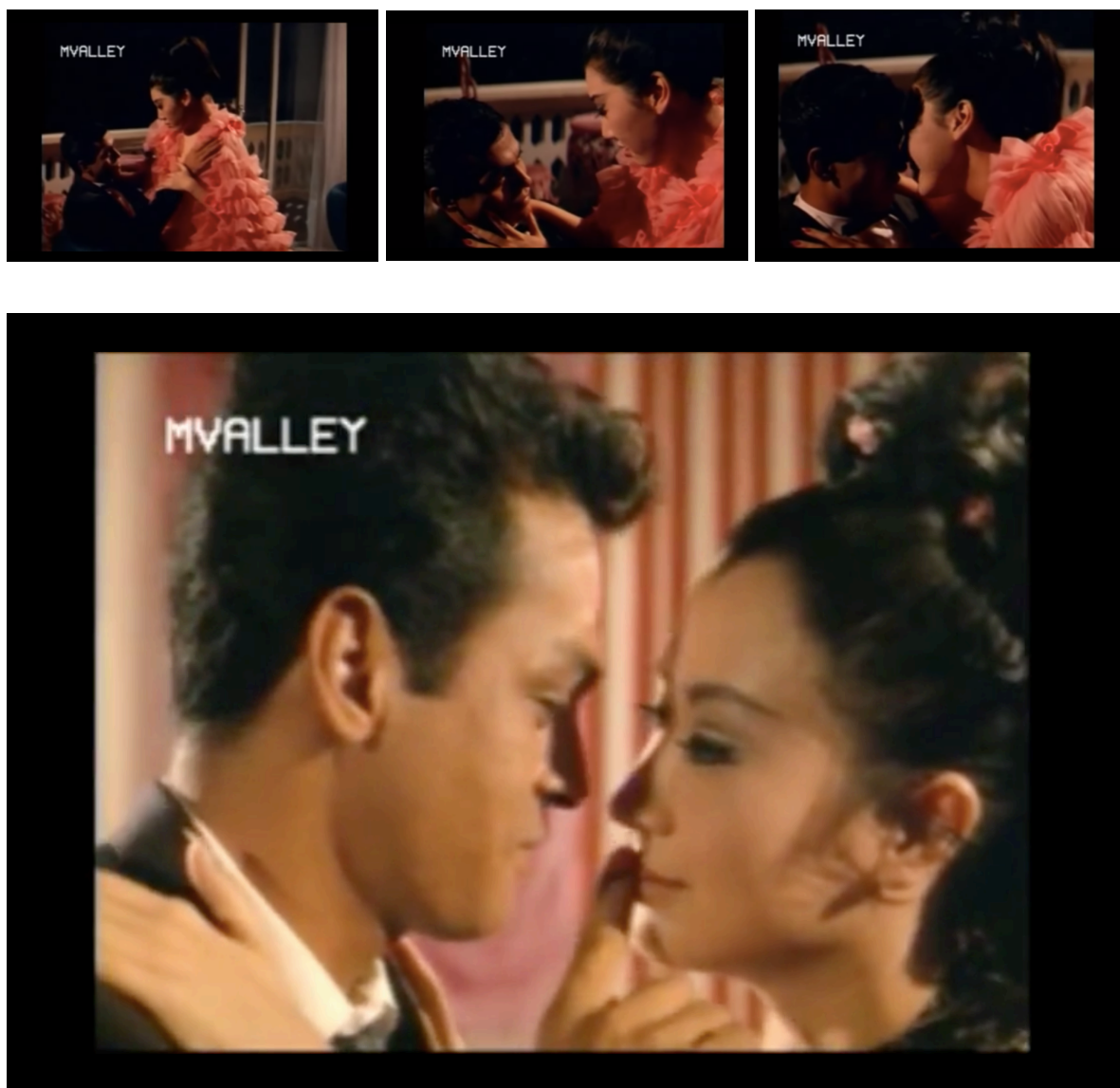


Figure 18. Physical intimacy is only performed with Hong Kong actresses



Figure 19. (clockwise) Tiger entering Dolly's bathroom and projects a lustful head-to-toe gaze



Figure 20. An over the shoulder shot revealing Tiger's object of gaze – a showering Dolly



Figure 21. A shot-reverse-shot sequence suggesting that Tiger is comfortable with seeing Dolly's naked body



Figure 22. Tiger handing Dolly a towel, not forgetting to survey her body head-to-toe again



Figure 23. A sexy Dolly finally in full view in long shot



Figure 24. A modestly-dressed Nora seducing Tiger as part of her mission

Such protection given to Malay female bodies both by means of “nonperformance” and by contrast with the hypersexualized Hong Kong female characters helps to reduce cultural friction in the Zain crossover because female “nafsu (lust)” is in this way being kept in check and the integrity of Malay and Islam tradition, by implication, left uncorrupted in this important aspect. With their Hong Kong counterparts fully responsible (and capable) of fulfilling the function of embodying sexiness and sex, Malay female bodies are not required in these films to threaten or upset the traditional “nafsu/akal (rationality)” balance that guides gender relations and sexuality in both Islam and Malay adat (custom). If under the nafsu/akal epistemology, Jefri Zain borders on running “amok” (unrestrained and uncontrollable libidinal desires) like Hang Jebat, evoking a crisis of traditional masculinity and anxiety about the loss of traditional values, then the careful managing of behaviors and images of the female Malay characters here helps to restore this balance, reinforcing the line that reassuringly distinguishes Self (Malay, Muslim) from the Other (non-Malay, non-Muslim).

To appreciate this argument, it is necessary to first gain some understanding of the nafsu/akal dichotomy. The nafsu/akal understanding of sexuality is found both in Malay adat and Islamic thought, although they differ in the extent to which they should be held in binary opposition to each other (Malay adat places more emphasis on bilaterality). Nafsu is an Arabic-origin term that is used widely among Malays and most other Muslims in the world. Commonly translated as “passion”, “desire” and “lust”, the term carries derogatory connotations in relation to the devil, evil spirits and demons of various kinds who tempt people with sinful behavior. It is construed and experienced in predominantly negative terms, indexing a lack of restraint and hence, weakness, animality, etc.¹⁶⁰ Nafsu has to be subdued and controlled lest disasters happen. In the words of nineteenth-century court writer Raja Ali Haji, if either rulers or subjects submit to nafsu, the judgement of God will bring the kingdom down, as was already happening to one ancient court after another.¹⁶¹ “Shame (malu)” comes into play here, for it acts as a brake on nafsu and its expression in social action.¹⁶²

In contrast to the devilish nafsu, “akal” distinguishes humans from the rest of the animal world and is regarded as a special gift from God. Also of Arabic origin, the term denotes “reason”, “intelligence” and “rationality”. To possess akal is to have the ability to evaluate alternative course of action and render informed judgement. Akal and nafsu forever struggle against one another within the individual and it is the onus of the individual to develop or expand (kembang) akal through socialization and religious instruction in particular. In Malay

¹⁶⁰ Michael G. Peletz, “Neither Reasonable Nor Responsible: Contrasting Representations of Masculinity in a Malay Society”, in Aihwa Ong and Michael G Peletz eds. *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1995, p.81-2.

¹⁶¹ Anthony Reid, “Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities”, in Timothy P. Barnard ed. *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries*. Singapore: University of Singapore Press, 2004, p.12. A fascinating account of the first monolingual Malay dictionary compiled by Raja Ali Haji and how his desire to delineate rules on Malay social behaviour (against the threat of encroachment by Western powers) guided his lexicographic strategies when dealing with words referring to sex and bodily functions can be found in Jan van der Putten, “On Sex, Drugs and Good Manners: Raja Ali Haji as Lexicographer”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.33, Issue 3 (2002): p.415-430.

¹⁶² Michael G. Peletz, “Neither Reasonable Nor Responsible: Contrasting Representations of Masculinity in a Malay Society”, p.83.

Muslim epistemology, the emphasis is on growing akal and controlling nafsu in absolute terms (rather than using akal to control nafsu or harnessing nafsu into a love for God as in Aceh cultural tradition). To gain virtue and prestige is to develop “long”, “broad” akal since akal is central to the system of moral evaluation. Conversely, individuals with offensive comportment are regarded as improperly socialized, standing somewhere between the realm of human beings ruled by moral codes and rules and the world of animals governed by nafsu. Learning and internalizing man-made (but divinely inspired) codes and rules embodied in Islam and adat is then the way to work on raw nafsu, giving rise to the cultured, respectable individual. ¹⁶³

Importantly, although nafsu and akal are present in all human beings, nafsu is said to be found in greater concentrations among women whereas akal less so. Thus, the regulation of female nafsu becomes the responsibility of the purportedly more rational men, and this male regulation of female nafsu is recognized as an important identity marker of Malay Muslim community. ¹⁶⁴ Born with nafsu that is more “pronounced”, women are considered – by women at large as well – “less controlled and restrained than men”; they are “more closely tied to the ‘baser’ things in life”, especially in “the arena of sexual relations”. Women therefore “‘need to’ – and do in fact – have a stronger sense of ‘shame’ (malu) than men since, if they did not, they would be ‘like wild animals’ (macam haiwan) and chaos would reign throughout the world”. ¹⁶⁵ Thus, especially in traditional Malay kampung (village) societies, among other standards, the keeping in check of his wife’s and daughters’ nafsu is considered by Islamic law a defining aspect of a Muslim man’s identity and duty. ¹⁶⁶ By extension, such “male protection of female sexuality” also delineates the boundaries between Malay Muslim communities and the wider, multiethnic society. As much as drinking, gambling, sex and eating pork, which is considered “haram (forbidden)” in Islam, are regarded as unrestrained, uncultured behaviors

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.82 and p.84.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.80.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.84-5.

¹⁶⁶ Aihwa Ong, “State Versus Islam: Malay Families, Women’s Bodies, and the Body Politic in Malaysia”, p.141.

of non-Malays and non-Muslims, the exercise of restraint as policed principally by Malay Muslim men also became a key marker signifying the boundaries between Malays and non-Malays, Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁶⁷

Bringing the discussion back to the Zain films, the “untouchability” of this marker is highlighted early in the Zain series when the Malay community reacted strongly against the idea of onscreen kissing poised to take place in the first installation. *Jefri Zain in Operation Lightning* (1966) was initially publicized as the first Malay film to include a realistic kissing scene and possibly a sex scene as well.¹⁶⁸ This, however, was put off after the news sparked off a heated debate in local newspapers and magazines, where it became clear that kissing, or physical intimacy for that matter, between Malay individuals in public is not widely accepted by the Malay community. The most frequent reason cited, albeit often without elaboration, is that it is against religion, culture and ethics.¹⁶⁹ Even Sarimah, the female lead of the film, wrote to the papers assuring the public that she “will not take part in any kissing scenes (saya tidak akan mau melakukan babak2 chium dalam filem2 saya)”. In her own words, “the news will damage my good name and cause misunderstanding to the public which I have always respected (perkataan2 ini merosakkan nama baik saya dan akan mendatangkan salah faham kepada masyarakat umum yang sa-lama ini saya hormati)”; “I am putting up this disclaimer so that the relatives in my village will not be misunderstood (harap siarkan penafian saya ini supaya tidak mendatangkan kekeliruan kepada saudara2 saya di-kampong)”.¹⁷⁰ Sarimah’s father also spoke out, saying that he is against kissing in public (berchium di-khala-yak ramai) and that he is “sure that Sarimah will keep the good name of the family and of Islamic law

¹⁶⁷ Michael G. Peletz, “Neither Reasonable Nor Responsible: Contrasting Representations of Masculinity in a Malay Society”, p.81.

¹⁶⁸ “Filem James Bond Melayu Mengandongi Babak Chium”, *Berita Harian*, 19 March 1966, p.7.

¹⁶⁹ “MP Gesa Haram James Bond Melayu Filem ‘Jefri Zain’ Na’ Di-haram Babak Chium”, *Berita Harian*, 26 April 1966, p.1.

¹⁷⁰ “Surat Dari Sarimah: ‘Supaya Masyarakat Ta’ Keliru”, *Berita Harian*, 28 April 1966, p.1.

(saya yakin Sarimah akan menjaga nama baik keluarga dan menatohi bukum-bukum shara)’’.

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This is a clear example of just how significant the nafsu/akal balance and, particularly, its attendant ethics of male protection over female sexuality is, to the Malay Muslim community. It also shows the far-reaching impact this actually has on the development of Malay cinema at that time: regardless of where it is filmed and who are involved, Malay cinema must be a Malay world; a destabilizing of this universe will provoke anxiety as evidenced by this public backlash (see Fig. 25). Indeed, the Shaws eventually quelled the storm by clarifying that the kiss will only involve English individuals.¹⁷² Political figures by and large also agreed that “if the kissing is enacted by non-Malays, we will not protest”.¹⁷³ With this saga as a precedent, it is little wonder then, that in the next few Zain films, even though they are now based off the sexually explicit Mandarin Bond films and are filmed in Hong Kong, it is not easy to find fault with the female Malay bodies on the basis of nafsu; their sexuality had been policed in accordance with public demand and expectations, their bodies fortified, their Malayness safeguarded. In this respect, the moral anxiety potentially triggered by Jefri Zain’s transgression of boundaries is, to some degree, soothed, helping thus to facilitate the Zain crossover.

¹⁷¹ “Enam Babak Berchium Tapi Bukan Sarimah atau Jins James Bond Melayu: Beberapa Pendapat”, *Berita Harian*, 27 April 1966, p.1. Timothy Barnard charts similar tensions faced by popular female Malay film stars of the same era – Maria Menando and Ummi Kalthoum – regarding notions of modernity, agency over their own body, public display of sexuality/sensuality, and the moral policing of Malay communities. See Timothy P. Barnard, “Women, Film and Modern Malay Identities”, in Susie Protschky and Tom van der Berge eds. *Modern Times in Southeast Asia, 1920s-1970s*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018, p.114-135.

¹⁷² “We Will Ban Singapore's Kissing Bond, Says Menteri”, *The Straits Times*, 8 May 1966, p.8.

¹⁷³ “Enam Babak Berchium Tapi Bukan Sarimah Atau Jins James Bond Melayu: Beberapa Pendapat”, *Berita Harian*, 27 April 1966, p.1.



Figure 25. Indeed, in *Nora Zain* (left), despite the film sharing the same sets in every scene with *Angel Strikes Again* (right), the portrait of Jesus is replaced by an abstract painting

A final mode of fortressing female Malay bodies that I wish to discuss here is the familiar patriarchal move of subjugating female success and subjectivity back under male authority. In the Zain films, Nora, Aisi and Mei Ling are, for the bulk of the films, independent, smart and strong women embarking on dangerous missions. In perfect command of technology, they navigate their way through difficult situations, eventually attaining victory. In this respect, these characters arguably go a step further than other “modern female characters” present in Malay cinema in the 1960s, who are primarily portrayed as engines of modernity *within* the household, promoting an ideal of women, modernity and culture rooted in the home – or, in other words, a notion of modernity based on the maintenance of a happy household stocked with consumer products.¹⁷⁴ Despite this seeming celebration of modern female agency, however, the way the Zain films ends nonetheless tames female subjectivity and reaffirms authentic masculinity by ensuring that these female characters do not claim full credit or victory – it is shared with their Malay male counterparts. In *Angel With The Iron Fist*, the film ends with a close-up shot of a victorious Luona alone; Tiehu had died in an earlier scene and does not appear in this closing shot. However, its Malay counterpart *Nora Zain* closes with the same close-up shot but with both Nora and Tiger (albeit an injured one) in frame, producing the

¹⁷⁴ Timothy P. Barnard, “Women, Film and Modern Malay Identities”, p.128-130.

effect of glorifying both these characters in achieving victory over the villains (see Fig. 26). Similarly, in *Shadow of Death*, whereas the Mandarin version ends with Deng Lei asking Mo Li if she is upset about not gaining any treasure in the end, in the Malay film it becomes Mei Ling who did the asking, testing the moral standing of her partner. Ultimately, Jefri is thus the one who gets to display moral superiority as he replies with a simple, “no (tidak)”, ending the film on this – his – note.





Figure 26. Both Nora and Tiger appear victorious in the closing shot

These rather drastic changes made to the resolutions of the films drive home the point that victory cannot belong solely to female characters in the Malay versions. In other words, no matter how independent or capable they are throughout the films, the ultimate victory of Malay females is eventually to be domesticated by Malay male power. Such subjugating of female subjectivity and success back under male authority befits authentic Malay masculinity, for by placing Malay male figures back beside the women and sharing credit with them, the men ultimately resume the traditional role and responsibility of being “protector of his female relatives, wife and younger sister, and by extension, of his community, nationality and race”.

¹⁷⁵ Such endings reaffirm that the Malay male is always around their own women and that they can be relied on – an important identity marker for Malay Muslim communities as mentioned above. Once again then, even though for the bulk of the running time, Jefri (and to a lesser

¹⁷⁵ Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.165.

extent, Tiger) actively destabilizes boundaries, at the end he nonetheless resumes the role of the reliable “abang (an honorific term for ‘brother’)” in control, salvaging to some degree, the crisis of traditional masculinity he has otherwise created.¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

This chapter examined the crossovers involved in producing the three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films. I have shown that market and labour conditions in 1950s-1960s Singapore and Malaysia provided the necessary conditions that prompted the transfer of resources from MFP to SB (HK), and that the body was the centerstage on which negotiations took place in order to facilitate the crossover. Fundamentally, the corporeality (or the bodily work) of the Zain crossover stems from the fact that it was precisely the desire and need to bring physical bodies, particularly those of MFP labour activists, out of Singapore and Malaysia that motivated the shift. In a situation when everything else remains conveniently unchanged in the process of transforming Mandarin films of a British colony into Malay ones of an ex-colony, the body is also perhaps the only available canvass on which critical changes could be made – reinscription could take place – so that the resultant films would appeal to a newly configured audience of Malay cinema.

In the larger scheme of things, the Malay bodies in these films – both that of the actual cast and their onscreen characters – register the tension experienced when a previously “territorialized” industry enters – or is brought into – the competitive global economy just as it begins also, to shift from being a cinematic network linked together by shared linguistic and cultural affinity within the Archipelago into discrete industries defined primarily in terms of the nation. As Malay cinema enters into the next decade, the studio era backed by powerful

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Hong Kong film studios would officially come to an end, with the base of Malay filmmaking in the peninsula migrating from Singapore to Malaysia, setting the ground for a Malaysian national film industry. Yet, despite this reconfiguration (which promises to demarcate the boundaries of the industry more and more clearly in accordance with nationalist agendas), the Hong Kong-Malay film connections underpinning the Zain films made using the last breath of the MFP would, nonetheless, continue to intensify well into the new decade, manifesting into an even more complex web of dependence and independence, conflict and cooperation, internationalization and nationalization between Hong Kong and Malay cinema. By the mid-1970s, the budding questions of identity, nation-building, and the desire or push to compete on an international stage encapsulated within the made-in-Hong Kong Zain films erupted to the surface in full force. This is a topic I will pick up in full in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Merdeka's "New-style" Films and Internationalist Nationalism

With the demise of the Malay Film Productions in the late 1960s and, shortly after, of Cathay-Keris in the early 1970s, Malay filmmaking transited from the golden/studio age into a new era characterized by the breaking of "Chinese monopoly" and the rise of local players in the industry. Financial and production control shifted from the hands of Chinese capitalists (in the likes of Cathay Organization and the Shaws) to those of local Malay(sian) players with the withdrawal of major film studios, moving of filmmaking base from Singapore to Malaysia, a proliferation of bumiputera-owned production companies and some degree of intervention by the Malaysian government. By the 1980s, Malay cinema has ushered in a new epoch now commonly known as the "Independent" or "Bumiputera" (lit. sons of the soil) era while at the same time also becoming synonymous with Malaysian cinema by official definition. The 1970s thus importantly constitutes a transitional period for Malay cinema and can, in a way, also be regarded as the formative, exploratory years of Malaysia's national cinema.

Existing film history discourses surrounding this transformative decade tend to focus on the notion of "breaking Chinese monopoly". Historical narratives often highlight the act of independent bumiputera companies overtaking the once unshakeable Chinese-owned studio system as the industry became more and more involved in newly-independent Malaysia's larger nation-building project. Although this is indeed one of the most prominent transformations that altered the course of Malay filmmaking in the region during this time, the jarring presence of a group of films produced by Merdeka Film Productions from 1975 to 1980 presents an inconvenient case to this dominant narrative. Also known as the "third studio", the Malaysia-based Merdeka Film Productions was run by studio veterans the Shaw Brothers from

1964 to 1980.¹⁷⁷ After the closure of Singapore-based Malay Film Productions (MFP), the Shaws channelled their attention onto Merdeka in a short-lived attempt to reboot their Malay filmmaking business in Malaysia, becoming the only studio player that made the leap into the new milieu. In September 1974, film magazine *Utusan Filem & Fesyen* reported that the company plans to make a film that would inaugurate “a new age (satu zaman baru)” and make “a positive step forward (satu langkah positif)” for Malay cinema.¹⁷⁸ This said film would be *The Last Wish* (Permintaan Terakhir), which premiered a year later in 1975, and was the first Merdeka film to be made in colour and widescreen. Public response to the film was very encouraging, with a theatre run lasting more than a month since its premiere in Kuala Lumpur.¹⁷⁹ Spurred by the film’s success, the company subsequently produced five more films using the same formula, all in colour and Merdekascope.¹⁸⁰

More intriguingly, all of these films are based off Hong Kong box-office hits of earlier decades and there was heavy involvement on the part of Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Company (SB (HK)) in the production process. All six films are purportedly rewritten from the storylines of six Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) films made in the mid-1960s to 1970, and a SB (HK) technical crew was sent to Malaysia to help with the filming. Directors such as Kuei Chih-hung (桂治洪) and Liu Kuo-hsiung (劉國雄) also travelled there to co-direct alongside Malaysian and Indonesian directors such as Jamil Sulong, Naz Achnas, and Frank Rorimpandey. In other words, quite contrary to the oft-cited narrative of “breaking Chinese monopoly”, right at a time when emerging new independent companies were beginning to threaten the position and relevance of the old Chinese monopoly and its studio system, the Shaws rather defiantly

¹⁷⁷ William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film: Border Crossings and National Culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002, p.117.

¹⁷⁸ *Utusan Filem & Fesyen*, September 1974, qtd. in A. R. Mustafar, “Permintaan Terakhir”, 22 June 2012. *Filem Klasik*, <http://filemklasikmalaysia.blogspot.com/2012/06/permintaan-terakhir-1975.html>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Zainuddin Ayip, “Jatuh Bangun Filem-filem Melayu”, *Filem Majallah*, January 1977, No.202, p.6.

¹⁸⁰ Merdekascope is the term the studio used to describe its widescope technology. See Gordon Gray. “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity: Film and Anthropology”, p.108-109.

continued to assert their presence through Merdeka albeit only for a short while with *The Last Wish*, *The Restless Youth* (Jiwa Remaja, 1975), *My Beloved Child* (Sayang Anakku Sayang, 1976), *Love and Songs* (Cinta Dan Lagu, 1976), *The Death Bell* (Loceng Maut, 1976) and *Pampered Child* (Adik Manja, 1980). Produced by studio veterans and inherently linked to their Hong Kong counterparts in many ways, these films, poised to lead Malay cinema to new and greater heights represent an uncharacteristic studio-led attempt at bumiputera-izing and nationalizing – in other words, reimagining and restructuring – the industry. They make the case that the industry’s restructuring process in the 1970s is in fact more a contentious redistribution of power and resources than a straightforward episode of old (Chinese) studio players retreating from the scene.

Embodying such anachronistic qualities, these films prompt the following questions: how should we position them at this historical juncture? Why – and indeed, how – were these transborder interactions effected at a time when “breaking Chinese monopoly” was being touted as cinema’s way of contributing to the larger bumiputera-izing and nationalizing movements? More fundamentally, if this period was primarily about bumiputera-izing and nationalizing the industry, what happened to the transnational network that was intrinsic to the old studio system (and that already existed in kind before the concept of “nations” became normalized in the region in the late 1960s), and how might remnants of this preceding era implicate the formation of the new?

Motivated by these questions, in this chapter I take a close look at this set of Merdeka films, affording special emphasis to four of those attributed to Jamil Sulong: *The Last Wish*, *The Restless Youth*, *My Beloved Child* and *Love and Songs*. The reasons for zooming in on Jamil is twofold. Firstly, just as Merdeka Film Productions embody the lingering spectre of the old studio system, as a veteran MFP director who made the shift to Malaysia and to Merdeka, Jamil at this juncture represents the director-in-transit. A study on the works that he continued

to produce for the Shaws in a new environment under a new zeitgeist thus potentially plugs a gap in Malay film histories and at the same time complicates the notion of “breaking Chinese monopoly”. Secondly, although all six films by and large followed the same mode of production, *The Death Bell* and *Pampered Child* exhibit other qualities that set them apart from the rest. Most significantly, *The Death Bell* was co-produced with Tuti Mutia, an Indonesian company, while Othman Hafsham, director of *Pampered Child*, was the only one who managed to resist the Shaws’ by then well-established pattern of transporting a director over from their Hong Kong studio to co-direct the film. With this newfound agency and a unique style of storytelling and filmmaking that won the rare praise of both the critics and the local crowd, *Pampered Child* and Othman Hafsham himself later became venerated in film histories as the first “truly Malaysian” film that “heralded the changes that were to come”, one of the “young Turks [so dubbed] because of their more aggressive style and approach in the industry”.¹⁸¹ Such intricacies unique to these two films render them separate case studies in their own right, though nonetheless I will inevitably touch upon them at relevant points in this chapter.

Since an understanding of Malay(sian) cinema history is imperative to the study of these films, I will open this chapter with an overview of the transitional 1970s, underscoring the notion of “breaking Chinese monopoly” in the bumiputera-izing and nationalizing of the industry.¹⁸² Evaluating existing literature, I highlight the unidirectionality of current narratives, and point out that, to better account for Malay cinema’s transitional period and the beginnings

¹⁸¹ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle: A Century (and a Bit More) of Wayang*. Petaling Jaya: Merpati Jingga, 2013, p.106; Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, “Malaysia: Gentle Winds of Change”, in Aruna Vasudev, Latika Padgaonkar and Rashmi Doraiswamy eds. *Being and Becoming: The Cinemas of Asia*. New Delhi: Macmillan, 2002, p.316 and “New Film-makers Leave An Impact”, *The Straits Times*, 4 April 1988, p.4.

¹⁸² Throughout this chapter, I will use the composite term, “Malay(sian) cinema”, quite frequently. As will be shown in later sections, Malay cinema, which existed first as a transregional industry, eventually became the foundation of an official national Malaysian cinema. Particularly in the context of this transitional period in Malay film history, it is thus often difficult to speak of Malay cinema and Malaysian cinema as separate entities. Yet, at the same time, it is important to keep cognizant of the highly racialized slant – a Malay ethnocentrism – present in the official definition of Malaysian cinema. The use of parenthesis thus simultaneously acknowledges the convergence of these two concepts and the arbitrariness of this very act, in referring to the newly configured official Malaysian cinema.

of Malaysian cinema, we need to further unpack what exactly is involved in this recalibration of power and resources. With that, I will introduce the set of six Merdeka films as an anomaly to the dominant narrative. I illustrate the “newness” of these films and the unique mechanism that generated it, demonstrating how the Shaws contentiously attempted to ride on the burgeoning wave of bumiputera nationalism counterintuitively by integrating their Hong Kong studio with its new Malaysian counterpart. That is to say, the “old Chinese monopoly” tried to align itself with the new dominant force ironically through sustaining Chinese (Hong Kong) participation in Malay(sian) film production during this time. Thereafter, I will go on to probe how this curious crossover took place under such unfavourable circumstances, uncovering the combination of cover-ups and cosmeticizing and the other mechanisms involved therein. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by summarizing the way through which Merdeka managed to fit back into the reconfigured industry, albeit only for a short time, using the concept of “passing”.

Taking into account Merdeka’s statements, public and critical responses as well as the films themselves, the case I wish to make in this chapter is that, in an attempt to stay relevant, the emblem of “Chinese monopoly” at that time – the Shaws – leveraged on their unique position and resources as an established studio player to introduce another brand of nationalism into Malay(sian) cinema through the new-style Merdeka films. Negotiating for a survival space under extremely unfavourable circumstances, the company legitimized its unwelcome continued presence and counterintuitive cross-studio practices during this time by pushing for “internationalist nationalism”, aligning itself both with official ethnonationalism and with ideals and practices of internationalization, thus pulling an act of “passing” that rebranded itself as friend instead of foe to the budding Malay(sian) cinema. Tying this back to the dissertation’s main research question, this means that the curious SB (HK)-Merdeka crossover in these new-style films was motivated, to a large extent, by a pressing need to demonstrate the company’s

commitment to Malaysian nationalism, and internationalist nationalism was a vehicle that helped to enable this crossover.

The transitional 1970s: breaking Chinese monopoly

The 1970s is a transformative decade for Malay(sian) cinema in that it marked the end of the “Chinese-owned” studio era while paving the way for what is now known as the independent or bumiputera era. The studio era begun in earnest with the re-emergence of local Malay film production in Singapore after the Second World War, kickstarted and sustained by two key players – Malay Film Productions’ Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris’ Loke Wan Tho.¹⁸³ Having distributed only Chinese-language films upon their arrival from Shanghai to Singapore in the 1920s, by the late 1930s Runme Shaw and Run Run Shaw had already begun to import a variety of Indian, Western and Indonesian films, and possessed a chain of 139 cinema halls across Singapore, Malaya, Indonesia and Indo-China. Around this time, inspired particularly by the success of Indonesian films, the brothers decided to venture into Malay film production, buying over equipment from the Malay Art Film Productions company which produced Malaya’s first Malay film, *Laila Majnun*, along with additional equipment and technicians from Shanghai, and turned an old warehouse on Jalan Ampas Road in Singapore into a film production studio. The studio made four films before World War II broke out. The first post-war film it produced was *Singapore by Night* (Singapura di Waktu Malam, 1947) and,

¹⁸³ In terms of productivity, film quality, popularity and financial strength, historians also identify this period as the “Golden Age” of Malay cinema. See William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.132 and p.134-5; Gordon Gray. “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity: Film and Anthropology”, p.102; Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.101; Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.134-5; Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, “Malaysia: Gentle Winds of Change”, p.179 and Jonathan Driskell, “*Majallah Film* and Stardom in the Golden Age of Malay Cinema”, in Tamar Jeffers McDonald and Lies Lanckman eds. *Star Attractions: Twentieth-century Movie Magazines and Global Fandom*. Iowa: Iowa University Press, 2019, p.111-122.

with the release of this film, the Shaws officially established the now-famous Malay Film Productions Company (MFP).¹⁸⁴

During this time there were also other Malay film production companies in operation, such as Rimau Film Production, Nusantara Film Company, Maria Menando Film Productions and Keris Film Production, which was set up by Roomai Noor with financial help from Ho Ah Loke and two other businessmen. However, the only studio that could truly compete with the MFP was Loke Wan Tho's Cathay-Keris Productions.¹⁸⁵ A Peranakan born in Kuala Lumpur, Loke Wan Tho began to acquire cinemas in Malaya and Singapore from the 1930s under the name of his family business, Cathay Organisation, and later under his own company, International Theatre Limited. By 1957, Loke Wan Tho owned 39 cinemas halls across Singapore and Malaya.¹⁸⁶ Eager to build up his distribution channels, Loke also collaborated with England's J. Arthur Rank Organisation in 1946 and set up the International Distribution Company in Singapore in 1951 to better consolidate his business of distributing English and Chinese films.¹⁸⁷ Like the Shaws, Loke eventually also extended his reach into film production. In 1953, Loke joined forces with Ho Ah Loke to form Cathay-Keris Productions under its parent company Cathay Organisation, setting up production studios on Singapore's East Coast Road.¹⁸⁸

By the mid-1950s, the MFP and Cathay-Keris dominated every aspect of the film industry in Malaya and Singapore with their robust vertically integrated systems, and a shared pattern in both company's mode of production became apparent. Malay film production then

¹⁸⁴ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989): Early History and Development in the Making of a National Cinema". PhD. Thesis. School of Theatre and Film Studies, University of New South Wales, 1994, p.92-3, p.98 and p.100.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.100 and Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat: Contemporary Malaysian Film and Literature*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005, p.90.

¹⁸⁶ Gordon Gray. "Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity: Film and Anthropology", Ph.D. Thesis. Edinburgh Napier University, 2002, p.83.

¹⁸⁷ Stephanie Chung Po-yin (鐘寶賢), "A Southeast Asian Tycoon and His Movie Dream: Loke Wan Tho and MP&GI (星馬實業家和他的電影夢：陸運濤及國際電影懋業有限公司)", in Wong Ain-ling (黃愛玲) ed. *The Cathay Story (Revised Version)* (國泰故事 (增訂本)). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2009, p.34.

¹⁸⁸ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.105.

was by and large organized along ethnic lines, with the Chinese providing financial capital and technical expertise, the Indians – most of them hired directly from India – assuming directorial positions, and the Malays casted as performers.¹⁸⁹ In other words, during the early days of the studio era the Indians and the Chinese had creative and financial control over Malay film production, while Malay participation was limited to the realm of performance and sometimes to the role of script translation.¹⁹⁰

Malay creative autonomy, particularly in terms of directing, only began to see signs of development in the second half of the 1950s. Mahadi Mohammed Said, who directed *Jewel in the Slum* (Permata di Perlimbahan, 1952) for the MFP, is credited as the first ever Malay director to have directed a Malay film. The film, however, did not do well at the box-office. The management was also unhappy with the way Mahadi handled the production, causing the studios to hold back on recruiting Malay directors for several years to come. This status quo was finally destabilised with the entrance of a pivotal figure – P. Ramlee.

After amassing unprecedented popularity as actor and singer, Ramlee was recommended by MFP information officer Abdullah Jaafar to Run Run Shaw to be allowed to direct a film. This was supported by other Malay activists in the film industry, who saw cinema as a potential vehicle that can be used to disseminate political and sociocultural messages. Stoked by the larger milieu of independence (merdeka) that was developing, by the mid-1950s Malay film workers were already beginning to push for greater Malay input in studio productions. Ramlee's explosive stardom provided the timely currency needed to bargain for the chance to make a film that could convey their ideas and aspirations for a future, decolonized Malaya. After much negotiation, and in order to prevent P. Ramlee from being poached by

¹⁸⁹ Gordon Gray, "Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity", p.88; Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.89-118; William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.134-7; Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.90 and Edna Lim. *Celluloid Singapore: Cinema, Performance and the National*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p.29.

¹⁹⁰ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.92 and p.118.

Indonesia's Persari film studio, Run Run Shaw eventually agreed to the proposal.¹⁹¹ Ramlee's directorial debut, *The Trishaw Peddler* (Penarik Becha), premiered in 1955, rendering him the second Malay director in Malay film history. Unlike *Jewel in the Shum*, *The Trishaw Peddler* became a huge box-office success, initiating an important turn in the course of Malay filmmaking.¹⁹² The film represented a significant development in the fight for greater Malay creative control, ushering in "a new era in Malay filmmaking in which social and historical concerns of the time were presented in an entertaining fashion on the screen".¹⁹³

Indeed, shortly after Ramlee's breakthrough an important protest against "foreign control" took place within Malay intellectual circles, this time triggered by another MFP film – *Hang Tuah* (1956). Directed by Phani Majumdar from India, *Hang Tuah* was adapted from a popular Malay legend and was one of the earliest Malay films to be fully shot in colour. Significant both in Malay film history and to Malay cultural identity, the film sharply provoked questions of (in)authenticity within Malay communities, with dissent centring around the fact that an Indian director was appointed to recreate such an important Malay story onscreen. By this time it was in fact already a common complaint that Malay films directed by Indian directors did not, and could not, reflect concerns of the Malay community. That majority of the Indian directors habitually produced Malay remakes of Indian films translated from Tamil, Hindi or Benggali had long been a source of contention throughout the years. *Hang Tuah* thus hit an already sensitive nerve all ready to fire up.

The discontent with *Hang Tuah* was also brought about by the changing reception of this Malay cultural icon. As mentioned in the previous chapter, by this time the ideals of Hang

¹⁹¹ Timothy P. Barnard, "Decolonization and the Nation in Malay Film, 1955-1965", *South East Asia Research*, Vol.17, Issue 1 (2009): p.73.

¹⁹² Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.129-130 and p.132.

¹⁹³ Timothy P. Barnard, "The Shaw Brothers' Malay Films", in Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008, p.161 and Timothy P. Barnard, "Chicken, Cakes and Kitchens: Food and Modernity in Malay Films of the 1950s and 1960s", in Anne. L. Bower ed. *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film*. New York: Routledge, 2004, p.77.

Tuah had become anathema. For the Malay intelligentsia, Hang Jebat was now the celebrated hero, representative of a democratic and individualistic ideal of the time; he embodies a new vision that they wanted to promote, one that would suit their hopes and possibilities for Malay communities moving towards merdeka. In this light, the involvement of Mubin Sheppard, a prominent British civil servant, in the making of this film further exacerbated tensions.¹⁹⁵ One of the more vocal critics was S. Roomai Noor, the first Malay director hired by Cathay-Keris and a member of the Generation of the Writers of the 1950s (Angkatan Sasterawan 1950, ASAS 50), an association dedicated to promoting Malayan Malay literature. At a key ASAS 50 meeting in 1956, Roomai, representing the film community, called for Malays to gain control over the content of their films so that they could better reflect Malay cultural values and correct Malay language usage.¹⁹⁶

This plea seemed to have gained traction by the mid-1960s. After *The Trishaw Peddler*, P. Ramlee went on to become one of the most prolific MFP directors, and Cathay-Keris also stepped up on hiring Malay film directors.¹⁹⁷ Both MFP and Cathay-Keris had, by 1963, gathered each's own stable congregation of Malay directors, with only two foreign directors reportedly still working for the MFP: Dhiresh Ghosh, an Indian, who would leave the industry in 1963, and Ramon Estella, a Filipino, who left in 1965.¹⁹⁸ By this time, the ethnic-based *modus operandi* seemed to have taken a fundamental turn, with creative autonomy handed over from Indian directors to the local Malays.

This, however, was not a sufficiently satisfactory solution. The general consensus within Malay film communities towards the end of the 1960s was still that of “foreign” powers

¹⁹⁵ Timothy P. Barnard, “Decolonization and the Nation in Malay Film, 1955-1965”, p.74 and Timothy P. Barnard and Jan van der Putten, “Old Malay Heroes Never Die: The Story of Hang Tuah in Films and Comics”, in Ian Gordon, Mark Jancovich and Matthew P. Mcallister eds. *Film and Comic Books*. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2007, p.262.

¹⁹⁶ Timothy P. Barnard, “The Shaw Brothers’ Malay Films”, p.161.

¹⁹⁷ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.133.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.134. Indian directors during the studio era include L. Krishnan, S. Ramanathan, B.N. Rao, K.R. Sastry, K.M. Baskaran and V. Girimaji. L. Krishnan and K.M. Baskaran are raised in Malaya. See Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.100.

holding Malay cinema captive through financial means which in turn controlled creative output. In a charge against “foreign monopoly of Malay films”, the Artist Union of Malaya (PERSAMA) wrote a memorandum to the Federation of Malaya government in 1959, claiming that “Malay films are produced by other races (foreigners) who get profits on the sweat and energies of the Malays without caring for their difficulties”. It alleged that “most cinemas in Malaya are owned by capitalists of other races who have monopolised the circulation of the films”, and that “Malay films produced by the capitalists have greatly lowered the standard of culture and art and often go against the customs and religion of the Malays”. The union thus urged the government to encourage Malays to build a film industry themselves and to impose a quota system in order to protect their productions.¹⁹⁹ Reading these statements in context, by “foreign” and “other” the union essentially referred specifically to the Chinese monopoly – Chinese financiers in the likes of the giants, MFP’s Shaws and Cathay’s Loke Wan Tho.

To readers who are familiar with Malay film history, this is an oft-repeated tale. The intertwining theme of Chinese capital dominance and repression of Malay (creative) control by and large characterizes the period between the late 1940s to the late 1960s in film histories, culminating in the now oft-cited “Chinese monopoly” narratives in records on the studio era. Gordon Gray, for example, concludes that “the sheer number of films the Shaws and Cathay-Keris produced, their production practices, and their control over all three aspects of the film industry ensured their monopolisation of local film production”.²⁰⁰ Hatta Azad Khan also posits that “[t]he strength of both the Shaw Brothers and Cathay Organisation in monopolizing the various aspects of the film trade in Malaysia and Singapore was not only a threat to the independent film-makers but also to the government should it become involved in the industry”.

²⁰¹ Undeniably, identifying these traits and their cause-and-effect relationship as key markers

¹⁹⁹ “Cathay to Become a Public Company”, *The Straits Times*, 28 July 1959, p.1.

²⁰⁰ Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.99.

²⁰¹ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.234-5.

of the studio era is, in a way, quite a useful writing strategy as it offers a convenient thread of continuity to begin understanding the succeeding bumiputera or independent era which, by most measures, is indeed structurally very different from the studio era. Yet, the reliance on such a narrative model also laid the path for a rather standard, one-dimensional framework that most narratives on the post-studio era development of Malay(sian) cinema now collectively and increasingly unproductively follow, as follows.

Scholars today hold different views as to which event should be taken as the pivotal turning point, but it is generally agreed that the bumiputera or independent era of Malay cinema began in the mid- or late-1970s and lasted till the early 1990s.²⁰² More will be expounded later on this term but for now it suffices to know that “bumiputera” literally means “sons of the soil” and carries the meaning of “indigenous” or “native”. The three officially designated bumiputera groups in Malaysia include: the Malays – the largest group among the three defined by the Malaysian Constitution as “one who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay custom”, the Orang Asli – aborigines residing mainly in Peninsula Malaysia, and ethnic minority groups in the states of Sabah and Sarawak such as the Sea Dayaks and the Kayans.²⁰³

As most accounts have it, in the context of Malay cinema the most striking feature of the bumiputera/independent period is that of the proliferation of independent, bumiputera-

²⁰² Hatta Azad Khan labels the period between 1976-1986 as the independent era, calling the year 1979 “the bright new beginning of the independent era” (see Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.196); Khoo Gaik Cheng and William van der Heide opine that the independent era begun in 1974 (see William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.117 and 147; Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.91); Gordon Gray places the beginning of the independent era in the year 1975 (see Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.113).

²⁰³ Goh Beng Lan. *Modern Dreams: An Inquiry into Power, Cultural Production, and the Cityscape in Contemporary Urban Penang, Malaysia*. New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2002, p.44 and Khoo Kay Kim, “The New Economic Policy: A Historical Note”, *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies*, Vol.46, Issue 1 (2009): p.101. For a useful review of the evolution and usage of the term “bumiputera” since colonial times, see Rusalina Idrus, “Malays and Orang Asli: Contesting Indigeneity”, in Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied eds. *Melayu: The Politics, Poetics and Paradoxes of Malayness*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2011, p.146-164, in particular p.158. A list of what constitute the last group can also be found in the Malaysian Constitution, Article 161A.

owned Malay film companies accompanied by the collapse of the old Chinese-owned studio system. As we have seen, by the late 1960s fervent calls were already made by Malay intellectuals to push for the dismantling of the Chinese monopoly. Throughout the 1970s, such calls further intensified and extended even beyond the realm of film.²⁰⁴ Filmmakers, film organizations and government officials now collectively claimed that “[t]he position of the local film industry has been deteriorating due to Hong Kong producers monopolising the industry [a]nd in the absence of competition the quality of their productions has been going down”.²⁰⁵ Public calls were made by filmmakers and politicians alike to “break the monopoly of Hong Kong film producers in the Malaysian market”, “break the monopoly of foreign film companies and reap some of the benefits of the show business”, and to transfer “the traditional monopoly on Malay films... [to] become the right of the bumiputras”.²⁰⁶

A most direct way to achieve this was to increase the number of independent Malay-owned cinemas and film companies – hence the often interchangeable use of “bumiputera” and “independent” when describing this era. The first independent Malay film company ever recorded is Gabungan Artis Filem company (Gafico), formed in Singapore in 1967.²⁰⁷ In 1969, the company released their first and last film, *Mother is My Heaven* (Ibulah Syurgaku), directed by S. Sudarmaji with former MFP stars such as Aziz Jaafar, Saadiah, etc.²⁰⁸ Thereafter, in 1972, P. Ramlee, Jins Shamsuddin, Jaafar Abdullah and H. M. Shah founded the Malaysian Film Industry (Perusahaan Filem Malaysia, PERFIMA) “as a Malay answer to the Shaws and Cathay-Keris, with the intention that the company would build cinemas throughout Malaysia as well as make films for the local and overseas markets”, thus directly challenging the

²⁰⁴ John Lent, “ASEAN Mass Communications and Cultural Submission”, *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol.4, Issue 2 (1982): p.180-181.

²⁰⁵ “Film-makers Want Govt to Break HK Monopoly”, *The Straits Times*, 30 August 1966, p.20.

²⁰⁶ “Silent Film Giants”, *The Straits Times*, 31 August 1966, p.13; “Malaysian Film Company to Start Big Talent Hunt”, *The Straits Times*, 26 October 1972, p.24 and Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.185 and p.231-2.

²⁰⁷ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.186.

²⁰⁸ Mohd. Zamberi A. Malek. *Suria Kencana: Biografi Jins Shamsudin*. Bangi, Selangor: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998, p.72-3.

vertically integrated systems of MFP and Cathay-Keris.²⁰⁹ By 1973, the company had already imported 60 Indonesian films, and government officials even called for cinemas to be set up in every state to screen Perfima films.²¹⁰ Notably, it was also through PERFIMA that Jins Shamsuddin was sent to London to study filmmaking, becoming the first overseas-trained Malay film director in the peninsula. On his return, Jins made PERFIMA's (by this time renamed Perfima Film Production) first feature film, *Waiting for Tomorrow* (Menanti Hari Esok, 1976).²¹¹

These early developments spurred the local bumiputera community to also try their hands at producing, distributing and/or exhibiting films. For instance, actress Sarimah formed Sari Artiste in 1972, P. Ramlee and H. M. Shah founded Rumpun Melayu in 1973, Sabah businessman Deddy M. Borhan formed Sabah Films in 1975, businessmen brothers Zain Ibrahim and Zaharan Ibrahim created Indra Films in 1979, Jins Shamsuddin founded Jins Shamsuddin Film Productions in 1980, and so on.²¹² As a commentator puts it, at that time “companies mushroomed like a harvest season gone haywire”.²¹³ Between 1975 to 1988, a total of 43 independent bumiputera film companies were registered and 112 feature films were produced.²¹⁴ Furthermore, in an effort to raise the visibility and legitimacy of bumiputera film producers, Jins and Borhan also gathered film producers in Malaysia to form the Association of Malaysian Film Producers in 1980, so that producers of independent companies could be recognized as official representatives of Malaysia at international film festivals.²¹⁵ This came

²⁰⁹ Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.114-5.

²¹⁰ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.189.

²¹¹ Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.115.

²¹² Ibid., p.113 and Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.189-277.

²¹³ Latif Baharudin. *Cintai Filem Malaysia: Love Malaysian Films*. Kuala Lumpur: Perbadanan Kemajuan Nasional Malaysia, 1989, p.50-51, qtd. in Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.114.

²¹⁴ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.196.

²¹⁵ The association still exists now as *Persatuan Pengeluar Filem Malaysia* or PPFM. See *ibid.*, p.279-80.

after the formation of the Malaysian Chamber of Film Companies by local film producers in 1975, in an apparent move to consolidate solidarity and to protect themselves.²¹⁶

Although these new bumiputera companies were principally ground-up initiatives, the importance of sociopolitical changes in bringing about this industrial restructuring cannot be understated. The New Economic Policy (NEP; 1971–1990) came into effect in 1971 as part of the Second Malaysian Plan (1971-1975) following the devastating May 13th 1969 racial riots that occurred primarily between the Malay and Chinese communities. Formulated as “a new strategy in which national priorities are re-ordered and efforts intensified to deal with the economic and social problems confronting the country”, the NEP was rolled out with the stated two-pronged aims of eradicating poverty and restructuring society to achieve inter-ethnic economic parity.²¹⁷ Massive changes to the Malaysian economy were made through state intervention and public expenditure, such as nationalizing industries, giving tax or loan concessions for Malay businesses, etc., to ensure that bumiputeras own 30% of Malaysia’s corporate wealth by 1990. This was later boosted by the 1975 Industrial Co-ordination Act, which specifically required manufacturing firms to employ 30% Malays and to promote some of them to suitable management positions. Foreign and non-Malay businesses were also required to divest at least 30% of their equity to Malay shareholders.²¹⁸ Positive discrimination for bumiputera employment and university admissions were also practiced under the NEP, with pro-Malay affirmative action policies laid out to accelerate Malay progress in business and education, and special programs aimed at urbanizing the Malays were also launched.²¹⁹ In

²¹⁶ Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.118 and John Lent. *The Asian Film Industry*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990, p.192.

²¹⁷ “The New Economic Policy”, *Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia Official Website*. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RMK2.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2020 and “The Malaysian Plan”, *Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia Official Website*. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/the-malaysia-plan/>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

²¹⁸ Cheah Boon Kheng. *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002, p.164.

²¹⁹ William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.92; A. B. Shamsul. *From British to Bumiputera Rule: Local Politics and Rural Development in Peninsular Malaysia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986, p.192 and A. B. Shamsul, “Bureaucratic Management of Identity in a Modern State: ‘Malayness’ in Postwar

short, the 1969 crisis set the stage for the State to become actively interventionist since the 1970s, departing from its earlier *laissez-faire* model to adopt features of a developmentalist state (or development-based nationalism). Since 1971, social, economic and political activities became organized most significantly along an officially endorsed bumiputera/non-bumiputera divide, and bumiputera privilege is institutionalized into the lives of all Malaysians up to this day.²²⁰

The onset of the NEP and the overall pro-Malay sentiment sparked off by its supporting rhetoric undoubtedly motivated local Malays in their fight for control over the film industry. Although it is debatable if, when compared to other businesses, film was ever high up on the government's agenda even until today, it nonetheless remains a fact that Malay investors managed to buy into the Shaw Brothers and Cathay-Keris as a result of NEP regulations, thus directly destabilizing the monopoly of the Chinese financiers.²²¹ The Malaysian arm of Cathay, for example, sought a bumiputera partner to abide by NEP requirements and in 1979, Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB) bought a 30.1% stake in Cathay, becoming the second largest single shareholder after Cathay (Holdings) Sd. Bhd.²²² Funding also became more available for bumiputera film producers, who further benefited from various tax concessions facilitated by the NEP.²²³

A more direct state-led bumiputerization of the industry came in the form of the National Film Development Corporation (Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional, FINAS). In

Malaysia", in Dru C. Gladney ed. *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey and the United States*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p.145-6.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.141, Abdul Rahman Embong, "Developmentalist State in Malaysia: Its Origins, Nature and Contemporary Transformation", in Joan M. Nelson, Jacob Meerman and Abdul Rahman Embong eds. *Globalization and National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*. Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2008, p.35 and A. B. Shamsul, "Nations-of-intent in Malaysia", in Stein Tønnesson and Hans Antlöv eds. *Asian Forms of the Nation*. London: Curzon Press, 1996, p.323.

²²¹ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.204 and p.229-30 and Gordon Gray, "Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity", p.120.

²²² Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.95.

²²³ Gordon Gray, "Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity", p.114 and Chang Hsin-ning. "Unfolding Time to Configure a Collective Entity: Alternative Digital Movies as Malaysian National Cinema". Ph.D. Thesis. College of Fine Arts, Ohio University, 2017, p.51.

1973, the Association of Bumiputera Film Entrepreneurs Malaysia (Gabungan Perusahaan Perfilman Bumiputera Malaysia), a joint association of bumiputera filmmakers, was formed. Headed by Jaafar Abdullah, the association pushed for more government support in developing the local film industry. As a response to their appeals, the Minister of Youth, Culture and Sports promised to look into the matter and in 1974, a Commission of Inquiry on Local Film Industry was formed. After six months of study, the Commission team stressed very strongly (amidst other factors) the duopoly of the Shaw Brothers and Cathay Organisation in impeding the industry's growth and suggested to establish a National Film Development Corporation under the Ministry of Home Affairs or that of Trade and Industry. According to the Commission report, this corporation will handle film imports, marketing, distribution and film production.²²⁴ Although the resulting corporation – that would be FINAS – only came to exist eventually in 1981, this “serious consideration given by the government to establishing a body to look after the ailing industry” at that time further encouraged Malay entrepreneurs to invest money in the industry.²²⁵

Contributing also to the shaping of the independent/bumiputera era is the Malaysian government's attempt at nationalizing Malay cinema. If the NEP expedited the structural replacement of the Chinese-dominated studio system with independent bumiputera companies, the instituting of Malay nationalism as Malaysia's official brand of nationalism and Malay cinema correspondingly as its official national cinema then installed Malay autonomy/authority over the entire film industry, rendering Malay rights over filmmaking in the country unquestionable. Malay cinema in the peninsula came under the complete purview of Malaysia after the Chinese-dominated Singapore separated from it in 1965. This not only caused Malay cinema to depart decisively from the Singapore-based studio model, it also

²²⁴ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.233-7.

²²⁵ Ibid., p.197.

subjected the industry to a new set of rules in accordance with the new host country's needs and desires. The NEP was supplemented by the National Cultural Policy (NCP) which culminated from the National Cultural Congress in 1971. The Cultural Policy stipulates that:

1. The national culture of Malaysia must be based on the cultures of the people indigenous to the region;
2. Elements from other cultures which are suitable and reasonable may be incorporated into the NCP; and
3. Islam will be an important element in the NCP.²²⁶

Pertaining to the second point, "suitability" and "reasonability" are defined as being in harmony with indigenous elements and not contrary to Islam and national interests.²²⁷ In fact, the 1970 Sedition Act had also already declared seditious and punishable any public discussion on Malay rights and privileges, Islam, Malay rulers or language.²²⁸

Correspondingly, the NCP identified Malay literature as "National Literature", those written in other bumiputera languages as "Regional Literature", and all other writings in non-Malay or non-bumiputera languages as "Sectional Literature". This was preempted by a National Language Bill passed in 1967, which decreed that Bahasa Melayu (the Malay language) be recognized as Bahasa Malaysia (the Malaysian/national language), leading to the implementation of Malay as the official language of instruction and communication across Peninsular Malaysia and later also in the Borneo States.²²⁹ With these policies, aptly described

²²⁶ Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, "The Cultural Context of Malaysian Film Policy: The New Malaysian Cinema", in Lars Feilberg ed. *Seminar on Film Industries in Asia and Europe: A Platform for Experiences Sharing*. Singapore: Asia-Europe Foundation, 2005, p.32.

²²⁷ Ibid., p.33.

²²⁸ A. B. Shamsul, "Bureaucratic Management of Identity in a Modern State: "Malayness" in Postwar Malaysia", p.146.

²²⁹ Tan Yao Sua and Teoh Hooi See, "Ethnic Contestation and Language Policy in a Plural Society: the Chinese Language Movement in Malaysia, 1952-1967", *History of Education*, Vol.43, No.2 (2014): p.265-7. Refer also to Babara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya. *A History of Malaysia*. London: Palgrave, 1982, p.277-9.

by Khoo Gaik Cheng as “NEP’s move to homogenize and nationalize culture”, the NEP, itself proclaiming to foster national unity in line with the National Ideology (Rukunegara, which “declares the national objectives and values and the fundamental principles to guide the citizens and the nation”), found its parallel in the realm of culture and the arts.²³⁰ National status was hereby conferred exclusively to Malay language, culture and religion, and a state-imposed definition of national culture and national identity founded upon an official version of Malayness – identifiably bumiputera, Muslim, and Malay speaking – was officially laid down.²³¹ Since then, it became an indisputable fact that “in Malaysia, the tools of [official] national identity construction are so firmly held in the hands of the Malays”.²³²

Once again, it is debatable whether film was ever taken into serious consideration by the government in formulating and propagating this official nationalism. Sentiments such as: “nobody [on the governmental level] seemed to realize the fact that cinema could be the most important medium in the task of nation building”, is prevalent in the Malaysian film industry since the 1970s.²³³ Yet, at the same time, it is hard to ignore the infiltration and manifestation in Malaysian cinema of that same kind of Malay nationalist ideals underpinning those policies. In 1976, the government mandated that all non-Malay films must include Malay language

²³⁰ Rukunegara is drafted by the Department of National Unity set up in July 1969, officially proclaimed on Malaysia’s National Day in 1970 and passed in parliament as a constitutional bill in 1971. “The New Economic Policy”, *Prime Minister’s Office of Malaysia Official Website*. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RMK2.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2020, p.2-3; James P. Ongkili. *Nation-building in Malaysia, 1946-1974*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.216-7 and p.223-4 and Cheah Boon Kheng. *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, p.133.

²³¹ Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.28; Wan Zawawi Ibrahim, “The Cultural Context of Malaysian Film Policy”, p.31-2; Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.13 and A. B. Shamsul, “Bureaucratic Management of Identity in a Modern State”, p.141. As prominent Malaysian scholar A. B. Shamsul puts it, in short, the NEP established some basic parameters, most important of which was the transformation of Malay dominance into Malay hegemony within the nation concept of a Malaysian federation based on a plural society (see A. B. Shamsul, “Bureaucratic Management of Identity in a Modern State: ‘Malayness’ in Postwar Malaysia”, p.146).

²³² William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.100.

²³³ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.229. Gordon Gray suggests that one possible reason why the government did not adopt a more “hands-on” approach in employing film as a nation-building or propaganda tool was precisely because the industry itself was *already* working almost exclusively in the national language and thus, could effortlessly transmit nation- building messages without the need for further intervention. See Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.120.

subtitles to “ensure that the film industry made its contribution towards national unity and nation building efforts”.²³⁴ Malay films, on the other hand, need not include any form of subtitles as “the general assumption since the NEP language policy came into effect (1971) is that all Malaysians should be able to understand Malay after having been educated in Bahasa Malaysia”.²³⁵ The FINAS Act of 1981 then made it official that to qualify as a Malaysian film, it must be made in the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, thus recognizing Malay cinema as the national cinema of Malaysia.²³⁶ Furthermore, even until now the Malaysian Film Censorship Board examines films based on Malay religious, cultural and moral values and, through this, instruct the development of Malaysian national cinema.²³⁷ It also bears mentioning that a public discourse on nationalizing Malay cinema (or Malayizing national cinema) did also surface on the official level. In 1975, for example, then Malaysian Trade and Industry Minister, Datuk Haji Hamzah bin Abu Samah, affirmed the direct relationship between Malay cinema and national unity/nationhood when he explained in Parliament that the (Malay) film industry warranted more government intervention and support, and that it was necessary to establish a national film board, because it has “immense influence over people’s values”.²³⁸ Taken together, such measures rendered Malay cinema into Malaysia’s official national cinema, effectively placing the country’s filmmaking resources, both financial and creative, legitimately and arguably wholly under Malay regulation.

Whether or not it was in deliberate support of the State’s initiatives, to a large extent bumiputera filmmakers seemed to have acted well in line with the government’s version of ethnonationalism. By and large Malay(sian) filmmakers continued to make films dominated

²³⁴ “Bahasa Subtitles A Must for All Non-Malay Films”, *The Straits Times*, 26 May 1976, p.11.

²³⁵ William van der Heide. *Malaysian Cinema, Asian Film*, p.149 and Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.103.

²³⁶ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.147.

²³⁷ Wan Amizah W.M., Chang Peng Kee and Jamaluddin Aziz, “Film Censorship in Malaysia: Sanctions of Religious, Cultural and Moral Values”, *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, Vol.25 (2009): p.48.

²³⁸ “Box Office Blues”, *New Nation*, 26 October 1975, p.10/11.

by a Malay cast with non-Malays either absent, stereotyped or simply used as comedy relief.

²³⁹ Films continued to reflect specifically Malay concerns, appealing specifically to the Malay community and largely resonating with the ethnonationalist ideology promoted by the government. ²⁴⁰ Calls to rise up against “foreign influence” were again unceasingly made. Hassan Muthalib goes as far as to conclude that, indeed, “up to the late 1990s, Malaysian cinema had been nothing but Malay cinema”. ²⁴¹ Khoo’s evaluation of the industry is particularly illuminating and worth quoting in length here:

[T]he mainstream Malay film industry... since the fall of the studio system in the 1960s, has ridden the ethnonationalist wave of the NEP and its cultural policies. The film industry is still regarded as a site of ethnonationalism, one whose necessary existence or *raison d’etre* is based on reflecting and perpetuating ‘Malaysian’ culture, defined narrowly by members of the privileged ethnic majority as Malay.” ²⁴²

Tellingly, the First Malaysian Film Festival organized by the Malaysian Entertainment Journalists Association (EJA) held between 11-13th April 1980 was purportedly motivated by “journalists from the Malay press [who] felt concerned about the future development of *Malay* film [emphasis mine]”. ²⁴³

In a nutshell then, Malay cinema history is generally narrated along two big blocs time threaded together by a Chinese monopoly/Malay autonomy dichotomy, and the 1970s can aptly be regarded as the transitional period that eased Malay cinema from the studio era (late 1940s

²³⁹ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.103.

²⁴⁰ Chang Hsin-ning. “Unfolding Time to Configure a Collective Entity”, p.59 and Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.213-4 and p.312-4. See also the selection and description of films included in “Chapter 5: Early Filmmaking in Kuala Lumpur”, in Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.77-100.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p.163 and p.147.

²⁴² Khoo Gaik Cheng, “Urban Geography as Pretext: Sociocultural Landscapes of Kuala Lumpur in Independent Malaysian Films”, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol.29, Issue 1 (2008): p.38.

²⁴³ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.245.

to late 1960s) into a new independent/bumiputera (mid-1970s to early 1990s). This decade crucially witnessed the intervention of the Malaysian State and independent/bumiputera forces in the continued survival of the old Chinese monopoly, creating “a space for Malay entrepreneurs to take financial control (hence also creative control) of the industry”, thereby fundamentally reconfiguring the Malay film industry in the peninsula and formalized Malay cinema into Malaysia’s national cinema.²⁴⁴ Indeed, unable to withstand this rising pressure, and due to other factors such as the closure of the Indonesian market, the rise of television, Run Shaw’s relocation to Hong Kong in 1959 and Loke Wan Tho’s sudden death in 1964, etc., Cathay-Keris ceased operations in 1973 and the Shaws folded the MFP in 1968 (detailed in the previous chapter) and the Merdeka Film Productions later in 1980.²⁴⁵

Merdeka Film Productions

At this point it is timely to turn our attention to the Merdeka Film Productions. Given the abovementioned, the case of Merdeka warrants special mention because unlike Cathay-Keris and the MFP, Merdeka was based in Malaya (later Malaysia) instead of Singapore since its inception, and the Shaws only truly began to focus their energy on it in the 1970s – right when conditions of Malay filmmaking were becoming extremely unfavourable to ethnic Chinese financiers like them. Compared to its other two studio predecessors, Merdeka thus encountered a different set of politics and challenges specific to Malaysia in the 1970s, inserting complexity into the usual “breaking Chinese monopoly” narrative.

Merdeka Film Productions, also known as Merdeka Studios, was first established in Kuala Lumpur during the studio era in 1961 by H. M. Shah and Ho Ah Loke. As Timothy P.

²⁴⁴ Gordon Gray, “Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity”, p.245.

²⁴⁵ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.153-4 and Khoo Gaik Cheng. *Reclaiming Adat*, p.91.

Barnard pointedly reveals, the founding of Merdeka was rooted in the dynamics of decolonization and the nation. Ho Ah Loke, who was co-founder of Cathay-Keris, fell out with Loke Wan Tho in 1958 chiefly due to the appointment of Sir Percy McNiece, who had previously served as a member of the Censorship Board, to a high administrative position that Ho had desired in the Cathay Organisation. This signified part of a larger problem that was particularly appalling to Ho in the context of merdeka: the continuing presence of former British civil servants in positions of authority in Singapore and Malaysia. Hoping to make films that emphasized “Malay culture and the Malay language”, Ho left Singapore for Kuala Lumpur where he founded Merdeka Studios with director and cultural activist, H. M. Shah.²⁴⁶

The Shaw Brothers later joined in as partner in 1964 and eventually acquired all the shares, becoming the sole owner of the studio. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the late 1960s conditions in Singapore, now separated from Malaysia, were no longer viable for the Shaws to continue with their Malay filmmaking endeavour. It is thus believed that the acquisition of Merdeka, alongside the wrapping up of MFP operations, was in fact a largely financially-informed attempt by the Shaws to rebuild their Malay film business in Malay-dominant Malaysia.²⁴⁷ This reboot started off on an optimistic note. The Shaws brought popular MFP stars P. Ramlee and Sarimah over to Merdeka and subsequently hired familiar names such as directors Diresh Ghosh, S. Kadarisman, Jamil Sulong, Omar Rojik, etc.²⁴⁸ With the release of *Sitora The Were-Tiger* (Sitora Harimau Jadian, 1965), *Sourness and Sweetness* (Masam-masam Manis, 1965), *Holy Devil* (Dajal Suchi, 1965), *Son of the Soil* (Bumiputera, 1965), etc., the Shaws seemed to enjoy a promising (re)start in the late 1960s.²⁴⁹

Ultimately, however, the veterans did not succeed in replicating their studio era success in a new time and space. Much has been documented about the reasons behind the studio’s

²⁴⁶ Timothy P. Barnard, “Decolonization and the Nation in Malay Film, 1955-1965”, p.82-83.

²⁴⁷ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.92-3.

²⁴⁸ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.154-161.

²⁴⁹ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.93.

failure, including the death of P. Ramlee, the studio's outdated equipment and stringent budgeting, waning interest from the Shaws themselves which led to half-hearted, even insincere, management of the studio, as well as the aforementioned restrictive policies imposed on non-bumiputera companies.²⁵⁰ Although Merdeka still managed to churn out around 80 films since the Shaws took over in 1964, overall the company was unable to survive the heat nor cater sufficiently to the new audience who were now younger, more urbanized and more discerning.²⁵¹ In 1980, Merdeka officially ceased operations and on 16th October 1986, FINAS bought over the Merdeka Studio, officially moving into the premise on 19th December 1988.

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The closure of Merdeka was particularly significant in that it sounded the final death knell of the studio era, clearing the last vestige of the old Chinese-dominated system. In the words of Hassan Muthalib, "the closure of Merdeka Film Productions in 1980 ended the era of film production dominated by the Chinese producers".²⁵³ This tying of Merdeka not just to an old system but also to a bygone time fits perfectly into the "breaking Chinese monopoly" narrative that has hitherto dominated discussions about the transitional 1970s. Yet, it does little to account for Merdeka's sustained operation throughout the 1970s and the popularity of some of the films they have made especially after 1974, when the company initiated a revamp. Indeed, apart from its faults and failure, so little has been written about the Shaws' Merdeka endeavor that its inconvenient existence during this time has never been adequately explained, much less the implications this "remnant of the past" may have, on the shaping of a "new" cinema. Over and above the dominant "breaking Chinese monopoly" narrative, Merdeka's seemingly obsolete and obstinate presence in 1970s Malaysia render it a salient case study from which

²⁵⁰ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.165 and John A. Lent. *The Asian Film Industry*, p.190-191.

²⁵¹ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.95.

²⁵² Ibid., p.97.

²⁵³ Ibid., p.95.

the industry's redistribution of power and resources can be further probed to better account for the transformation of a cultural industry and beginnings of a national cinema. I should clarify at this point that in reviewing Merdeka's place in Malay(sian) film history, I am not at all interested in defending the Shaws' monopolistic ways and often inexcusably unjust labour practices (as will be revealed shortly). Rather, and as mentioned, it is in the interest of understanding the shifts and roots of a (national) cultural industry, that I believe it worthwhile to investigate how the old Chinese monopoly, in the form of Merdeka, came to fit or misfit in this defining, transformative moment. The question I ask here both troubles and refines the often oversimplistic – perhaps even fatalistic, in the case of Merdeka – “breaking Chinese monopoly” narrative: if “breaking Chinese monopoly” is, quite undeniably, key to unlocking a new chapter in Malay(sian) cinema, then surely it is necessary to unpack more carefully, what exactly is involved in the restructuring of the Chinese monopoly *itself*. It is with this inquiry in mind that I now introduce a set of Merdeka films produced right in the middle of the transitional period.

Merdeka's “new-style” films

Between 1975 to 1980, Merdeka Film Productions produced six films that were, in many ways, uncharacteristic for its times.²⁵⁴ These films – *The Last Wish*, *The Restless Youth*, *My Beloved Child*, *Love and Songs*, *The Death Bell* and *Pampered Child*, were the results of a revamp in Merdeka's production style, which aimed at recapturing the audience and market with “new-style” Malay films. The revamp took place in 1974, when Merdeka's studio

²⁵⁴ There were at least two other films that Merdeka produced during this time: *Rahsia Hatiku* (1975) directed by Naz Achnas, which does not follow the same mode of production as the six films in question here, and *A Night in Malaysia* (Semalam di Malaysia, 1976), of which too little information has been recorded, obstructing further research on it at the present moment. See “Filem Merdeka Yang Kedua Dalam Tata-warna dan Scope Arahan Naz Achnas – Rahsia Hatiku”, *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.15.

manager decided to restructure the studio's production methods and management after four Merdeka films failed miserably at the box office. Kadarisman, Naz Achnas, Omar Rojik and Sudarmaji, the four directors who each made a film for Merdeka in 1974, were fired by the company.²⁵⁵ A new production plan was drawn up and Jamil Sulong was called in to put this new formula into practice.²⁵⁶

By this time Jamil was already a well-known director with rich experience. The director kickstarted his film career as assistant director at MFP in the early 1950s, his job mainly involved translating film scripts (mostly of successful Indian films) from English to Malay.²⁵⁷ Only about seven years later was Jamil given the chance to direct a film, debuting with *The Cursed Stone* (Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup, 1959) and becoming one of the first few Malay directors alongside Mahadi Mohammed Said, P. Ramlee and Roomai Noor.²⁵⁸ Jamil then continued to work for the MFP up until its closure in 1967, making mostly Malay legend (purba) films.²⁵⁹

Throughout his time at MFP, Jamil scored several firsts that would later become useful experiences rendering him well-placed to execute Merdeka's revamp. He was among the earliest in the industry to cast non-Malay actors, shoot on-location, participate in colour and widescreen filmmaking and work with technicians from other countries (such as Japanese technicians for the making of *King of Fangs* (Raja Bersiong, 1968)).²⁶⁰ The director was also an active member of the aforementioned Malay nationalist group ASAS 50 and was a young journalist in Singapore before joining MFP.²⁶¹ Timothy Barnard draws a link between Jamil's

²⁵⁵ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.165.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p.173.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p.129 and p.136.

²⁵⁸ "Jatuh Bangun Filem Melayu", *Berita Minggu*, 20 January 1985, p.8.

²⁵⁹ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.136 and p.152.

²⁶⁰ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata: Memoir Seorang Pengarah*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kementerian Pendidikan, 1990, p.173 and Aimi Jarr and Mohd. Zambari A. Malek. *Bermulanya Filem Melayu*. Ampang, Selangor: Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia, 2009, p.102.

²⁶¹ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.306; Timothy P. Barnard, "The Shaw Brothers' Malay Films", p.158 and Timothy P. Barnard, "Chicken, Cakes and Kitchens", p.78-79.

modern nationalist ideals and his filmmaking career, positing that Jamil shifted his talents over to the film studio precisely because he understood that film was an avenue for reaching a mass audience; there he became an influential creative, contributing to the industry by promoting modern ideals that reflected a desire for an independent nation.²⁶² Attesting to this, Jamil himself once expressed in a local newspaper that he had no wish of making films solely for entertainment. The director wants to use film as a tool to educate and guide the community, for otherwise the movie, to him, will be made in vain.²⁶³ After MFP folded in 1967, Jamil made one film – *Another Path to Heaven* (Lain Jalan ka Shorga, 1968) – for the new Merdeka Studio before joining Filem Negara Malaysia, the film unit of the Malaysian Ministry of Information, where he mainly made advertisements and documentaries for the then newly-independent Malaysia.²⁶⁴

Jamil's Merdeka endeavor begun in 1974, when he received an invitation from the company to make Malay films in colour and widescreen. Having made mostly advertisements and documentaries at Filem Negara Malaysia, the director yearned indeed to return to making feature films. Thus, after striking a wage agreement with the company, Jamil accepted the offer. This contract beckoned Jamil back under the employment of the Shaws, where he would eventually make a total of four “new-style” films, starting from *The Last Wish*.²⁶⁵ Premiering in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Singapore in January 1975, *The Last Wish* is a melodrama that tells the story of a rebellious young lady, Salina, who turned over a new leaf after realizing that she had brain cancer.²⁶⁶ The first half of the film establishes Salina's willful and spoilt character mainly through her spiteful behavior towards her stepsister, Rohani. On one occasion,

²⁶² Timothy P. Barnard, “The Shaw Brothers' Malay Films”, p.158.

²⁶³ “Jamil Sulong Menoleh Semula Detik2 Peristiwa yg Sering Mencubit2 Ingatannya”, *Berita Harian*, 22 September 1974, p.3.

²⁶⁴ “Jamil Sulong Dia Bukan Sahaja Seorang Pengarah Yang Berkaliber Besar Tapi Dia Juga Seorang Penulis Kreatif Pada Zaman 50an Dulu...”, *Filem Majallah*, No.175, October 1974, p.11.

²⁶⁵ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.257.

²⁶⁶ “‘Ketemu Jodoh’ Sebagai Ganti 'Permintaan Terakhir' Untuk Aidiladha”, *Berita Harian*, 15 December 1974, p.7; “Permintaan Terakhir: Acara2 Khas utk Tayangan Perdana Diatur”, *Berita Harian*, 26 January 1975, p.7 and “Virtue and Vixen – Sabah Actresses Here to Promote Film”, *The Straits Times*, 28 January 1975, p.9.

to antagonize her sister, Salina deliberately goes out with Rohani's love interest, Iskandar. On a holiday trip to Singapore with Iskandar, Salina develops a splitting headache which prompted her to go for a hospital check-up. It was there that she discovered about her brain cancer and that she had only around six more months left to live. This devastating diagnosis is a turning point for Salina. Upon returning to Malaysia, Salina changed her willful ways and transformed into a considerate, filial and pious lady, even helping to bring Rohani and Iskandar back together. As her health deteriorates towards the end of the film, Salina strives even harder to atone for her past behaviors. The film finally ends on an emotional note with Salina dying beside her mother who had just given birth. Having fulfilled her wish of seeing her newborn sister, Salina breathes her last and the family tearfully agrees to her final request, that is, to name her sister "Salina".

When news about *The Last Wish* first surfaced, the film was positioned as Merdeka's pioneering effort to produce a "new" kind of Malay film. Shaws' official Malay film magazine, *Filem Majallah*, described it as "Merdeka's first attempt in changing the style of Malay films in order to regenerate interest that is already diminishing (inilah usaha pertama yang dijalankan oleh Merdeka Studio dalam mengubah corak filem-filem Melayu untuk merebut kembali minat yang telah mula 'lari')".²⁶⁷ In an apparent bid to prove that the company was serious in this endeavour, it was further reported that the film will be the most expensive film ever made by the studio, with a budget amounting to half a million dollars.²⁶⁸ These declarations created the impression that the Shaws were banking on this film to reestablish their footing in a new Malay(sian) cinema landscape.

An analysis on the professed "newness" or "progressiveness" of this film will reveal the constituents of Merdeka's new production formula. Most prominently, technical

²⁶⁷ Aduka, "Permintaan Terakhir", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.4.

²⁶⁸ "Permintaan Terakhir Filem Berwarna Pertama Keluaran Merdeka Film", *Berita Harian*, 19 May 1974, p.7.

advancement was achieved by filming in colour and widescreen. In an article announcing Merdeka's revamp, the company expressed that one key aim was to refurbish studio facilities so that it can support colour filmmaking to "uplift the quality of Malay cinema (meninggikan mutu perfileman Melayu)".²⁶⁹ The first film that resulted from this was *The Last Wish*, and the company spared no effort in highlighting this technical merit. The film was repeatedly publicized as the first Merdeka – and in some cases, the first Malaysian – film that was shot in colour and cinemascope, and the tagline, "COLOUR & SCOPE", was often the only information printed in eye-catching block letters on advertising materials.²⁷⁰ When the film won an award at the ASEAN film festival 1975, it was also emphasized that the jury praised the film for being outstanding not only in "dialogue (persembangan)" and "story (cerita)", but also in "technique (teknik)".²⁷¹

To be sure, by that time colour filmmaking was not new to Malay cinema. Films like *Magic Flute* (Buloh Perindu, 1953), *Storm* (Ribut, 1956), *Hang Tuah* (1956; discussed above), *The Long House* (Rumah Panjang, 1957), *Mahsuri* (1958), *The Virgin of Borneo* (Cinta Gadis Rimba, 1958), *Holiday in Tokyo* (Melanchong ke Tokyo, 1964), the three made-in-Hong Kong Zain films (1967-1968; discussed in the previous chapter), *The King with Fangs* (Raja Bersiong, 1968; directed by Jamil himself) and *Si Comat's Family* (Keluarga Si Comat, 1975) were already made in colour. *King for a Day* (Raja Sahari, 1953) also included dance sequences shot in colour. What is new, then, about Merdeka's technical promise of *The Last Wish* was its professed commitment to henceforth completely abandon the black-and-white world of Malay cinema instead of just making them occasionally as in the past. This is why *The Last Wish* was afforded pioneering status almost reminiscent of New World rhetoric: *The Last Wish* signposts

²⁶⁹ Othman Abdullah, "Kerusi Penyunting: Filem Melayu Bertatawarna", *Filem Majallah*, No.166, January 1974, p.1.

²⁷⁰ Aduka, "Permintaan Terakhir", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.3; "Permintaan Terakhir Filem Berwarna Pertama Keluaran Merdeka Film", *Berita Harian*, 19 May 1974, p.7 and "Advertisements, Column 5", *The Straits Times*, 8 April 1975, p.6.

²⁷¹ "Halaman 2 Iklan Ruangan 2", *Berita Harian*, 23 January 1975, p.2.

a moment where “colour... [gave] films produced in Peninsular Malaysia a new lease of life and boosted their waning popularity among local audiences and those across the Causeway”, ushering Malay cinema into “a new world (dunia baru)” of colour.²⁷²

That colour and scope were the most pronounced aspects of Merdeka’s “new” revamped style was also due to the fact that these technical components were, at that time, widely regarded as a key symbol of quality and progress in Malay(sian) cinema. As a newspaper forum contributor pointed out in 1971, Malaysian film producers should boost the quality of Malay films for “there is hardly any improvement or a change in most aspects, *particularly that of techniques* [emphasis mine]. Like most films in the 1950s and 60s, all Malaysian-produced Malay films are still in black-and-white, despite the availability of modern equipment for making colour films”.²⁷³ In contrast, the industry’s main competitor, Indonesian cinema, was already producing all their films in colour and mostly in widescreen; locally-produced Malay films were now comparatively “outdated” and unable to satisfy local audiences.²⁷⁴ In this light, committing to colour and scope was thus a surest, most fundamental step to creating and exhibiting “newness” in Merdeka’s new-style films.

Another key element in Merdeka’s revamp formula was to film entirely on-location. Merdeka’s predecessor, the MFP, was known to discourage their directors from on-location shoots because of budgeting issues unless the desired studio sets were too expensive to build.

²⁷⁵ Departing from this tradition, the Merdeka management decided that starting from *The Last*

²⁷² “Kita Dalam Dunia Baru”, *Filem Majallah*, No.190, January 1976, p.1 and “Director: Colour Films Lured Back Fans”, *The Straits Times*, 29 October 1975, p.7.

²⁷³ “Boost Quality of Malay Films”, *The Straits Times*, 29 May 1971, p.14.

²⁷⁴ “Membuat Filem Warna-warni: Dasar Baru utk Hadapi Saingan”, *Berita Harian*, 2 February 1975, p.7; “Jamil Sulong Dedahkan Rahsia Kejayaan Dua Filem Warnanya”, *Berita Harian*, 29 October 1975, p.8; Aduka, “Permintaan Terakhir”, *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.5 and Zainuddin Ayip, “Jatuh Bangun Filem-filem Melayu”, *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977, p.3-4. Additionally, competition from bumiputera companies might also be a motivating factor for this “colour push”. M. Shariff Ahmad is of the opinion that the box-office success of the colour film, *Si Comat’s Family* (Keluarga Si Comat, 1975), produced by Deddy M. Borhan’s Sabah Films company, proved “the seeming hunger of Malaysian moviegoers for colour films” and thus “forced Shaws’ Merdeka Studios in Hulu Kelang to shift to colour on some projects” (see “Malaysia”, in Jose F. Lacaba ed. *The Films of ASEAN*. Pasig: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 2000, p.54).

²⁷⁵ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.112-3.

Wish, there will no longer be any more indoor shooting and the Merdeka studio in Ulu Klang itself will no longer be used for filming.²⁷⁶ In replacement Jamil was allowed to travel within Malaysia to scout for locations.²⁷⁷ *The Last Wish* was ultimately filmed in Port Dickson, a town on Malaysia's West Coast, and in Singapore, for scenes where Salina and Iskandar went on a holiday together.²⁷⁸ Indeed, Jamil himself assured that fans will be able to see many beautiful sceneries because "not one of the scenes in the film is made in the studio (tidak ada satupun penggambaran dalam filem ini yang dijalankan di dalam studio)".²⁷⁹

Besides locations, Jamil was also allowed to scout for young new acting talents by conducting screen tests instead of repeating the usual practice of casting studio era veteran stars.²⁸⁰ Advertisements were made in newspapers seeking "young and talented" "aspiring film stars" to "star in [Merdeka's] first Malay colour film, *Permintaan Terakhir* (The Last Wish)". Applicants "must be photogenic, between 18 and 21 years old, preferably bilingual in Bahasa Malaysia and in English, with SPM or MCE qualification and have a little stage or modelling experience".²⁸¹ The resultant casting process was a refreshing one. Initially it was a lady from Johor Bahru who got selected to play the leading role but her fiancé did not allow her to perform. Jamil then recalled that when he was working on a Filem Negara film about traditional Malay dance with performers from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (Kementerian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan Malaysia, or KKBS), one of the performers – Uji Rashid – was particularly outstanding. The crew thus made a trip to KKBS to audition the dancers and it was there that Uji clinched the leading role of Salina. Her fellow dancer, Sony Abdullah, got the

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p.165; Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.258.

²⁷⁷ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.173.

²⁷⁸ *Filem Majallah*, No.175, October 1974; Aduka, "Permintaan Terakhir", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.5; "PT Sudah Siap Sedia", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.25; "Permintaan Terakhir difilemkan di Singapura", *Berita Harian*, 12 September 1974, p.8.

²⁷⁹ Aduka, "Permintaan Terakhir", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.5.

²⁸⁰ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.173.

²⁸¹ "Shaw Scouts for Malay Talent", *The Straits Times*, 6 May 1974, p.9.

role of Rohani's love interest, Iskandar.²⁸² Nozie Nani, who was then working at the Malaysian Industrial Development Finance office as a receptionist, also received an audition call and eventually got selected to play Salina's sister, Rohani.²⁸³ Another newcomer to the big screen, Yusof Haslam, was casted to play the minor role of Salina's university mate. Yusof worked at a bus company and was a dramatist with drama troupe, Kumpulan Seni Drama Ibukota K.L. (KUSDIK), when he responded to the open call.²⁸⁴ With this, a main cast unprecedentedly comprising entirely of non-professionals fresh to film acting was introduced to an audience who were becoming just as tired of seeing the same faces over and over again onscreen as they were with black-and-white films.²⁸⁵ The novelty of this move was further confirmed in retrospect when years later, Jamil's casting decision became recognized as "a commendable, brave pioneering effort (usaha perintis yang berani ini dipuji)" that "indirectly pioneered a new attitude in casting for Malay films (secara tidak langsung telah memelopori satu sikap baru dalam pemilihan pelakon filem-filem Melayu)".²⁸⁶

Filming in colour and scope, shooting on-location and casting fresh new talents – these are three major constituents of Merdeka's brand of "newness" embodied by *The Last Wish*. However, there remains one more element that is fundamental to this new formula but which, unlike the other three, was not made visible in publicity materials. Like the Zain films, *The Last Wish* was in fact produced with heavy involvement from Merdeka's Hong Kong counterpart – the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Company (SB (HK)).²⁸⁷ Most fundamentally,

²⁸² Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.258-259 and "Filem 'Permintaan Terakhir' akan Memperkenalkan Bintang Baru Fuziah Harun", *Berita Harian*, 11 August 1974, p.5. Note: Fuziah binti Haroun Al Rashid is Uji Rashid's name at birth.

²⁸³ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.259 and Zawiyah Salleh, "Nozie Ingin Membaiki Mutunya dlm Senilakun", *Berita Harian*, 9 February 1975, p.7.

²⁸⁴ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.260 and "Yusoff Haslam Tak Pernah Puas Dengan Lakonannya", *Berita Harian*, 25 September 1977, p.7.

²⁸⁵ "Permintaan Terakhir: Lakun Layar dan Kata Bual oleh Jamil Sulong", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.19 and Zawiyah Salleh, "Membuat Filem Warna-warni: Dasar Baru utk Hadapi Saingan", *Berita Harian*, 2 February 1975, p.7.

²⁸⁶ "Sikap Baru dalam Memilih Pelakon Filem", *Berita Minggu*, 9 March 1980, p.7.

²⁸⁷ However, unlike the Zain films, *The Last Wish* is not a shot-by-shot replication of its Hong Kong counterpart. By most definition, it can be characterized as a remake (see, for example, Constantine Verevis. *Film Remakes*.

the film was a remake of the 1967 SB (HK) blockbuster, *Susanna* (珊珊), directed by the studio's long-term director, Ho Meng-hua (何夢華). *Susanna*, starring popular Hong Kong stars Li Ching (李菁) and Chang Chung-wen (張仲文), follows the transformation of a selfish young lady, Shan Shan, after she got diagnosed with brain cancer. Originally a spoiled, selfish, rebellious character who stole her sister's boyfriend out of spite and jealousy, Shan Shan tries very hard to redeem herself after knowing that she has only six more months to live. Juxtaposing the narratives of both films, it is indisputable that *The Last Wish*, made nearly a decade after *Susanna*, is based off this SB (HK) film.²⁸⁸ In fact, it was reported that the original title for *The Last Wish* was, indeed, *Suzana*.²⁸⁹

According to Jamil Sulong, it was his employers' directive to adapt this particular story into a Malay film.²⁹⁰ Jamil and H. M. S. Sutan – Shaw's public relations officer – rewrote the screenplay, the latter being credited as having “rearranged the story (cerita yang disusun semula

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p.1-2). Furthermore, owing to the fact that the film was entirely shot on-location in Malaysia and Singapore, thus, unlike the case of the Zain films which shared the same sets as their Hong Kong counterparts, visually *The Last Wish* also looks very different from *Susanna* which was shot in the SB Hong Kong studios.

²⁸⁸ Hatta Azad Khan also mentioned some other possibilities: “...few other comedies were also making comfortable profits namely those directed by A.R. Badul, *Bertunang* (1982), *Manis-Manis Sayang* (1983) and *Pagar Pagar Cinta* (1984). Some of these comedies were actually adapted from successful Hong Kong comedies”. See Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.213.

²⁸⁹ “Permintaan Terakhir Filem Berwarna Pertama Keluaran Merdeka Film”, *Berita Harian*, 19 May 1974, p.7.

²⁹⁰ Jamil Sulong. *Warisan dan Wawasan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2007, p.196. As far as I know, there is no recorded account on why *Susanna* and the other SB (HK) films that I will mention in the following pages were chosen to be remade. It is certainly possible that this was because all these Mandarin films were box-office hits when they premiered. *Susanna*, in particular, was wildly popular across East Asia. The Shaws likely hoped to conveniently recycle their templates of success by replicating these tried-and-tested formulas. Another plausible possibility is that these films were chosen to match up to or compete with what were popular in Indonesian cinema at that time. One compelling evidence is that, in November 1974, a newspaper article reported that after *The Last Wish*, Jamil Sulong would start working on a film that would be modeled after the popular Indonesian film trend of the musical, in particular the Indonesian film, *Akhir Sebuah Impian* (1973) (“Pengarah Jamil ketika ini sedang menyiapkan script untuk filem keduanya di Merdeka Studio; sebuah filem bercorak muzikal mengikut tren filem Indonesia ‘Akhir Sebuah Impian’”). See “Filem Dokumentari RTS untuk Pesta Asean”, *Berita Harian*, 10 November 1974, p.15). Although Jamil's second Merdeka film did not turn out to be a musical film, this report reveals that the company was attentive to Indonesian film trends and likely wanted to compete directly with it. Another article published in 1985 about new trends in Indonesian cinema listed teenage love (cinta remaja), religious preaching (dakwah), Malay martial arts (Silat), musicals (muzikal) and comedy (lucu) as themes or genres that undeniably still garner the most audiences and profits (see “Tren Terbaru Dalam Dunia Filem Indonesia, *Berita Harian*, 9 October 1985, p.5). As will be revealed, these themes and genres indeed characterize the SB (HK) films that were chosen for the Merdeka remakes. This could explain why, instead of kungfu and swordplay (wuxiapian) films that SB (HK) were using to globalize their operations at that very same time, it was instead films of an earlier time that were selected to be remade for the Malay film market.

oleh H. M. S. Sutan)”. Jamil was reportedly also the one who translated the original screenplay from English to Malay.²⁹¹ This SB (HK) link would then be carried forward into the films’ production and post-production stages. If Jins Shamsuddin and the Malay cast were sent to Hong Kong to make the Zain films, this time a team of five technical assistants from the Shaws’ Hong Kong studio was instead sent over to Malaysia to assist with the filming.

“Assist”, however, is but an understatement, considering the actual control they had over the production. Although the 1974 report on Merdeka’s revamp revealed that it was within Shaws’ plan all along to bring Hong Kong technicians over for a few months to guide local technicians with colour filming, it was not stated that these people would assume directorial control as well, which was what actually happened.²⁹² On set, Jamil’s job was essentially limited to communicating with the local cast, location scouting and supervising the actors’ lines in Malay, since the crew from Hong Kong could not understand a word of Malay or English.²⁹³ What Jamil did was in effect not too different from the time when he first started out as assistant director at MFP, although the formal credits and publicity materials listed him as the sole director of this film. Instead of Jamil, it was most likely Liu Kuo-hsiung, a Taiwanese director sent over by the Shaws, who called the real shots. Although his name did not appear anywhere in the final credits, a Chinese newspaper report revealed that Liu was the “assistant director (副导演)” of *The Last Wish*. Liu was reportedly already familiar with filming in Southeast Asia, having also been invited to Thailand and Indonesia previously to help with local filming there.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.196; Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.173 and Aduka, “Permintaan Terakhir”, *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.3.

²⁹² Othman Abdullah, “Kerusi Penyunting: Filem Melayu Bertatawara”, *Filem Majallah*, No.166, January 1974, p.1. In fact, from the outset Jamil was already unhappy with this cross-studio arrangement as he believed that local technicians could also produce colour films. See Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.197, p.258 and p.260. MFP veteran A. V. Bapat was also hired to help. See Aduka, “Permintaan Terakhir”, *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.5.

²⁹³ Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.173.

²⁹⁴ “Mengdijia Yingpian Gongshe Shezhi Shoubu Guoyu Caisejian Yuanwang Liangyuehou Jiangzai Xingma Fangying (猛迪加影片公司攝製 首部國語彩色片願望 兩月後將在新馬放映)”, *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商

In fact, Jamil himself once confessed that at that time he did not know who was actually directing the films because for the most part, it was the foreign personnel who were handling the camera set-ups.²⁹⁵ A complaint made by Ahmad Daud and Saadiah, veteran studio actors who play the supporting roles of Salina's parents in the film, supports this claim. The duo alleged that they were unable to perform their best because the foreign workers were sometimes too quick and rushed in their work, hinting thus at the actual executive control and power this team from Hong Kong had, over the pace and standard of the production.²⁹⁶ Indeed, the entire filming took a mere eighteen days to complete (compared to an average of a month that a MFP production would typically take).²⁹⁷ In any case, after shooting was completed, Jamil then brought the footage over to the Shaw studio in Hong Kong for processing, as facilities in Singapore and Malaysia at that time were reportedly unable to support colour processing.²⁹⁸ This integral Merdeka-SB (HK) link makes up the fourth key ingredient of Merdeka's post-1974 formula.

Encapsulating this mix of new elements, *The Last Wish* did indeed reinvigorate the scene, granting the new Merdeka formula its first taste of success. With a theatre run in Kuala Lumpur lasting more than a month, the film became a box office hit, and it also received critical acclaim as best tragedy film at the 4th Asean Film Festival.²⁹⁹ To the Shaws, these proved the viability of the new formula. The company thus prompted Jamil to replicate this success. Under his contract, Jamil had to make two more films for Merdeka and Uji Rashid, *Nozie Nani* and

报), 11 September 1974, p.26; Gao Renhe (高仁河). *Nanke Yi Meng: Gao Renhe Daoyan Huiyilu* (南柯一梦: 高仁河导演回忆录). Taipei: Independent & Unique (新锐文創), 2015, p.358.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ "Permintaan Terakhir: Lakun Layer dan Kata Bual oleh Jamil Sulong", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.19.

²⁹⁷ "P'mintaan Terakhir Mungkin ke Pesta Filem Asean", *Berita Harian*, 24 October 1974, p.3 and Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.111.

²⁹⁸ Jamil Sulong. *Warisan dan Wawasan*, p.196-7; "Permintaan Terakhir ke Jakarta dalam 'Pesta Filem ASEAN ke Empat'", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, 1974, pg1 and "P'mintaan Terakhir Mungkin ke Pesta Filem Asean", *Berita Harian*, 24 October 1974, p.3.

²⁹⁹ Zainuddin Ayip, "Jatuh Bangun Filem-filem Melayu", *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977, p.6; "Virtue and Vixen – Sabah Actresses Here to Promote Film", *The Straits Times*, 28 January 1975, p.9 and Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.173.

Yusof Haslam had also chosen to quit their jobs to sign on with the studio.³⁰⁰ Conditions were thus ripe for Jamil to continuing making two more films modelled after *The Last Wish*. They are: *The Restless Youth* (1975) and *My Beloved Child* (1976).

Starring Uji Rashid as Anita, Yusof Haslam as her brother Yusof, and two other new young actors, Hail Amir as Harry and Zulkifli Zain as Joey, *The Restless Youth* follows the life of Harry – a rebellious young man who refuses to be tied down by rules and regulations. One day on a car trip with his buddy, Joey, Harry meets Anita and decides to woo her. Anita, however, is from a wealthy family and her arrogant brother, Yusof, forbids her to continue seeing the working class Harry. Abusing his authority and power, Yusof creates trouble for Harry at his workplace, aggravating him. One fateful day, Harry found himself caught in the middle of a gunfight by chance between a criminal and the police. In the chaos, Harry picks up a gun left at the scene by the fleeing criminal and hides it in his room. Tension between Harry and Yusof then intensifies and Joey dies trying to save Harry in a gang fight led by Yusof. Blinded by rage and revenge, Harry shoots Yusof with the stolen gun and is himself killed in a showdown with the police at the end.

Like *The Last Wish*, *The Restless Youth* was shot in colour, widescreen and entirely on-location in Malaysia. The film also introduced more new faces with Hail Amir and Zulkifli Zain who, like Uji Rashid and Yusof Haslam, were dancers at KKBS.³⁰¹ Intriguingly, it is also remade from another popular SB (HK) film, *Dead End* (死角, 1969), directed by famous SB (HK) director, Chang Che (張徹). *Dead End* basically follows the same storyline as *The Restless Youth*: a poor young man, Chang Chun (played by Ti Lung (狄龍)), and a rich lady,

³⁰⁰ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.261 and Zawiyah Salleh, “Nozie Ingin Membaiki Mutunya dlm Senilakun”, *Berita Harian*, 9 February 1975, p.7.

³⁰¹ “Sikap Baru dalam Memilih Pelakon Filem”, *Berita Minggu*, 9 March 1980, p.7; “Filem2 Melayu Punya Kemungkinan Dapat Sambutan Baik Jika Dialihbahasakan — Penonton”, *Berita Harian*, 30 October 1975, p.8; “Jamil Sulong Dedahkan Rahsia Kejayaan Dua Filem Warnanya”, *Berita Harian*, 29 October 1975, p.8; “Hail Amir Ingin Maju Dalam Semua Lapangan yg Diceburi”, *Berita Harian*, 13 June 1976, p.7; “A. Hail: Pelakun2 Tempatan Tak Puas Dengan Bayaran”, *Berita Harian*, 23 July 1976, p.2.

Wen Rou (Li Ching 李菁), refuse to break up despite objections by Wen Rou's brother (played by Chen Hung-lieh 陳鴻烈). In a gang fight initiated by Wen Rou's brother, Chang Chun's best friend, David (David Chiang 姜大衛), is killed. Filled with rage, Chang kills Wen Rou's brother with a gun he had previously picked up at a crime scene and the film ends with Chang being shot to death by the police.

Filming for *The Restless Youth* wrapped up in a mere sixteen days, and was "aided" by SB (HK) director, Kuei Chih-hung, who arrived in Malaysia with an assistant director and eight technical crew members.³⁰² In an interview, Kuei explained in jest that he was chosen for the job not because he was familiar with the situation in Malaysia, but more likely because he knew a little bit of Malay.³⁰³ An action coach was also sent over to help with the fighting scenes.³⁰⁴ Once again, although Jamil Sulong is credited as the sole director for this film, in reality it was the crew from Hong Kong that helmed the production. An article in Shaws' Chinese-language publication even stated that "Kuei's first Malay film shot in Malaysia, *The Restless Youth*...stars local stars but the team sent by SB (HK) was responsible for the entire production process (小桂在那邊拍攝的第一部馬來片《叛逆青年》……演員都是那邊的影星，至於影片的全部製作，便由香港邵氏公司所派之工作人員負責)." ³⁰⁵ The film eventually won acclaim as best tragedy film at the 22nd Asian Film Festival in Pusan, South Korea and was

³⁰² "Ramai Artis Terkenal akan Jay akan 'Puspa Raya'", *Berita Harian*, 28 September 1975, p.8 and "Gui Zhihong Fei Jilongpo Paishe Guoyu Xinpian (桂治洪飛吉隆坡拍攝國語新片)", *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商報), 3 October 1975, p.18; "Xingjiapo Zhengfu Cujin Dangdi Dianying Shiye Shaoshi Kaipai Malaiyu Panni Qingnian (星加坡政府促進當地電影事業 邵氏开拍馬來語叛逆青年)", *Southern Screen* (南國電影), June 1975, p.20; Yu Qi (于琦), "Fang Gui Zhihong paiwan Wuyupian Panni Qingnian Guilai Tan Dama Zhipian Qingxing (訪桂治洪拍完巫語片叛逆青年归来 談大馬制片情形)", *Southern Screen*, July 1975, p.32.

³⁰³ Li Mo (李默), "Gui Zhihong Gaibian Zuofeng Kaipai Chuotouxiju Panzhu Chi Laohu (桂治洪改變作風开拍綽頭喜劇 扮豬食老虎)", *Hong Kong Movie News* (香港影畫), May 1978, No.149, p.37.

³⁰⁴ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.261.

³⁰⁵ "Gui Zhihong Paidianying Lingyou Yitao (桂治洪拍電影另有一套)", *Southern Screen*, December 1975, p.30.

also sent to the 5th Asean Film Festival as Malaysian representative, where an audience remarked that it marked a clear “change (perubahan)” from the Malay films of the 1960s.³⁰⁶

After *The Restless Youth*, the “third colour and scope Merdeka film directed by Jamil Sulong (filem ketiga bertatawarna dan scope arahan Jamil Sulong terbitan Studio Merdeka)” was *My Beloved Child*.³⁰⁷ The film was again fully shot on-location, with many scenes filmed in a small house and a logging area near Hulu Langat Selangor.³⁰⁸ Notably, the film also features a vacation trip to Kuala Lumpur, showcasing the sights and sounds of Malaysia’s capital city. Like *The Last Wish* and *The Restless Youth*, *My Beloved Child* starred a brand new cast, this time featuring child actors to fulfil the needs of the story. Remade from SB (HK)’s *The Younger Generation* (兒女是我們的, 1970, dir. Yueh Feng (岳楓)), the film follows the difficult lives of five children trying to survive on their own after their parents (Zulkifli Zain as Rahman and Noor Azizah as Noraini) passed away one after another. An open audition call was put out and eight children were eventually selected from Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, four of whom were the children of TV, radio and stage writer, M. Osman.³⁰⁹ Particularly noteworthy this time is that, Chua Lam (蔡瀾), the then newly-appointed producer of Merdeka, personally brought the SB (HK) team over to Malaysia and oversaw the audition process themselves.³¹⁰ Among those who went were, once again, director Kuei Chih-hung and his long-time collaborators, assistant director Moon Yiu-wah (門耀華/聞耀華/門見隆/門岳霆) and cameraman Yu Chi (Yau Kok Cheng; 游琪).³¹¹ According to Chua, Kuei was chosen

³⁰⁶ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.264; “Jek to Open Asean Film Festival”, *The Straits Times*, 21 October 1975, p.6 and “Filem2 Melayu Punya Kemungkinan Dapat Sambutan Baik Jika Dialihbahasakan — Penonton”, *Berita Harian*, 30 October 1975, p.8.

³⁰⁷ “Noor Azizah Bintang Utama ‘Anakku Sayang’ Terbitan Merdeka Filem”, *Filem Majallah*, No.188, November 1975, p.36.

³⁰⁸ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.263-4.

³⁰⁹ “Lapan Kanak2 Dalam ‘Sayang Anakku Sayang’”, *Filem Majallah*, No.189, December 1975, p.36.

³¹⁰ “Cailan Gui Zhihong Shuai Jishurenyuan Zaifu Malaixiya Paishe Dierbu Wuyupian Er Nu Si Qing (蔡瀾桂治洪率技术人员 再赴马来西亚 拍摄第二部巫语片《儿女私情》)”, *Southern Screen*, October 1975, p.48.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*; “Gui Zhihong Xiang Benkan Zhengshi Dao Lundun Pai Dagecheng Hengsao Heishoudang (桂治洪向本刊证实 到伦敦拍大哥成横扫黑手党)”, *Southern Screen*, September 1975, p.41 and Zhu Jinglie (朱经烈),

because he had been partnering a lot with the director over other projects at that time.³¹² Filming for *My Beloved Child* wrapped up in twenty days and the film did exceedingly well at the box-office and at film festivals.³¹³ In a rare feat for its time, *My Beloved Child* broke box-office records in Malaysia and Singapore, even screening for more than fifty days straight at one cinema in Singapore.³¹⁴ Aziz Osman won Best Child Actor at the 22nd Asian Film Festival and the film was sent to the 5th Asean Film Festival to represent Malaysia alongside *The Restless Youth*. This phenomenal reception prompted Merdeka to summarise 1976 as “a year of many changes in the developing world of Malay cinema (tahun ini juga banyak membawa perubahan kepada dunia perkembangan perfileman Melayu)”.³¹⁵

With the completion of *My Beloved Child*, Jamil’s contractual duties had officially come to an end. However, the Shaws approached him to make one last film using the same formula. They wanted to release a Malay musical film and requested Jamil to make *Love and Songs*, which is adapted from a Hong Kong musical film.³¹⁶ Unfortunately, I have yet to be able to determine which Hong Kong film this is, but with what little clue available, it is possible that the film is *Love Song Over The Sea* (南海情歌/海外情歌, 1970, dir. Shima Koji (史马山/岛耕二) and Kuei Chih-hung; currently lost).³¹⁷ Set in a fishing village, *Love and Songs* opens with Zulklifi (Hail Amir) meeting Ani (Noor Azizah) and the two fall in love with each other. However, Malek (Yusof Haslam), the village chief’s son, has also set his eyes on Ani. Overcome with jealousy, Malek sends his men to attack Zulklifi when he is on his way to

“Menyaohua Yisheng Zhiyou Diyici Zongheng Yingtan Shiyuzai Conglai Paipian Duo Bieming (门耀华一生只有第一次纵横影坛十余载从来拍片多别名)”, *The Milky Way Pictorial* (银河画报), March 1981, No.275, p.48.

³¹² Keith Chan, “Interview with Chua Lam”, in Sam Ho and Li Cheuk-to eds. *Kuei Chih-hung, The Rebel in the System*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2011, p.23.

³¹³ *Filem Majallah*, No.187, October 1975, p.2 and Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.264.

³¹⁴ *Filem Majallah*, January 1977, p.37; *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977, p.6 and Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.264.

³¹⁵ *Filem Majallah*, No.202, April 1977, p.1.

³¹⁶ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.200 and p.264.

³¹⁷ Since *Love and Songs*’ Hong Kong counterpart has yet to be confirmed, where textual and comparative analysis takes place in the following paragraphs, I will focus only on the first three films.

receive Ani on their wedding day. The film eventually ends with Ani reuniting with Zulklifi and Malek is arrested for his unlawful acts with the help of the villagers such as Ani's good friend, Noraini (Nozie Nani), and the village chief – Malek's father – himself. Carrying a simple storyline, *Love and Songs* is instead plumped up with several traditional song and dance sequences. For this purpose Johari Salleh from Radio Television Malaysia was invited to compose more than thirty songs, the lyrics of each were to fit into the narrative of the film.³¹⁸

As with the previous three films, *Love and Songs* was shot entirely outdoors. Since the story is set in a fishing village, Jamil was originally interested in using Marang, a coastal town in Malaysia, but the management disapproved, saying it would be too expensive to shoot there. Thus, when the technicians from Hong Kong arrived, the team did a second location scouting, traveling all the way to Penang and Langkawi, then back south to the beaches of Port Dickson and Malacca, and eventually decided on Serkam, Melaka, Port Dickson and Kuala Lumpur.³¹⁹ Very little has been recorded about this particular Hong Kong team, though film enthusiast A.R. Mustafar recalls that the publicity material given out at the film's premiere in Singapore's Capitol Theatre listed Hong Kong's Lo Jun as co-director.³²⁰ Naz Achmas was also credited as director because Jamil fell sick and was unable to follow through.³²¹ In terms of casting, there were plans to cast Indonesian actors this time but every possible arrangement eventually fell through.³²² The usual cast – Nor Azizah, Hail Amir, Nozie Nanie and Yusof Haslam – was selected in the end.³²³ *Love and Songs* premiered in 1976 but was not as well received as its predecessors.

³¹⁸ Johari is credited as music director in the film. See Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.200 and p.265 and *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977.

³¹⁹ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.267.

³²⁰ A. R. Mustafar, "Cinta Dan Lagu", 22 June 2012. *Filem Klasik*, <http://filemklasikmalaysia.blogspot.com/2019/06/cinta-dan-lagu-1976.html>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

³²¹ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.267.

³²² Ibid., p.265.

³²³ *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977.

After *Love and Songs*, which Jamil described as a “most boring film because it is full of boring songs (sebuah filem yang paling menjemukan kerana penuh dengan lagu-lagu yang membosankan)”, Jamil left Merdeka in 1977.³²⁴ Without Jamil, Merdeka churned out at least two more films using the same basic formula before officially calling it quits. They are: *The Death Bell* and *Pampered Child*.³²⁵ Each of these embody the same key elements laid down by Jamil’s films but each with a different twist.³²⁶ *The Death Bell* (1976, dir. Naz Achnas, Frank Rorimpandey and Kuei Chih-hung; remade from *The Bells of Death* (夺魂铃, 1968, dir. Yueh Feng)) was co-produced with Indonesia’s Tuti Mutia Film Production in an attempt to break into the Indonesian market.³²⁷ This means that aside from the SB (HK) personnel, the local Merdeka team had to also work with staff sent from the Indonesian company, thus encompassing a whole new set of power dynamics. The last Merdeka film, *Pampered Child*, remade from SB (HK)’s *Whose Baby’s in the Classroom?* (女校春色, 1970, dir. Umetsugu Inoue (井上梅次)), introduced a new Malaysian director, Othman Hafsham, who was the first director to refuse to comply fully with the formula. When Merdeka approached Hafsham, then working at an advertising firm after a stint with Filem Negara, Hafsham was told by studio manager, Ronnie Tan (who interestingly once worked for Filem Negara too), that the actual directing will be conducted by a director from Hong Kong; all he had to do was to rewrite the

³²⁴ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.267 and “Jamil Kini Bebas”, *Berita Harian*, 17 July 1977, p.7.

³²⁵ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.267.

³²⁶ The same actors such as Uji Rashid, Nozie Nani, Hail Amir and Zulkifli Zain, as well as new actors like Omar Shariff, continued to fill the leading roles in these films which were also shot in colour, widescreen and on-location. See “Zulkifli Zam Rasa Kagum Dengan Kecergasan Kaum Seniman di Indonesia”, *Berita Harian*, 10 July 1977, p.7 and “Nozie Berjaya Hidupkan Wataknya dlm Filem Semalam Di Malaysia”, *Berita Harian*, 7 December 1975, p.7.

³²⁷ “Shao Yifu Xuanbu Yu Yinni Hezuo Shoubu Yingpian Jiang zai Dama Shaoshi Pianchang Kaipai (邵逸夫宣布与印尼合作首部影片将在大马邵氏片场开拍)”, *Southern Screen*, July 1975, p.21; “Mini Yingxun: Zai Dama Paipianshi Ceng Shi Bujie Haichan Gui Zhihong Huan Ganyan Bingfei Duzi Shengchong (迷你影讯：在大马拍片时曾食不洁海产 桂治洪患肝炎并非肚子生虫)”, *Southern Screen*, No.232, July 1977, p.64; “Gui Zhihong Maijidan (桂治洪卖鸡蛋)”, *Southern Screen*, September 1977, p.44; *Filem Majallah*, No.189, December 1975, p.12; “Loceng Maut Filem Supersilat Dari Kominasi Dua Silat Melayu Indonesia Filem”, *Filem Majallah*, April 1977, p.2; “Loceng Maut Perkenalkan Pendekar Muda Dari Kedah”, *Berita Harian*, 1 May 1977, p.7 and “Behind The Successful Movies — is a Woman Producer”, *The Straits Times*, 8 January 1979, p.2.

story and have his name credited as director. Unlike his predecessors, however, Hafsham refused to do so and insisted on directing the film himself. He then reworked the screenplay in a way he thought would work with local audiences and brought in well-known local art director, Victor Chin, as well as cameraman, Karunanithy, whom he had worked with previously at Filem Negara. When the film was eventually sent to Hong Kong for editing and processing, Hafsham also reportedly ignored notes from the management asking him to cut down on his above-average ratio of shooting scenes.³²⁸ With this newfound agency injected into the formula handed down by the Shaws (and indirectly by Jamil), Hafsham's *Pampered Child* significantly broke away from Merdeka's "new-style Malay film" formula and it is almost symbolic that the film went on to win Best Comedy Film, Best Script and Best Actress at the very first Malaysian Film Festival.³²⁹ After this, Malay directors (including Jamil) were no longer willing to work with film scripts from the Hong Kong studio and, as mentioned, the Shaws finally washed their hands off Malay film production in 1980.³³⁰

Abiding by official nationalism

Surveying these Merdeka films made between 1975 to 1980, Hatta Azad Khan calls this period the "era of Malay films made by Chinese filmmakers" while Gordon Gray terms it the Merdeka era of "Malay-ised Hong Kong films".³³¹ More than just a description, these labels mark a complex historical occurrence: the films stand out starkly as an antithesis against the backdrop of burgeoning Malay nationalism. Somehow or another, these films, produced by the only Chinese-led studio left in the 1970s and undeniably steeped in Chinese elements,

³²⁸ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.270; Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.106-7 and "Hail, Hafsham!", *The Straits Times*, 13 December 1983, p.1.

³²⁹ "Anugerah Merak Kayangan and Anugerah P. Ramlee", *Berita Harian*, 9 April 1980, p.5.

³³⁰ Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.106-7.

³³¹ Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.173 and Gordon Gray. "Malaysian Cinema and Negotiations with Modernity", p.112

found space and reason to exist – even flourish – despite the odds stacked against them. Indeed, quite contrary to the “breaking Chinese monopoly” narrative, there have been at least a few instances where critics made unpopular claims such as: “the golden age of Malay cinema started again when Merdeka made *The Last Wish* (zaman kegemilangan semula filem Melayu bermula kembali apabila Merdeka Studio Ltd. menghasilkan filem *Permintaan Terakhir*)”; “Merdeka’s efforts somehow managed to sustain the Malay film industry from total collapse... [I]n terms of content, Merdeka films were more Malay than those produced during the Singapore studio era”.³³² These curious discrepancies raise the question of how to position these films and Merdeka Studio in the context of the new independent/bumiputera era or, in short, how to make sense of their apparent anachronism. Holding off for a moment the common perception that irresolvable antagonism existed between Malay nationalism and the Chinese monopoly, an effective incision point would be to examine the ways in which Merdeka might have, instead, aligned itself with Malaysian nationalism, particularly with the kind of official nationalism delineated above, through these post-revamp films and their paratexts.

Besides being branded as “new-style” Malay films, the films were actually also positioned as Merdeka’s contribution to the nationalizing of Malaysia’s film industry. A series of articles published between 1975 to 1976 in Shaw’s Mandarin publication, *Southern Screen* (南國電影), repeatedly claimed that it was in response to the nation’s appeal for help from foreign investors and experienced industry players in developing their local film industry, that the company sent their staff over from Hong Kong to Malaysia.³³³ According to this discourse, “since the government expressed desire to advance the nation’s developing film industry, the

³³² Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri, Faridah Ibrahim, Mohd. Safar Hasim. *Penontonan Filem Cereka di Malaysia*. Ampang: Perbadanan Kemajuan Filem Nasional Malaysia (FINAS), 2009, p.11 and Hatta Azad Khan. “The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)”, p.168.

³³³ “Xing Jiapo Zhengfu Cujin Dangdi Dianying Shiye Shaoshi Kaipai Malaiyu Panni Qingnian (星加坡政府促进当地电影事业 邵氏开拍马来语叛逆青年)”, *Southern Screen*, June 1975, p.20. The first line in the report says “Singapore”, but this was a common misrepresentation as many people confused the usage of the names of newly independent Singapore and Malaysia at that time.

Shaws immediately rose to the occasion (当地政府既然有意建立电影事业，邵氏立即起而响应)”，committing to raise local film quality and make more Malay films – at least ten to fifteen each year – all in colour.³³⁴ Boasting that they were in the best position to help (having already owned a well-equipped studio in Kuala Lumpur), the Shaws expressed their willingness to nurture the locals’ capabilities by bringing directorial talents over from Hong Kong to show them the ropes.³³⁵ Correspondingly, when asked why foreigners instead of local technicians were recruited to make Malay films in Malaysia, Kuei Chih-hung explained that films made locally in Malaysia were not well-received among local audiences because of their low technical standards; however, because “the local government cannot possibly give up on their own domestic film market altogether, thus they had to invite production staff from elsewhere in order to improve their film quality, regain audience confidence and reestablish the position of local films within their own country (但又不能不维持自己本国的电影市场，便只好在外面邀请一些制作人员，回来好好地拍一两套片，重新给观众有信心，以奠定自己影片在国内的地位)”.³³⁶ An article in Merdeka’s *Filem Majallah* also confirmed the company’s supportive stance by announcing that they will “give full opportunities to bumiputera in the world of cinema in line with the aims and policies of the Malaysian government (memberi peluang sepenuhnya kepada bumiputra dalam bidang perfileman sesuai dengan tujuan dan dasar Kerajaan Malaysia)”.³³⁷

Merdeka’s claims about the Malaysian government’s call for help remain unverified today. Nevertheless these statements demonstrate a professed interest in supporting Malaysia’s

³³⁴ Ibid.; “Xianzhi Guopian Jinkou Shuangguanqixia Dama Jiji Paishe Wuyupian (限制国片进口双管齐下 大马积极拍摄巫语片)”, *Southern Screen*, September 1976, p.65 and “Cailan Gui Zhihong Shuai Jishurenyuan Zaifu Malaixiya Paishe Dierbu Wuyupian Er Nu Si Qing (蔡澜桂治洪率技术人员 再赴马来西亚 拍摄第二部巫语片《儿女私情》)”, *Southern Screen*, October 1975, p.48.

³³⁵ Yu Qi (于琦), “Fang Gui Zhihong paiwan Wuyupian Panni Qingnian Guilai Tan Dama Zhipian Qingxing (访桂治洪拍完巫语片叛逆青年归来 谈大马制片情形)”, *Southern Screen*, July 1975, p.32.

³³⁶ “Gui Zhihong Paidianying Lingyou Yitao (桂治洪拍电影另有一套)”, *Southern Screen*, December 1975, p.30.

³³⁷ “Merdeka Dengan Filemnya”, *Filem Majallah*, No.189, September 1975, p.1.

official nation-building project. Indeed, the new-style films themselves manifest this position in several ways. Recall that featuring fresh new talents was a key element in Merdeka's revamp formula. Casted as a result of an open call made through Malaysian media, or sourced from the Malaysian Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports because of Jamil's affiliation with Filem Negara, which came under the Malaysian Ministry of Information at that time, the main cast in these films were not just newcomers to the big screen; they were, as critics Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong put it, Malaysia's "homegrown" talents.³³⁸ Although veterans from the Singapore-based MFP era did also appear in these films, for instance Sa'adiah in *The Last Wish* and Aziz Jaafar in *My Dear Child*, they now play only supporting roles to their new and younger successors. As mentioned, this casting arrangement was a game changer because it stimulated renewed interest in local Malay film personalities. More than that, however, in the context of developing a national cinema this move was equally generative in that it created a new staple pool of local Malaysian film stars. In making this argument, I am here invoking a particular way of conceptualizing national cinema that assumes a necessary and direct relationship between nationality and national cinema – an approach that Choi Jinhee reasonably cautions could potentially create a "pitfall of restricting the value of national cinema to a vehicle for exemplifying national identity".³³⁹ Yet, for a fledging national cinema attempting to assert its national specificity at a time of social restructuration (post-1969) when negotiations about citizenship and nationhood were underway, foregrounding the nationality of the main cast and breaking away from the old Singapore-based studio era cast seem to me the most direct – even a quick fix – way, to associate the films with the nation-state of Malaysia, creating a

³³⁸ Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, "Malaysia: Gentle Winds of Change", p.308.

³³⁹ Choi Jinhee, "National Cinema, The Very Idea", in Choi Jinhee and Carroll Noel, eds. *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p.316.

likeness of a national(ized) cinema by tagging it to a national identity straightforwardly extrapolated from the nationality and “homegrown” nature of its performers.³⁴⁰

In much the same way, the films’ on-location shots also exhibit Merdeka’s eagerness to jump onto the (official) nationalism bandwagon. More than just a refreshing move away from usual studio settings, these shots very often function as a survey of the national landscape, with frequent featuring of national landmarks, institutions and icons. In *The Last Wish*, for example, establishing shots inform the viewer that Salina studies at the University of Malaysia while Rohani works at the National Bank of Malaysia (Bank Negara Malaysia). Salina’s trip to Singapore with Iskandar also led to an introduction of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (Subang International Airport) and the Malaysian national airline (then called the Malaysian Airline System). After the holiday, when Salina called Iskandar out to break off their romantically ambiguous relationship, the two met in front of the National Monument (Tugu Negara) – “a sculpture which was built in remembrance of the brave soldiers who died fighting for the independence of our country”, and which architecture scholar Lai Chee Kian categorizes as being part of Kuala Lumpur’s “national architecture cluster (國族建築群)” that facilitates the active, continuous imagination of a national community.³⁴¹ The iconic revolving restaurant in The Federal Hotel, which “opened just three days before the Nation’s declaration of independence on 28 August 1957 to welcome all VIPs, foreign dignitaries and diplomats who arrived in Kuala Lumpur to witness Malaya celebrate her independence on 31 August

³⁴⁰ In fact, this was an established studio tradition (no doubt familiar to the audience at that time) even before the times of nationalization. In the context of Amoy-dialect cinema, for example, using “Nanyang talents (南洋人才)” was regarded as a direct means of localizing the films to the Southeast Asian context. See Su Zhangkai (蘇章愷), “Yaoyuan Ji Xiangsi: Cong Dianying Wenwu Chutan Xiayupian Zhong de Nanyang Qinghuai (遙遠寄相思——從電影文物初探廈語片中的南洋情懷)”, in Wu Yujun (吳玉君) ed. *Xianggang Xiayu Dianying Fangzong* (香港廈語電影訪蹤). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2012, p.129.

³⁴¹ *Visit Malaysia*. <http://kuala-lumpur.attractionsinmalaysia.com/National-Monument.php>. Accessed 15 July 2020 and Lai Chee Kian (賴啟健). Trans. Zhang Minhua (張敏華), “Zhanhou Yishu Yu Jianzhu Li de ‘Malaiya’ (戰後藝術與建築里的‘馬來亞’), in Ngoi Guat Peng (魏月萍) and Show Yingxin (蘇穎欣) eds. *Revisiting Malaya: Political and Historical Thoughts* (重返馬來亞：政治與歷史思想). Kuala Lumpur: Inter-Asia School and Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2017, p.206-7.

1957 at Stadium Merdeka... [and that was] developed and built from encouragement from our Government and personal support from our Nation's founding fathers", is also clearly marked out in the film when Rohani and Iskandar met to clear the air between them, and so is the famous Shaw Capitol Theatre built way back in 1947, when Rohani went to catch a movie at the encouragement of Salina.³⁴² In essence, nearly every scene in *The Last Wish* shot outside the confines of a house is set at readily recognizable local Malaysian spots (see Fig. 27), many of them coated with national symbolism or national heritage value, thus assigning the space and time of the film a national specificity that enables it to be set distinctly against another body of images and values, in this way fulfilling a fundamental procedure of nationalist myth-making onscreen.³⁴³



³⁴² Federal Hotels International. <https://www.fhihotels.com/news/2017/08/grande-dame-kuala-lumpur-embarks-year-celebrations-2017>. Accessed 15 July 2020.

³⁴³ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", *Screen*, Vol.30, Issue 4 (1989): p.37.



Figure 27. Recognizable Malaysian landmarks in *The Last Wish*

Similarly, in *My Dear Child*, a film set primarily in an unspecified rural village where the family resides, a survey of the newly-independent country's capital was made possible when the family takes a daytrip to Kuala Lumpur. The Merdeka Square (Dataran Merdeka) where Malaysia announced its independence on 31st August 1957, the iconic old Kuala Lumpur train station and the national zoo are presented in front of the viewer in this holiday scene. Interestingly, the whole trip was filmed in third-person perspective, much like a promotional video that showcases the fun, modern and attractive side i.e. the success story of the country's capital. The film also features Malaysia's national welfare institution – the Social Welfare Office (Pejabat Kebajikan Masyarakat). The family's neighbor, Mat Uteh, mentioned early in the film that her husband and herself “are under the Social Welfare Scheme”, a national

initiative undertaken by the Social Welfare Office, which would be physically featured at the end of the film, when Mat Uteh fails to legally adopt the children but their father's employer arrives in the nick of time, adopting all five of them, giving this tragic melodrama film a happy ending (see Fig. 28). Such "promotion" of Kuala Lumpur is done even more conveniently in *The Restless Youth*, since the protagonists' car is as prominent a character as the protagonists themselves in the film. With a narrative involving "restless" protagonists who love to go for a spin, the film includes many car ride scenes in which the capital's sceneries are introduced. Meandering through roads lined with the Malaysian national flags, the vehicle most significantly drives past the Parliamentary Building with the statue of Malaysia's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman well in sight. Particularly worth highlighting here is that national symbolism in these scenes is accentuated using a simple prop: there is a Malaysian flag attached to the car radio antenna. More than just a personal vehicle then, this embellishment transformed the car into an unofficial Malaysian ambassador that brings the viewer around to experience the sights and sounds of the country's capital city. The National Monument Plaza (Plaza Tugu Negara) featured in *The Last Wish* also made an appearance in this film – that was where Harry and Anita went on a date (see Fig. 29).



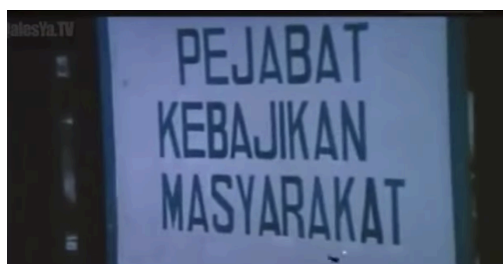


Figure 28. Kuala Lumpur landmarks in *My Dear Child*





Figure 29. Malaysian landmarks and the national flag attached to the protagonists' car in *The Restless Youth*

Clear attempts were also made to (ethno)nationalize the films' outlook and narratives by adding Islamic and Malay codes and conduct. Most prominently, praying scenes in Islam tradition are frequently included in these films. Whereas the main protagonist Shanshan prays to “tian (天; the heavens)” in *Susanna*, in *The Last Wish* Salina prays to Allah donned in her prayer dress and kneeling in the direction of Mecca, asking for mercy and for her life to be prolonged a little more so that she could witness the birth of her younger sister (see Fig. 30).

Similarly, in *My Dear Child*, a family evening prayer scene and that of Noraini praying for her deceased husband weaved religiosity into the daily lives of the family (see Fig. 31), both scenes given approximately a full minute of the film's running time each when, in contrast, these praying scenes are completely absent in its Hong Kong counterpart. Effort was also clearly taken in the rewriting of scripts to include lines that are specific to Islamic and Malay traditions. For example, when Salina's mother got to know that her daughter has brain cancer in *The Last Wish*, she exclaimed, "Astaghfirullah hal-zaim" – an Arabic phrase asking God for forgiveness or uttered when receiving bad news. Nearing the end of the film, Salina's father tells Salina to recite the Islamic declaration of faith called the *shahadah*, which is usually chanted before someone passes away, though unfortunately Salina fails to complete it before breathing her last ("Ashhadu alla ilaha..."). In *The Restless Youth*, the nursery rhyme that serves as a musical refrain in the film to symbolize the protagonists' carefreeness and comradery was changed from its Hong Kong counterpart's "Three Little Tigers (三隻老虎)" to "Rasa Sayang", a Malay folksong popular throughout Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. In the film, Anita also sarcastically calls her brother "halim", a reference to someone who is religiously inclined or pious (usually "alim"), revealing that Islam is taken to be the standard for assessing moral behavior. These conscious changes made to the original scripts accentuate Islam and Malayness in the films, bringing them closer in line with the official nationalism propagated by the government and, at the same time, establishing "a definite horizon of expectation" for the general audience, particularly the domestic audience, that clearly marks its difference vis-à-vis other national cinemas.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, "Chronicle of a Death Retold: In Search of the European Art Movie", *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.54, Issue 641 (1987): p.167. It is also worth noting that such extent of script-rewriting in order to accentuate Malayness and Islam was not present in the case of the made-in-Hong Kong Zain films discussed in the previous chapter. The pressures of (ethno)nationalism during the time of these Merdeka films as compared to the earlier Zain films is evident.



Figure 30. Salina praying in *The Last Wish*



Figure 31. Praying scenes in *My Dear Child*

Lastly, Merdeka's attunement to Malaysian official nationalism is evident in how the issue of creative autonomy was handled, albeit in a rather convoluted way. The facts that the films' source materials came from earlier Hong Kong films and that directorial control did not belong (solely) to Jamil were obscured in Malay-language media with the use of ambiguous language and selective reportage. In the case of *The Last Wish*, for example, any mention of Lin Kuo-hsiung as co-director could only be found in Chinese-language media. To the Malay-speaking community, Jamil Sulong was proudly introduced and widely publicised as the only director helming this inaugural "ground-breaking" project. On the other hand, that the story was not original or written from scratch was, at this point, not yet completely kept under wraps. In publicity materials for *The Last Wish*, as mentioned, the peculiar word "arranged (disusun)" is used to describe how the story came into being, indicating to some degree that authorship did not belong to Jamil or H. M. S. Sutan – though nor was it made clear who wrote the original screenplay.³⁴⁵ It was also acknowledged in at least one instance, that the film was based off a Chinese film: "although this film is adapted from a Chinese film and the technicians came from abroad, the quality is commendable (walaupun filem ini merupakan saduran dari sebuah filem Cina dan tenaga tekniknya didatangkan dari luar negeri namun kualitinya boleh dibanggakan)".³⁴⁶ Subsequent Merdeka films, however, were framed in much more resolutely "Malay-ized" terms. Besides continuing to omit information about shared directorial authority, misleading information were now also released to further downplay the Hong Kong factor and play up Malay autonomy. In the credit titles for *The Restless Youth*, it was stated that the film "takes reference from the story *Jalan Mati* (dipetik dari cerita 'JALAN MATI')". "Jalan Mati" is the literal translation of "Dead End" – the title of the SB (HK) film upon which the film was based,

³⁴⁵ Aduka, "Permintaan Terakhir", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.3.

³⁴⁶ Zainuddin Ayip, "Jatuh Bangun Filem-filem Melayu", *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977, p.3.

but aside from this decontextualized statement which could easily be misunderstood as referring to an original Malay story, no other detail was given to account for the source material.

Furthermore, instead of replacing the conventional role of scriptwriting with the ambiguous concept of “arrangement” like the last time, this time Jamil was unambiguously credited as the man behind the “script and dialogue (sekerip dan katabual)”, with Siti Arifah Othman also separately credited as “scriptwriter (pemsekerip)”. Similarly, in the case of *My Dear Child*, Jamil is credited for “dialogue (katabual)” and Siti Arifah for “script (skerip)”, while in publicity posters the “story and directing (cerita dan arahan)” were attributed to Jamil Sulong alone.³⁴⁷ In fact, the word, “write (menulis)”, was now also invoked upfront, creating the impression that Jamil owns full authorship of the story: “I [Jamil] really believe that this third story will be a memorable one for old and young people in the nation... because when *I was writing the script*, the scenes clearly illustrate the children’s struggle to live after losing their family (saya yakin penuh bahwa cerita ketiga ini akan menjadi sebuah filem yang tak akan luput dari ingatan oleh orang-orang tua dan kanak-kanak semua bangsa... sewaktu saya menulis skrip ini, kerana adegan-adegan dalam filem itu dengan jelas menggambarkan perjuangan mahu hidup oleh kanak-kanak itu yang kehilangan keluarganya) [emphasis mine]”.

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Such cover-ups and partial truths suppress the contentious issue of creative autonomy that underpin these productions, portraying to the Malaysian community a corporate image of Merdeka supporting local bumiputera film development. The selective representation of information bolstered Shaws’ efforts in positioning Merdeka as a proactive supporter of the government’s grand nationalizing plans which, as mentioned, emphasized the nurturing of Malay autonomy and participation. Notwithstanding such concealments, however, it must be

³⁴⁷ *Filem Majallah*, No.189, December 1975, p.2. Screenwriter for *Susanna* is Cho Chi (鄒琪), for *Dead End*, Chiu Kang Chien (邱剛健), for *My Younger Generation*, Katy Chin (斬蜀美).

³⁴⁸ “‘Sayang Anakku Sayang’ akan Siap Dalamasa 20 Hari”, *Filem Majallah*, No.187, October 1975.

noted that cultural critics and industry players were generally unconvinced. Those in the know began to voice their discontent on public platforms over the intervention of the SB (HK) team and the films' "foreign look", taking issue particularly with the Chinese roots of the source narratives.³⁴⁹ This is perhaps well within expectation since the content or subject matter, including the source materials on which the narrative draws upon, the sensibility expressed i.e. the worldview embodied therein, and the style of the films in question are commonly understood as being fundamental to the construction of the "national character" of any given cinema.³⁵⁰ That the "new-style" Merdeka films triggered a backlash from within Malay cultural circles was thus unsurprising at the height of the country's ethnonationalist movements. This is actually highly reminiscent of the situation in the early studio era, where Malay intellectuals also expressed utmost displeasure that screenwriters and directors were predominantly non-Malay and screenplays very often adapted from Indian films.³⁵¹

The comparison is made here because this *déjà vu* opens up an avenue through which the relationship between creative autonomy and nationalization can be further probed. Focusing on finding aesthetic agency and creative individuals, Adil Johan puts forth convincingly that "one unique aspect of the ethnicised social and economic structure of the post-war film industry that afforded considerable creative autonomy to Malays is in the area of music". Although widespread Malay participation in directing and screenwriting was not a norm until much later in the studio era, "the musical authorship of such films was predominantly in the hands of Malay composers such as P. Ramlee, Zubir Said, Yusof B., Osman Ahmad, Ahmad Jaafar, Wandly Yazid and Kassim Masdor".³⁵² In other words, pretty

³⁴⁹ Baharudin Latif. *Krisis Filem Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Insular Publishing House, 1983, p.45-49; Hassan Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle*, p.94 and p.103 and Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong, "Malaysia: Gentle Winds of Change", p.308.

³⁵⁰ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", p.43.

³⁵¹ Adil Johan. *Cosmopolitan Intimacies: Malay Film Music of the Independence Era*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018, p.8.

³⁵² Ibid., p.8.

much since the beginning of Malay film production, Malay creative agency can be located specifically and often exclusively in the realm of music, although Johan believes this ceased to be the case from the 1970s onwards, when it became “increasingly rare to feature film songs or music scenes in Malaysian-made films”.³⁵³

The case of Merdeka’s post-1974 new-style films challenges Johan’s projected timeline, proving that this studio tradition may well have extended into the 1970s, turning opportunely into a trait that fitted perfectly with the Malay nationalist cause.³⁵⁴ Unlike the Zain films, which mainly included music by resident SB (HK) composer, Wang Fu Ling, Malaysian Malay musicians, including composers and pop star singers, were invited to craft the aural landscapes for these Merdeka films. *The Last Wish* features background music by famous film composer Ahmad Nawab and a song specially composed for Malaysian singer Syarifah Aini, who was then signed on to the famous pop music label, EMI.³⁵⁵ Ahmad Nawab also composed music for *The Restless Youth*, performed by pop singer Salamiah Hassan, who shot to fame after winning a Malaysian television singing competition. Nazri Ahmad and I. Shariman composed the music for *My Dear Child*, performed by local orchestra, Orkes Irama Sari, and famous music composer from the studio era – Kassim Masdor – also reportedly played a part.³⁵⁶ Most of the musicians involved in these films were, at that time, popular – and here I borrow Hassan Muthalib and Wong Tuck Cheong’s term again – “homegrown” musicians. Collectively they represent the pooling together of fresh local musical blood in service of a budding national industry while, at the same time, preserving – inheriting – the tradition of Malay creative autonomy in the realm of film music, as they create and perform for these “Malay-ised Hong

³⁵³ Ibid., p.33.

³⁵⁴ Adil Johan articulated a more cosmopolitan-based nationalism prevalent during the studio era. Although the music in these Merdeka films are often also pop music with diverse cultural influences, the point I wish to make here is that the very engagement of these musicians in this context can be regarded as being in service of the more insular Malay nationalism as propagated by the State.

³⁵⁵ “Berilah Aku Masa Untuk Hidup Supaya Dapat Aku Menyambut Kelahiran Adikku ke Dunia Ini...”, *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.28.

³⁵⁶ “Aziz Jaafar Bintang Utama ‘Anakku Sayang’ Arahan Jamil Sulong”, *Filem Majallah*, No.187, October 1975, p.25.

Kong films”. Bringing this one step further, Jamil himself once remarked that the rise of pop music presented a huge threat for Malay cinema during this time as pop bands and singers were competing for affection among the younger generation, stealing the limelight away from film stars.³⁵⁷ Taking this into account, co-opting these “threats” into the realm of cinema can then also be regarded as a helpful step in framing these Merdeka productions favourably in the larger picture of national cinema-building, by means of reattracting audience support both emotionally and financially.

Pushing for internationalization

I have thus far demonstrated how Merdeka tried to position themselves as a studio that was receptive and supportive of Malaysia’s official nationalism with their new post-1974 formula. In broad strokes the company accentuated aspects of localism, nationalism and bumiputera participation while deemphasizing foreign intervention. Through a series of cosmetic make-ups (using homegrown talents, on-location shots, localized visual and verbal languages, and locally-produced music content) and cover-ups (obscuring information about foreign participation and authorship), Merdeka appears to embody, advocate and propagate the official nationalism handed down by the State principally in the forms of the NEP and NCP. The films thus embody an important spirit of national cinema in the sense that they were defined in terms of already established discourses of Malay(sian)ness by turning in on itself, on its own history and cultural formation, and the defining ideologies of national identity and nationhood.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Jamil Sulong. *Kaca Permata*, p.216.

³⁵⁸ Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema”, p.42.

With closer scrutiny, however, the alignment with official nationalism constitutes only part of the core idea in Merdeka's brand of nationalism. Faced with hostile opposition, mistrust and competition from new bumiputera companies, Merdeka carved out an edge that could set them apart. A statement in the January 1977 issue of *Filem Majallah* announced that the company already knows what the bumiputera companies were planning for the year and, unlike other companies that were just making "ludicrous films (filem-filem karut)", Merdeka is ready to take on this competition by "bring[ing] about new changes in terms of content and technique, *in accordance to the new trend in the international film world* (membawa perubahan-perubahan baru dari segi isi dan teknik penggambaran yang kini, menurutnya telah menjadi satu tren baru di dalam dunia perfileman antarabangsa) [emphasis mine]".³⁵⁹ This statement reveals two important points: one, although Merdeka expressed support for the nationalizing of the industry (which inherently involved bumiputera-izing), bumiputera companies were nonetheless still regarded as industrial rivals; two, Merdeka's idea of competition was not simply to surpass these companies from within but to establish an international standing for Malay films made under their label. This push for internationalization fundamentally informed Merdeka's idea of nationalization.

As the statement above indicates, on top of a nationalizing discourse an internationalizing discourse was also activated to justify Merdeka's mode of production in the new era. Beyond just helping the local government with nationalizing the industry, the Shaws declared it their mission to help Malaysian cinema catch up with international progress and establish a foothold on the international stage. This often took a teleological slant. For instance, it was reiterated several times that director Kuei bore "the huge responsibility of guiding the

³⁵⁹ Othman Abdullah, no title, *Filem Majallah*, No.202, January 1977, p.1. Hatta Azad Khan also noted: "it is interesting to note that the formation of new companies each year did not mean that the number of companies kept growing. In fact companies that ceased production after producing one or two films were common." See Hatta Azad Khan. "The Malay Cinema (1948-1989)", p.204.

Malaysian film industry to catch up with the times (扶助马来西亚电影事业，导向追上时代的重大责任)”, and that this was a heavy burden that the Shaws have taken upon their own shoulders (这是邵氏一个重大的抱负)”.³⁶⁰ Colour, in particular, was a key indicator used to ascertain the industry’s underdevelopment on an international scale as Kuei explained: the purpose of his trip was precisely to “bring local cinema out from the black-and-white world into the era of colour (要把当地的电影，由黑白世界带入彩色世纪)” because at that time, Malaysian cinema was still stuck in the black-and-white era, lagging behind Hong Kong cinema at least twelve to fifteen years.³⁶¹ A 1975 article in *Southern Screen* further concurred that, compared to Hong Kong and Taiwan, the Malaysian film industry “awaits development (待发展)” for they have only recently started to make colour films.³⁶²

Complementarily, articles condemning Malay(sian) cinema’s lack of international perspectives and ambition also made their rounds in Shaw publications. A long report entitled, “Our Films Don’t Have International Touch... Malay Films for Malay People Only (Filem-filem Kita Tidak Mempunyai International Touch... Filem Melayu untuk Orang Melayu Saja)” was published in *Filem Majallah* the year *The Last Wish* premiered. In this representative article, the writer criticized the local film industry for failing to produce a director of international standards or a film that could stand out in world cinema and be appreciated by people around the world. Chastising local directors and writers for not keeping track of international trends from Hollywood, India, Hong Kong, Italy and other countries, i.e. not having an “international touch”, and for insisting on making “Malay films only for the Malays (filem Melayu untuk orang-orang Melayu saja)”, the writer called on film producers and

³⁶⁰ “Cailan Gui Zhihong Shuai Jishuren Yuan Zaifu Malaixiya Paishe Dierbu Wuyupian Er Nu Si Qing (蔡澜桂治洪率技术人员 再赴马来西亚 拍摄第二部巫语片《儿女私情》)”, *Southern Screen*, October 1975, p.48 and Yu Qi (于琦), “Fang Gui Zhihong paiwan Wuyupian Panni Qingnian Guilai Tan Dama Zhipian Qingxing (访桂治洪拍完巫语片叛逆青年归来 谈大马制片情形)”, *Southern Screen*, July 1975, p.32.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² “Gui Zhihong Paidianying Lingyou Yitao (桂治洪拍电影另有一套)”, *Southern Screen*, December 1975, p.30.

directors to make films that would appeal to different ethnicities and all kinds of people both in Malaysia and around the world. He further opined that the Malaysian film market itself also needs to be better connected to the rest of the world, so that Malaysian films could be showcased in other countries and, through that, “we can indirectly introduce our stars and country all around the world (kita mengenalkan bintang-bintang dan negara kita keseluruhan dunia) [emphasis mine]”. For “if Hollywood, India, Hong Kong, Italy and Japan can do it (kalau Hollywood, India, HongKong, Itali dan Jepun dapat membuatnya),” asserts the writer, “why can’t we (mengapa kita tidak boleh)?”³⁶³

This rather aggressive call for internationalization formed the discursive foundation upon which Merdeka’s new-style films correspondingly became rendered as an offering that could fill this perceived “lack”.³⁶⁴ From the outset, *The Last Wish* was touted not just as a contribution to Malaysia’s nation-building project, but also as “the first step taken by the studio to raise the quality and image of Malay films in the international film world (langkah pertama pihak studio tersebut ke arah matalamat meninggikan lagi mutu dan imej filem-filem Melayu dalam dunia perfileman antara-bangsa)”. When the film eventually became a box-office hit, the company also declared that it has “reinvigorated the whole country (telah mengegarkan seluruh tanahair)”, showing “a sign that Malay films will become a fierce competitor to films coming from other countries (satu pertanda bahwa filem-filem Melayu akan menjadi satu saingan yang maha hebat kepada filem-filem yang didatangkan dari luar negeri)”.³⁶⁵ Evidently, Merdeka was not interested in reaching out solely to the people of Malaysia with their new formula. Having identified bumiputera filmmaking as being stuck in a problematic state of

³⁶³ “Rencana Filem: Filem-filem Kita Tidak Mempunyai International Touch... Filem Melayu untuk Orang Melayu Saja”, *Filem Majallah*, No.187, October 1975, p.32.

³⁶⁴ This is not new in Shaw’s practice. The Malay Bond films of the previous chapter, for example, also embodied such a discourse. What is new here is that they have now incorporated this into a national discourse, rather than maintaining it as a simple market concern.

³⁶⁵ *Berita Harian*, 29 December 1974, p.15 and “Box-office”, *Filem Majallah*, No.187, October 1975, p.3.

stagnated navel-gazing, Merdeka highlighted international competitiveness and recognition as being intrinsic to their revamp plans from the very beginning.

In fact, sending these films to compete at international film festivals was among the driving factors that motivated the productions in the first place. Even before the films premiered in Malaysia, it was already reported that *The Last Wish* will be sent to the 4th Asean Film Festival, *The Restless Youth* to the 21th Asian Film Festival and *My Dear Child* to the 5th Asean Film Festival to represent Malaysia, as long as they can be completed in time.³⁶⁶ As mentioned, all these films did eventually go on to represent Malaysia and win accolades at these festivals. Similarly, before filming for *The Last Wish* officially ended, it was also already announced that if the film achieves international standards, it will be subtitled and exported to other Asean countries outside of Malaysia and Singapore, such as Thailand and Brunei.³⁶⁷

This emphasis on internationality translated correspondingly into border-crossing holiday plots in the films. The aforementioned holiday scene in *The Last Wish* is a narrative plot that is not present in its Hong Kong counterpart, *Susanna*. The scene begins with Salina and Iskandar entering the boarding gates at the Malaysian airport, then boarding the plane, taking off into the skies, arriving in Singapore and visiting several landmarks of Singapore (see Fig. 32). Merdeka explained that this travel narrative was added “in an effort to introduce neighbouring countries (dalam usaha memperkenalkan negara-negara jiran)”.³⁶⁸ However, against the film’s backdrop of heightened national and local symbolism previously described,

³⁶⁶ “P’mintaan Terakhir Mungkin ke Pesta Filem Asean”, *Berita Harian*, 24 October 1974, p.3; “Xing Jiapo Zhengfu Cujin Dangdi Dianying Shiye Shaoshi Kaipai Malaiyu Panni Qingnian (星加坡政府促进当地电影事业 邵氏开拍马来语叛逆青年)”, *Southern Screen*, June 1975, p.20; “3 Muka Baru Diberi Peranan Penting dlm ‘Jiwa Remaja’”, *Berita Harian*, 11 May 1975, p.9 and “Gui Zhihong Xiang Benkan Zhengshi Dao Lundun Pai Dagecheng Hengsao Heishoudang (桂治洪向本刊证实 到伦敦拍大哥成横扫黑手党)”, *Southern Screen*, September 1975, p.41.

³⁶⁷ “Permintaan Terakhir Filem Berwarna Pertama Keluaran Merdeka Film”, *Berita Harian*, 19 May 1974, p.7 and “Mengdijia Yingpian Gongshe Shezhi Shoubu Guoyu Caishepian Yuanwang Liangyuehou Jiangzai Xingma Fangying (猛迪加影片公司攝製 首部國語彩色片 願望 兩月後將在新馬放映)”, *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商報), 11 September 1974, p.26.

³⁶⁸ Aduka, “Permintaan Terakhir”, *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.5.

the effect that this travel scene has on the viewer goes beyond experiencing a cursory presentation of another country. By inserting the visuals – the experience – of physically leaving Malaysia and arriving at another country into the otherwise rather highly saturated nationalistic imagery, a kind of distancing effect that disrupts the illusion of a self-sufficient, self-enclosed Malaysia is produced. This short “cutaway” from home – Malaysia – reinstalls an awareness that the nation is situated within the international, and that a nation does not solely exist in and for itself. Similarly, travel subplots that are not present in their Hong Kong counterparts are also included in *The Restless Youth* and *My Dear Child*, with Anita’s father going to Jakarta for a business trip in the former and Rahman’s employer going overseas to receive medical treatment in the latter, returning only near the end of the film to adopt Rahman’s children.





Figure 32. Salina and Iskandar leaves Malaysia for a holiday in Singapore

Merdeka's internationalist nationalism

The analyses above demonstrate that nationalism and internationalism co-existed with equal prominence in Merdeka's post-1974 operations. Time and time again the company reinforced their stance that, even as it joined in the rally for bumiputerizing and nationalizing the industry, Merdeka had its sight casted well beyond the Malaysian nation-state, aiming to make Malay(sian) films that appeal not just to the domestic audience but that could also travel across borders and be accepted by audiences of other nations and cultures. Coupled with the cosmetic make-ups and cover-ups that helped to align Merdeka and their new-style films with official nationalism, these acts of emphasizing (activating internationalizing discourses and

inserting holiday plots) and materializing (participation in film festivals) border-crossing potentials illuminate the curious intersectionality between internationalizing and nationalizing in Merdeka's brand of nationalism. Unlike the State and most bumiputera companies at that time, the nationalism that Merdeka tried to interject into the scene was defined not just in inward-looking terms but principally from an outward-looking position. It is not *solely* concerned with and targeted at the community within, nor does it focus exclusively on exhibiting an internally-defined common or "united" national culture and values, but seeks meaning and value of the local and national *also* on an international scale, identifying the legitimacy and worth of the nation in relation to international standards and other nations.

For ease of explanation, a seemingly unlikely parallel between this post-1974 Merdeka (operating at a time when Malaysia was seeking a new national identity post-1969) and the early 1920s League of Nations (conceived during the postwar apogee of nationalism) can be usefully drawn here. Whether or not the Shaws intended it, in several ways the Merdeka brand of nationalism resembles the kind of liberal internationalism embodied by the League in its founding days. Most fundamentally, Merdeka's conceptualization of the Malaysian nation is rooted in an acute consciousness of the wider international order and a basic recognition that the two are intrinsically engaged in a mutually-affecting relationship, much like the League's structural foundation of being a state-based international system. Espousing a version of internationalism that the League represented, Tomas Masaryk, leader of the then newly legitimated Czechoslovak nation, described it succinctly using a "concentric circles" model: "there is no difference between national identity and internationalism"; internationalism should be thought of "as an organization of nations which are capable of managing their own efforts" but that nonetheless allowed for static concentric circles of ever-larger communities, with the family being encircled by the nation, and the nation encircled in turn by the international

community.³⁶⁹ This means that unlike cosmopolitan-internationalism, which is anti-nationalism at its core, or proletarian internationalism, which is class-based and Marxist inspired, this model of liberal internationalism reinforced the authority of member states rather than challenge it, presenting a vision of internationalism where the nation-state was the principal unit that counted and where state sovereignty was afforded primacy.³⁷⁰

One direct impact that such a conceptualization of internationalism has on nationalism, is that national identity is hereby inescapably hinged on international membership. National sovereignty and strength are confirmed and bolstered through international recognition, validation and representation, and interdependence is imperative to the assertion of independence and the subsequent nation-building project. As Salvador de Madariaga, press member of the Secretariat of the League in 1921 and chief of the Disarmament Section in 1922, once remarked, when nations meet and discuss as nations, they acquire a deeper sense of their existence and importance, adding a new vigor to national self-consciousness.³⁷¹ Scholar Glenda Sluga, in a laudable attempt to restore the international in our understanding of “the age of nationalism” (i.e. the twentieth century), further points out that many visionaries of liberal internationalism regarded international institutions like the League as “contexts in which they could improve their status as *national* citizens [emphasis mine]”.³⁷² The case of China is illustrative here. China was among one of the first few nations to form a League of Nations Association under the leadership of the country’s elites. The Association, together with other related organizations formed between 1919 and 1920, made public its endorsement of the League, the League’s internationalist ideals and principles, and China’s membership in the League. However, when it came to actions, scholar Liang Pan maintains that China’s primary

³⁶⁹ Glenda Sluga. *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, p.43.

³⁷⁰ Patricia Calvin. *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p.6-7.

³⁷¹ Qtd. in Glenda Sluga. *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, p.61.

³⁷² Ibid., p.8.

purpose was to use the League as a forum to strengthen its *own* sovereign position in handling its relationships with the imperialistic powers entrenched on their territory, believing that cooperation with the League would help to promote sympathy in the international community for China's bid to abolish Western nations' prerogatives inside its territory.³⁷³

This intimate entwinement between the national and the international well illustrates Merdeka's own projection of Malaysian nationalism which, while promulgating official nationalism's more protectionist or conservative idea of nationhood, also *simultaneously* emphasized the need to keep its borders open to engage with other nations, be in tune with international trends and standards, and showcase itself to an audience from *without*. Similar to the League during the early postwar 1920s, undergirding Merdeka's proposal of nationalism for a post-1969 Malaysia in search of a new identity, is the idea that going international will introduce Malaysia to the (film) world as an equal, relevant player capable of representing self-interest, thus creating a sense of self-worth and self-affirmation that will refract back to the country as national pride in service of nationalism. Integration into the world system is here implicitly tantamount to (gaining and nurturing) recognition of self-determination. In this regard, the aforementioned reference to Hollywood, Japanese and Italian cinemas as examples to emulate is particularly instructive, for these were national cinemas that, at that time, grew in strength and power through amassing international regard and acclaim.³⁷⁴

Another striking resemblance between Merdeka and the League is the way the company positioned itself as a worthy leader in nationalizing Malay(sian) cinema by leveraging on its standing as an international organization i.e. its ability to effect internationalization. The

³⁷³ Liang Pan, "National Internationalism in Japan and China", in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Calvin eds. *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p.179.

³⁷⁴ As Tom O'Regan describes, "The American national cinema is in its reach the most international of national cinemas"; "...[Hollywood] appears to be the only national cinema which is not a national cinema. But Hollywood movies do not disavow their 'Americanness'; rather their Americanness just does not typically appear to be what they are principally about". See Tom O'Regan. *Australian National Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p.42 and Tom O'Regan, "Too Popular By Far: On Hollywood's International Popularity", *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol.5, Issue 2 (1992): p.328.

League's nation-embracing liberal internationalism, as Patricia Calvin explains, has its roots in Jeremy Bentham's notion of "international" as a term for laws that extended beyond the state, Immanuel Kant's vision of permanent peace among nations, and the emergence of non-governmental and international organizations dedicated to culture, communication, international standardization and peace in the late 19th century. It also contained "aspects of liberal (sometimes articulated as humanitarianism) imperialism redolent with a language of rights, notably the rights of states in the West, and their 'responsibilities' towards the rest of the world, whose access to rights and resources were curtailed and increasingly controlled".³⁷⁵ That is to say, at the same time as nations were the foundational units of this state-based international system, in spirit the internationalism endorsed by the League believed also in working towards certain shared goals of a common humanity. Alongside national interests, the League represented "the political ambitions of the world's population for equality, progress, peace and security and democratic representation", and eventually placed all societies of the world on "a single, shared continuum from the least to the most developed, on the same trajectory towards 'modernization'", having started off with a key economic aim of promoting free trade.³⁷⁶

The similarity I wish to highlight here between Merdeka and the League is less about what constitutes the perceived shared humanity goals and modernization telos than the overlapping of teleological and national discourses in their visions of internationalism. Recall that complementary to its support for official Malay nationalism, the Shaws declared it their mission to help Malaysian cinema to *catch up* with international progress and establish a foothold on the international stage. Throwing their weight around with the wealth of experience and resources they had, they made it known that the newly-formed bumiputera companies were

³⁷⁵ Patricia Calvin. *Securing the World Economy*, p.8.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.1 and p.8-9 and Glenda Sluga. *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, p.49.

unable to do what Merdeka could, which was to “lift” Malaysian cinema “up” to become on par with other national cinemas, both technologically and in terms of content and scope, as well as on the international stage through film festivals and diverse market links. Much like the League’s self-declared mission of raising “underdeveloped” states up to a “commonly-accepted” international standard, and not unlike the implied idea therein that not meeting those standards makes one a lesser nation, Merdeka’s self-positioning in the new bumiputera era as potential broker between the national and the international once again exemplifies the mechanism of internationalization *as* nationalization in its brand of nationalism.

A return to the topic of film festivals is in place here. As mentioned, a bait that Merdeka threw out was the promise that these new-style Merdeka films will be sent to the Asian and Asean Film Festivals as Malaysian representatives. This move not only reflected Merdeka’s vision of going beyond borders, it also appealed to nationalist sentiments for as nation-based events – in the sense that each participating entry represents their own nation (with the exception of Hong Kong which was then still a British colony) – these festivals provided an opportune platform for Malaysian cinema to assert itself through international recognition as part of its wider nation-(re)building project. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that international film festivals are crucial means of exhibition for national cinemas. Being major meeting points for filmmakers and potential buyers from various parts of the world, festivals allow national cinemas to be brought out of their domestic markets, potentially expanding their distribution and exhibition circuits thus helping to better sustain the industry while, at the same time, showcase each’s own specificity as distinctive national cinemas to a watching world.³⁷⁷ Partaking in international film festivals also strengthens identity-building in the aforementioned sense that integration into an international system contributes to recognition of

³⁷⁷ Stephen Crofts, “Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s”, in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemsen eds. *Theorizing National Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 2006, p.44 and p.53.

a nation's legitimacy and worth. This is particularly so in the case of *The Last Wish*, for it represented "the first time Malaysia will send a feature film in colour and in scope [befitting] for a country budding in science and technology (kali pertamanya Malaysia, sebagai sebuah negara yang sedang membangun dari segi sains dan teknologi akan mengirimkan sebuah filem feature yang bertatawarna dan scope seperti yang dilakukan oleh anggota sahabtanya dalam pertubuhan itu)".³⁷⁸ Speaking about this move, Merdeka further explains, "we hope that the films we send will raise the name of Malaysia in world cinema (kita yakin filem pengiriman kita itu akan menaikkan nama negara Malaysia dalam bidang perfileman se dunia)".³⁷⁹ With such framing, Merdeka clearly intended to lure the support of nationalists by demonstrating its ability to lift the new national cinema to equal footing with the rest and to progress towards the festivals' shared goals of promoting unity and elevating production standards of Asian cinema.

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Importantly, that this promise could even be made in the first place was likely because the Shaws were, themselves, the founding members of the Asian Film Festival. Co-organized in 1953 by Daiei Studio head Nagata Masaichi and Run Run Shaw, the Asian Film Festival (originally named Southeast Asian Film Festival) was held annually among its members, becoming arguably the most prestigious film festival in the region at that time.³⁸¹ Throughout the 1960s, the Shaws used the Festival to promote its annual releases and as a platform for coproduction deals, seeking to bolster the company's reputation in Southeast Asia.³⁸² It is thus not surprising that out of all the films made in Malaysia at that time by bumiputera companies,

³⁷⁸ "Permintaan Terakhir ke Jakarta Dalam 'Pesta Filem ASEAN ke Empat'", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.1 and M. Ismail Abdullah, "Filem Dokumentari RTS untuk Pesta Asean", *Berita Harian*, 10 November 1974, p.15.

³⁷⁹ "Permintaan Terakhir ke Jakarta Dalam 'Pesta Filem ASEAN ke Empat'", *Filem Majallah*, No.176, November 1974, p.1

³⁸⁰ Poshek Fu, "Introduction: The Shaw Brothers Diasporic Cinema", in Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brother and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008, p.11.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p.11.

³⁸² Lee Sangjoon, "The Asia Foundation's Motion-Picture Project and the Cultural Cold War in Asia", *Film History*, Vol.29, Issue 2 (2017): p.128.

it was instead the Merdeka films with their eclectic mix of Chinese elements that represented Malaysia consecutively in the festival at the height of its ethnonationalism. In this light, Merdeka's tailored-for-festivals films were a display of prowess on the company's part, an exhibition of its ability to contribute to nation-building in a uniquely international way against the dominant flow of official nationalism and rising bumiputera enmity directed towards them.

Progressive Muslim (PM) thought

The picture might become clearer when the personas in the Merdeka films are juxtaposed against those in their Hong Kong counterparts. Characterization of the parental figures in particular is strikingly different across the two sets of films. Consider, for instance, the scenes where the protagonist's grandparents appear in *Susanna* and *The Last Wish*. They first appear when Shanshan/Salina's future stepfather, Zhengting/Imran, conveyed to his parents his wish of marrying Shanshan/Salina's birth mother. In an authoritative, stoic fashion, Shanshan's grandfather replied:

I agree to your marriage, but I have to say a few things in advance. There are very few people in our Lin family, and Zhengting is our only male child. I hope you can give birth to more children after the marriage so that we can carry on our family line.

你們的婚事我同意，不過有幾件事我要說在頭裡。我們林家人丁不旺，正廳是一脈單傳，希望妳過門之後能開枝散葉，好傳宗接代。

In accordance with the Chinese concept of “carrying on the family line (傳宗接代)”, this is essentially a gender-specific demand made by Shanshan's grandfather for a grandson (on top

of producing more grandchildren in general) as a soft condition for allowing Shanshan's mother into the family (過門). Also worth noting is that, throughout this scene, Shanshan's grandmother is positioned in the background, playing only a passive role reacting quietly to her husband's speech (see Fig. 33).



Figure 33. Shanshan's stepfather telling his father that he wishes to marry Shanshan's birth mother in *Susanna*

Now compare this with the dialogue from the same scene in *The Last Wish*:

Grandfather: Actually, the two of you do not have to worry. If you two have already decided, then just go ahead with it! What do you say, Mother [referring to Salina's grandmother]?

Grandmother: Yes indeed, Bang haji.

[...]

Grandfather: But remember, Imran, I want to give you some advice.

Imran: What advice, Father?

Grandfather: It's not that I am against family planning, [but] don't do it (lit. don't proceed)! I wish only for one *grandchild*.

Grandmother: Hey, Abang haji! You speak without tact!

Grandfather: Hey! *We are modern people!* What is there to be wishy-washy about?

Grandmother: If that is the case, then shall we hold the wedding next week, Imran?

Imran: Yes, Mother.

Grandfather: [laughs] Good! But no Pill! No system! If you want to go on a honeymoon, go to Port Dickson!

Grandfather: Yang sebenarnya, kau berdua tak payah mita kebenaran kita lagi. Kalau kau berdua sudah bersetuju, teruskan saja lah! Apa kata maknya?

Grandmother: Memang betual, Bang haji.

[...]

Grandfather: Tapi ingat Imran, aku nak bagi kau satu nasihat.

Imran: Apa tu pak?

Grandfather: Aku ini bukannya yang anti-rancangan keluarga, jangan teruskan! Aku cuma berhajat satu *cucu* jadilah.

Grandmother: Alah! Abang haji ni! Cakap tak selindung bunyi lagi lah!

Grandfather: Hei! Kita orang moden! Apa yang nak selindung-lindung lagi, ya Saadiah?

Grandmother: Kalau gitu, tetaplah minggu depan lah ya, Imran?

Imran: Yeh Mak.

Grandfather: [laughs] Bagus! Tapi no Pill! No system! Kalau mahu berhoneyymoon, pergi ke Port Dickson!

The differences between the two versions are vast and clear. The grandfather figure in *The Last Wish* is painted in a much more approachable light. He is full of smiles, speaks in a much more

tempered tone and, instead of more grandchildren and a grandson in particular, requests for just one *grandchild* (satu cucu), gender unspecified. Exuding quite the same poise and mannerism, Salina's grandmother has her own voice and her views are being sought after and respected. She gives suggestions proactively and speaks her mind, suggesting a wedding date for her son and retorting her husband in jest (see Fig. 34). These changes made to the Malay version render the gender relationship embodied therein closer to mutual respect and, indeed, to equality as opposed to the clear Confucius-style patriarchy that underpins the corresponding scene in *Susanna*.



Figure 34. Salina's amiable grandparents in *The Last Wish*

It is completely justifiable to attribute this difference to Malay customs (*adat*), for, as mentioned in the previous chapter, bilateralism is at the core of Malay *adat* thought. However, a crucial self-identification in the dialogue above points to another reading. Salina's grandfather's declaration – “we are modern people!” – directs the viewer to interpret the counteractive force against dogmatism and gender inequality in this scene as one of modernity, or rather, a modern sensibility that embraces broad principles of liberalism such as individual freedom and equality. Yet, at the same time, this endorsement of liberal modernity necessarily comes hand in hand with Islamic faith, even if the two are often taken (at surface level) to be antagonistic contrasts with each other.³⁸³ Islamic inflections subtly exist in this short scene,

³⁸³ The relationship between liberal modernity/liberalism and Islam makes for a large, complex discussion that extends beyond the scope of this paper. One way to see it in the context of Malaysia, and that is also arguably

with Salina's grandmother referring to her husband as "Abang haji" – an indication that he has performed his Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, signifying his religiosity. This important detail adds a qualifier to the grandfather's – and more broadly, the film's – embrace of liberalism, shaping a Muslim subjectivity that is receptive to liberal modernity.

In this sense, it is my contention that internationalist nationalism, or the entwinement between international and national, universal and particular, is also exhibited and endorsed here in a form that resembles what is now known as "progressive Islam" or "progressive Muslim (PM) thought"³⁸⁴ – a critical school of Islam thought that challenges (neo-)traditional and puritan Islamic hegemonic discourses or commonly employed dichotomies on issues such as modernity, secularism, human rights, gender equality and justice, democracy, *and is committed to pluralism, social justice and particularly gender justice* (hence affirming Islamic feminism), a belief in the inherent dignity of every human being as a carrier of God's spirit (and thus that every human being has equal dignity, moral worth, and moral agency – a view thought to be deeply embedded within the Qur'anic worldview itself), as well as epistemological and

close to the principles propagated by the films, is as Norani Othman has deftly and cogently articulated: "The issue here is not that Islam and democracy are incompatible, but that Islamic globalization tendencies and political aspirations have been dominated not by emancipatory impulses but by a fundamentalist ideology that contains many archaic, pre-modern interpretations of the public and social role of religion in society and state". See Norani Othman, "Globalization, Islamic Resurgence, and State Autonomy: The Response of the Malaysian State to 'Islamic Globalization'", in Joan M. Nelson, Jacob Meerman and Abdul Rahman Embong eds. *Globalization and National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2008, p.258.

³⁸⁴ Although Progressive Islam is now largely associated with a Euro-American premise, that is, the aftermath of the 9/11 incident, it is also worthwhile to note that scholar Sharifah Munirah Alatas had suggested that the idea of it actually emerged in the Malay world back in 1954, raised by Malaysian scholar, Syed Hussein Alatas. See Sharifah Munirah Alatas, "The Misunderstood Concepts of Progressive and Liberal Islam", *FreeMalaysiaToday*, 6 December 2019. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2019/12/06/the-misunderstood-concepts-of-progressive-and-liberal-islam/>. Accessed 21 July 2020. It must also be highlighted that by referring to PM here, I am not equating the films point by point with this theology. I hesitate, for example, to label the films as "left-leaning", though Progressive Muslim thinkers tend to take on that stance. The parallelism is here made because there are several crucial points of resemblance between the two, in particular with respect to their treatment of gender relations and the compatibility between liberalism/liberal modernity with Islam (as opposed to the common aversion to the "liberal" idea in traditionalist Islam), that renders PM a salient analytical tool to deepen our understanding of the films. It also bears mentioning that "Progressive Islam" is invoked here instead of its close neighbour, "Liberal Islam", for the same reason PM thinkers once put forth: "many progressive Muslims also do not agree with the connotation of liberal as 'loose, not strict,' as if progressives are only *loosely* Muslim, and they can be progressive only because they are not *strictly* following Islamic teachings." See Omid Safi, "Introduction: The Times They Are A-Changin' – A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism", in Omid Safi ed. *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2003, p.17.

methodological openness and fluidity (or “epistemological progressivism”, as scholar Adis Duderjia puts it). It brings about and strengthens multifaceted and dynamic aspects of inherited Islamic tradition, *resists its reductionism and exclusivist, sometimes violent, interpretation* founded on patriarchy, misogyny, and religious bigotry, classism, sexism and racism, and is *engaged in permanent dialogue with progressive agendas of other cultures*, drawing inspiration particularly from liberatory movements such as liberation theology and secular humanism. Importantly, Progressive Muslims emphasize God’s universal nature and the universality of the faith itself through demonstrating God’s concern for *humanity in general*, which then leads to an embrace of “the humane vision of pluralism” and global justice built upon *reasoned* plurality of truths (rather than on radical forms of postmodern pluralism or relativism), as well as the conviction that to be counted as “real believers” is to be responsible for the well-being and dignity of all human beings.³⁸⁵ This stands in contrast with both official nationalism and dominant strands of Islamic resurgence movements (*dakwah*) of the 1970s-80s, which advocated for a more hegemonic, conservative/revivalist, purist and dogmatic interpretation of the Islamic faith, the latter seeking in particular to implement Islamic values in social institutions such as the family, public morality, and the general lifestyle of Muslims in Malaysia against what was perceived as “moral decay” caused by Western-style social modernization.³⁸⁶ In fact, such openness to modern liberal thought recalls, to some extent,

³⁸⁵ Another important concept of progress in Progressive Islam is that it subscribes to certain theological, moral, and ethical principles that the community agrees ought to guide actions of those who believe in the Islamic message and which are considered to be in accordance with the foundational Islamic textual sources. These imperatives are considered to be applicable to *all humanity*, since they are premised on the belief in pre-theoretical and pre-conventional concepts of truth and justice that do not presuppose faith. Engaging in a quintessential “multiple critique”, progressive Muslim scholars are also relentlessly scrutinizing *all* forces and structures responsible for perpetuation of oppression and injustice regardless of whether these emanate from outside or within of the Islamic tradition and irrespective of the race, ethnic or gender-based identities of their victims; Progressive Muslim thinkers aim to theoretically affirm the conceptual compatibility between Islamic doctrine and the modern human rights scheme. See Adis Duderjia, “Progressive Islam”, *Tikkun*, Vol.33, Issue 1/2 (2018): p.66-71; Adis Duderjia, “Progressive Islam and Progressive Muslim Thought”, in *Oxford Bibliographies: Islamic Studies*, 27 October 2016, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0230.xml>. Accessed 15 July 2020 and Omid Safi, “Introduction: The Times They Are A-Changin’ – A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism”, p.2-29.

³⁸⁶ The *dakwah* movements of the 1970s-80s in Malaysia are often thought to be antagonistic with the official nation-building project that involved modernization, but they coincided in this shared inclination towards social

aspects of the earlier ASAS 50 – the Malay nationalist organization that Jamil was once a part of in the 1950s-60s, which itself embodied ideals of internationalist nationalism though they were not phrased that way then: “ASAS 50 mediated the challenges of the impact of the West... by taking up old debates on self-improvement, Islam and the position of women”.³⁸⁷ Their objectives were: “to free Malay society from anachronistic elements in its culture that obstructed modernity and progress; to nurture intellectual awareness among the *ra’ayat* [community or people]; and to foster Malay nationalism through the promotion of Malay literature and language”.³⁸⁸

Such a vision is repeated and reinforced in subsequent scenes involving Salina’s grandparents, and again, it is through comparison that the proclivity for a subjectivity reminiscent of a Progressive Muslim further unveils. In *Susanna*, at a friend’s baby shower party, Shanshan’s grandfather, unwilling to let go of the baby boy, says sarcastically to Susan’s mother (who has yet to bear a child after eight years of marriage):

I arrived early today. There are no boys in our family, so I came here early to see somebody else’s baby boy [...] We only have girls in our family, they will all marry out and leave the house (lit. become depreciating goods) when they grow up.

and cultural (neo)conservatism. The fact that many *dakwah* leaders were NEP scholarship holders who returned from overseas studies to enter the civil service further brought the two closer together, infusing Islamizing elements into national policy-making and challenging the secularization of the ruling party. By the 1990s, intolerant political Islam can be said to have taken root in Malaysia. See Norani Othman, “Globalization, Islamic Resurgence, and State Autonomy: The Response of the Malaysian State to ‘Islamic Globalization’”, in Joan M. Nelson, Jacob Meerman and Abdul Rahman Embong eds. *Globalization and National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2008, p.241-272. See also, Goh Beng Lan, “Dilemma of Progressive Politics in Malaysia: Islamic Orthodoxy versus Human Rights”, in Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn eds. *Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia*. Singapore and Kyoto: National University of Singapore Press and Kyoto University Press, 2012, for an account of how this evolved into the Mahathir era.

³⁸⁷ T. N. Harper. *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.302.

³⁸⁸ Terence Chong, “Manufacturing Authenticity: The Cultural Production of National Identities in Singapore”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.45, Issue 4 (2011): p.883.

早來了，我們家沒有男孩子，早點來看看人家的也好【…】哪像我們家都是女孩子，大了還不是賠本貨。

Shortly after the party, Shanshan's grandfather called for a family meeting, announcing that he is going to find a concubine for his son so that he can produce a grandson to carry on the family line:

Grandfather: You are already almost forty years-old, yet you don't even have a son, who can the Lin family line depend on? The saying goes, there are three major behaviors of being unfilial, the foremost being not producing descendants to carry on the family line. I want to find a concubine for Zhengting.

Shanshan's Father (Zhenɡting): Father, although I don't have a son, but I already have two daughters. Our family is happy this way, why do you have to bring someone else in? This is going to wreck the happiness of our family. Besides...

Grandfather: Say no more, I have already decided.

Shanshan's Father: But I cannot agree to it.

Grandfather: Hmph, unless you don't acknowledge me as your father anymore.

爺爺：你今年都快四十了，連個兒子都沒有，我們林家的香火靠誰呀？不孝有三，無後為大，我要替正庭納妾。

珊珊爸爸：爸，我雖然沒有兒子，可是我已經有兩個女兒，我們一家過得快快樂樂的，你又何必多弄一個人回來呢？破壞我們家庭的幸福，再說……

爺爺：你用不著這麼說了，我決定這麼做了。

珊珊爸爸：可是我不能答應。

爺爺：除非你不要認我做爸爸。

Once again, all throughout this scene, the grandmother, together with Shanshan, her mother and her sister this time, sit quietly at one side as the conflict between the men unfolds (see Fig. 35). This gender divide would only (seemingly) be resolved at the resolution point of the film when, faced with his dying granddaughter, Shanshan's grandfather finally accepts that females can be equals with their male counterparts and apologizes for his gender bias:

Shanshan: [holding on to her final breath] Let's combine Father's and Mother's names together to name the baby Qiuting, is that okay?

Father: Yes, we will definitely use that name.

Grandfather: Shanshan, hold on... I will make the call, and give my granddaughter a name. I have favoured boys and belittled girls in the past, now I realize my mistake. To have such a wonderful granddaughter like you is way better than having a boy. I hope the little girl will grow up to become like you – smart and filial. I shall use this name [Shanshan] to remember you.

珊珊：就用你跟媽媽的名字合起來，叫秋廳，好不好？

爸爸：好，一定取這個名字。

爺爺：珊珊，你等一等……我做主，替我的小孫女取個名字。過去我重男輕女，現在我知道錯了。有你這麼乖的孫女，比男孩子強多了。希望小妹妹將來也能像你一樣，聰明孝順。我要用這個名字來紀念你。



Figure 35. The “concubine scene” in *Susanna*

Undeviating from the first impression he had made at his first appearance, these scenes continue to shape Shanshan’s grandfather as an obsolete patriarch through and through. From the microaggressions displayed at the party, to the insistence on finding a concubine for his son, to the final “repentance” act, gender inequality, male authority and cultural hegemony are embodied and perhaps, perpetuated, under the skin of “Chinese tradition”. Even the final act of remorse is, in my opinion, a weak attempt at addressing the “mistake” (in Grandfather’s words), as acceptance is herein founded more on personal guilt (faced with Shanshan’s death) and on merit (a girl can be better than a boy if she is smart and nice) than on an understanding of principles such as equality and fairness. Indeed, up till the end, the grandfather continues to exercise his exclusive authority as “(male) head of the family”, unilaterally naming his newborn grandchild “Shanshan”, despite his dying granddaughter’s last wish.

This is not so much the case in its Malay counterpart. Corresponding to the above baby shower scene is a conversation in *The Last Wish* between Salina’s parents and grandparents in a room during Salina’s birthday party. Instead of making use of the context to make sarcastic comments about childbearing (note also that the baby shower party has been changed to Salina’s coming-of-age birthday celebration), and instead of casting the burden of childbearing

solely on the woman (i.e. Salina's mother), Salina's grandparents relate back to the issue of family planning:

Grandmother: Ah ah! If I'm not wrong, it's been nine years since you married Saadiah, is that right, Imran?

Salina's Father: Yes, Mother.

Grandfather: Is it true that you are not doing any family planning? I don't see any signs of Saadiah getting pregnant.

Salina's Father: Perhaps the time has not come yet. Take it easy, Father.

Grandfather: Hmm. I'm hoping to get a grandson. At this rate, I won't get one before I die!

Grandmother: Ah ah! Kalau tak salah sudah sembilan tahun kau kahwin dengan Saadiah, ya Imran?

Salina's Father: Yeh, Mak

Grandfather: Betul ke kau tak menjalankan rancangan keluarga? Aku tak Nampak tanda yang Saadiah tu mengandung.

Salina's Father: Belum ditakdirkan lagi... Agaknya lah, Pak.

Grandfather: Hmm. Aku ni mengharapkan dapat seorang cucu lelaki. Kalau begini nampaknya, sampai mati pun aku tak dapat seorang cucu!

The "concubine" scene that followed this in *Susanna* was completely absent in *The Last Wish*, and the next time Salina's grandparents made an appearance is, similarly, at the resolution point of the film, when with her last bout of breath Salina asks her grandfather if he would be disappointed if the newborn child is not a boy. To this, Salina's grandfather replies, "We cannot

be frustrated. We must be grateful that your mother gave birth and is safe. Every child she gives is a blessing (Kita tak boleh kecewa, cu. Kita mesti bersyukur kepada tuhan yang ibuma telah bersalin dan selamat. Anak yang dia beri pun satu rahmat)’’.

The humanizing touch in Salina’s grandfather’s behavior and speech is apparent. Emphasis is here given to Salina’s mother, whose safety is being acknowledged as priority, her act of giving birth given due appreciation, thus recognizing her as a unique individual rather than a mere child-bearing tool. Notice also, the peculiar use of the words “cannot” and “must be” instead of “are not” and “are” respectively here as a reply. In contrast to the rather self-serving statement made by Shanshan’s grandfather at the end about the gender of the baby, the use of these words is instructive here of a staunch belief in certain principles that guided Salina’s grandfather response and the statement which followed, “every child is a blessing”, again bespeaks an Islamic faith that does not contradict with modern liberal ideals. Furthermore, that his reply is given not as an expression of repentance or remorse, but as a reiteration of beliefs and principles further strengthens the believability of Salina’s grandfather’s character as a “modern” subject – or more specifically, resembling of a progressive Muslim – by virtue of achieving consistency and coherence in terms of characterization.

This overall character evaluation is particularly important as it helps to make sense of the sudden mention of a “grandson (cucu lelaki)” in the dialogue above between Salina’s parents and grandparents. If, all things considered, throughout the film Salina’s grandfather’s faith-based progressiveness is proven to be as central to his characterization as Confucius-style patriarchy is to Shanshan’s grandfather, this sudden expression of gender preference represents a narrative incoherence, an unexpected glitch, that resulted presumably from the cultural adaptation of a Chinese story to a Malay one – and a Malay one that champions specific ideals at that. A key point of conflict in the source narrative, the inclusion of this gender-specific demand is perhaps necessary since the overarching narrative structure remains unchanged; to

remove this detail is to significantly alter the story arc – a task conceivably deemed to be too much of a hassle for a project that evidently banks on the convenience and swiftness of a film remake. In this light then, as much as this perhaps inevitable “glitch” compromised the internal logic of the film, in an uncanny way it also illuminates the unique values encapsulated in the Malay version, albeit unintentionally, by provoking reflection through the presence of disjuncture.

Internationalist nationalism also comes through in a Malay-ized performance of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Last Wish*. To redeem herself, Salina agrees to act as Juliet for a charity theatre performance (the designated play in *Susanna* is a Chinese classic – *Dream of the Red Chamber*). This performance is unique in that, firstly, a Malay classic equivalent of *Dream of the Red Chamber* was not selected, and secondly, instead of English costumes befitting of the Shakespearean era, the characters are donned instead in traditional Malay costumes, in one scene even performing the traditional Malay martial arts, Silat (see Fig. 36). This choice and adaptation style – on a meta level reflective also of how the Malay writers adapted the Mandarin film itself – once again demonstrates a disregard for purism, opting instead for cultural hybridization. If official national culture is defined by Malay – and I would add, orthodox – tradition, the rendition of Malayness here clearly gives this definition its own spin.



Figure 36. Malay-ized *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Last Wish*

The same ideals also thread through *The Restless Youth* and *My Dear Child*. In *The Restless Youth*, Anita's father, played by Jamil Sulong himself, made a significant remark to his children that reveals his progressive Islam inclination: "I want you to be liberal but you must also obey the teachings of our religion". This characterization is again markedly different from its Hong Kong counterpart, which presents the same character as an absent, unopinionated parent. In *My Dear Child*, a significant change is made to the role of the protagonist's employer. Whereas in its Hong Kong counterpart, the employer plays only a functional role restricted to supervision and mentoring at the workplace, ceasing to appear in the later half of the film, and the protagonist's children are adopted by their birth grandmother at the end, in *My Dear Child*, the employer-employee relationship is given much more depth, framing them as friends who would have conversations outside the workplace and, crucially, when nobody seemed to be able to provide for the children anymore, it was the employer who reappeared to adopt all five of them. This characterization made the employer out to be a fair, compassionate and righteous boss, making a case for liberalism and its close cousin humanitarianism as much as for Islamic values, particularly through the act of adopting. By replacing the children's grandmother with the employer as the one who ultimately adopts the children, the expression of kindness now transcends the boundaries of kinship and stems instead from a humanist anti-classism aspiration embedded in progressive Muslim subjectivity. The same can be read from the actions of the protagonist himself, for in contrast to dying in an accident while trying to rescue the new clothes he had bought for his children at a mining site (*The Younger Generation*), the protagonist in *My Dear Child* sacrificed himself to save the life of his employer.

An alternative proposal

The importance of detailing this Merdeka brand of nationalism as such lies in recognizing another form of “nation-of-intent” arising from a position that was unable to comply or accept wholeheartedly, the dominant Malay-based, State-sponsored official nationalism during this period of change. Merdeka’s internationalist nationalism represents a “nation-of-intent” – “alternative nation-state paradigms being worked out at various levels informing the realpolitik in Malaysia” or “framework of ideas and actions ready to be implemented when the opportunity arises” – created in the realm of cinema, and was Merdeka’s strategy used to carve out a space for themselves as the only Chinese-owned Malay studio left in Malaysia that was, furthermore, being deemed as the anti-thesis of Malay(sian) cinema at that time.³⁸⁹ Notwithstanding the contentious methods undertaken, the way Merdeka threw out its own brand of nationalism in order to fit itself back into the overall nationalizing project reminds us of Choi Jungboon’s point made in his rather acerbic essay on national cinema: “whether or not one can place the label ‘national film’ on certain film text, therefore, belongs to the realm of discursive authority and contest”.³⁹⁰

At this point a discussion on the very concept of national cinema is finally due. Given the above information about Merdeka’s transborder tendencies, it seems equally reasonable to argue that, instead of contributing to national cinema, post-1974 Merdeka may perhaps be more appropriately categorized as transnational or global cinema. The position I am taking is that it is *one type of* national cinema that we are talking about here. Indeed, if in the field of international relations, nationalism and internationalism are usually understood as contrasting opposites, in film studies this is very much less so. Since Andrew Higson’s influential paper,

³⁸⁹ A. B. Shamsul, “In Search of ‘Bangsa Malaysia’: Politics of Identity in Multiethnic Malaysia”, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, Vol.27, Issue 2 (1995), p.59 and p.61.

³⁹⁰ Choi Jungboon, “National Cinema: An Anachronistic Delirium?”, *The Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol.16, Issue 2 (2011): p.187.

“The Concept of National Cinema”, many have argued, correctly in my view, that the very concept of national cinema ontologically includes a consideration of the transnational. While there are some who argue that the focus of national cinema, whether economic or cultural, should be placed within the domestic boundaries of the nation, others acknowledge that national cinema is inevitably defined against or alongside others to achieve nation branding through gaining international visibility and asserting difference, maintain a viable and sustainable market (particularly fighting against Hollywood), or simply because the Self is seen as intrinsically engaged with Other national cinemas in a dialectic way.³⁹¹ Choi Jinhee’s useful delineation of three different approaches to national cinema is helpful here. A territorial approach, explains Choi, identifies national cinema by virtue of its nation of origin, refers to a body of films produced and shot within a certain nation-state, and is fundamentally determined by territorial boundaries, whereas a functional approach identifies instances of national cinema based on what a film embodies at the level of text and how it functions within a nation-state. Separately, a relational approach defines national cinema in terms of product differentiation, that is, how it differs from Hollywood cinema and other national cinemas, and takes into consideration both nation-bound and transnational film practices which filmmakers in any given nation-state engage in, thus including in its oeuvre films aimed for a domestic audience

³⁹¹ On the relationship between the national and international in theorizations of national cinema, see, for instance, John Hill, “The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production”, in Duncan J. Petrie ed. *New Questions of British Cinema*. London: BFI Press, 1992, p.10-21; Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema”, p.41-2; Andrew Higson, “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema”, in Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie eds. *Cinema and Nation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.63 and p.66; Bruno Lovric, “From Film Stories to National Soft Power: Policies and Film Content of South Korea, Japan and China”, in Magnan-Park, Aaron Han Joon, Gina Marchetti, Tan See Kam eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Asian Cinema*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p.611; Choi Jungbong, “National Cinema: An Anachronistic Delirium?”, p.187-9; Roy Armes. *Third World Filmmaking and The West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p.306-310; Paul Willeman. *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and BFI Press, 1994, p.212; Thomas Elsaesser, “Chronicle of a Death Retold: In Search of the European Art Movie”, p.166-7 and Tom O’Regan. Tom O’Regan. *Australian National Cinema*, p.44.

as well as those that are more internationally circulated, leading us to reconsider the false dichotomy between these two sets of industrial modes – national and transnational cinema.³⁹²

It is to this last approach that the Shaws' proposal comes closest to. No doubt the territorial and functional accounts of national cinema do also account for certain aspects of Merdeka's post-1974 operations, since deliberate steps were clearly taken to align itself with official nationalism, but – and this is the point I hope to have made clear by now – what really gave Merdeka's brand of nationalism a distinctive touch is its added emphasis on the relational aspect of nationalizing a film industry. In relation to this, as a final note the financial aspect in this brand of nationalism must be disclosed. Make no mistake that at the end of the day, Merdeka was a commercial multinational company (in today's terms) primarily invested in profit-making.³⁹³ Playing the double cards of nationalism *and* internationalism by banking on their accumulated wealth of resources and experience not only created an opportunity for the old Chinese monopoly to stay in the business, it also promised to preserve the established transnational network upon which the company's mode of capitalism had always depended on, even before nations became the norm. Indeed, stripping away delusions of grandeur surrounding the concept, Higson stresses that while histories of national cinema may be histories of crisis, conflict and resistance, they are inescapably also histories of a business seeking a secure footing in the marketplace, enabling the maximisation of an industry's profits while at the same time bolstering a nation's cultural standing.³⁹⁴ Seen in this light, in the final analysis Merdeka's internationalist nationalism, its post-1974 revamp, can be understood more as a rebranding of its original character than an entirely new formulation altogether. A company

³⁹² Choi Jinhee, "National Cinema, The Very Idea", in Choi Jinhee and Carroll Noel, eds. *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p.314.

³⁹³ In this regard, this moment in Malay film history where a transnational film studio seeks to find its footing against the backdrop of internationalization provides an interesting case study to Chris Berry's theory on the difference between "transnational cinema" and "international cinema". See Chris Berry, "What is Transnational Cinema? Thinking from the Chinese Situation", *Transnational Cinemas*, Vol.1, Issue 2 (2010): p.111-127.

³⁹⁴ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", p.37.

helmed by capitalists ever so attuned to market preferences and international prospects, it is perhaps unsurprising that this is the position – the strategy – that Merdeka would choose to take, to survive in times like this.

To close this section, it is timely here to return to Khoo Gaik Cheng's evaluation of post-studio era Malay cinema: "[T]he mainstream Malay film industry... since the fall of the studio system in the 1960s, has ridden the ethnonationalist wave of the NEP and its cultural policies. The film industry is still regarded as a site of ethnonationalism, one whose necessary existence or *raison d'être* is based on reflecting and perpetuating 'Malaysian' culture, defined narrowly by members of the privileged ethnic majority as Malay".³⁹⁵ In contrast to the more self-contained traits of particularism, protectionism and conservatism embedded within Malaysia's official nationalism and Malay(sian) cinema at that time or, as a critic puts it, "the obsessive communalism that has traditionally defined Malay nationalism", Merdeka's brand of internationalist nationalism was built instead upon the intersectionality between the international and the national, manifesting also in a form reminiscent of progressive Islam, in this way simultaneously propagating and counteracting the burgeoning force of Malay nationalism in the scene.³⁹⁶ This, I contend, was how the "old Chinese monopoly" negotiated for a space to survive under such unfavourable conditions.

³⁹⁵ Khoo Gaik Cheng, "Urban Geography as Pretext", p.38.

³⁹⁶ Diane K. Mauzy, "From Malay Nationalism to a Malaysian Nation?", in Lowell W. Barrington ed., *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006, p.51; Xu Defa (許德發), "Xianzheng Yu Zuqun Jiuge: Malaiya Zhixian Guocheng Jiqi Zuqun Yinsu (憲政與族群糾葛：馬來亞制憲過程及其族群因素)", in Ngoi Guat Peng (魏月萍) and Show Yingxin (蘇穎欣) eds. *Revisiting Malaya: Political and Historical Thoughts* (重返马来亚：政治与历史思想). Kuala Lumpur: Inter-Asia School and Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2017, p.193 and Yao Shou Cheng, "After the Malay Dilemma: The Modern Malay and Cultural Logics of 'National Cosmopolitanism' in Malaysia", *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol.18, Issue 2 (2003): p.221.

An act of passing

Having sketched out in detail Merdeka's proposed, alternative vision for the future of Malay(sian) cinema, at this point it is necessary to reiterate that in no way am I invested in fighting for the Shaws' case. In delineating Merdeka's version of a Malay(sian) cinema, I do not profess to provide an assessment of this version's merits, nor am I making an evaluation on whether or not the Chinese-owned studio – a fragment of Malay(sian) cinema's immediate past at this historical juncture – should be afforded greater survival space as Merdeka would probably have hoped for. These call for a separate analysis that exceeds the scope of this dissertation. What I do find meaningful and important, however, is in re-presenting this vision, with its constituent ideals and technicalities, as another possibility of what Malay(sian) cinema could have been. Representing how the "old Chinese monopoly" restructured *itself* during a time of restructuration/nationalization, the production of Merdeka new-style films and its attendant politics form a narrative that significantly troubles and complicates the by now rather oversimplified "breaking Chinese monopoly" motif in narratives of Malay(sian) cinema's transitional 1970s. However unpopular and contentious its existence was, the trajectory that Merdeka rather deviantly inserted into the blueprint of post-studio era Malay(sian) cinema confers wider scope and a renewed imagination on our current understanding of the transformation of Malay cinema as a cultural industry, as well as the beginnings of Malaysian cinema as a national cinema. It prompts us to rethink, more rigorously, how the industry dealt with and defined itself against this "foreign" Other at this critical juncture, as well as the possible legacies it may have left, given that Merdeka essentially stood not just as an ethnic Other to an increasingly ethnocentric film industry, but also as a complex *temporal* Other to it,

which Malay(sian) cinema had – and arguably still has – to both disavow and acknowledge, since at that point it embodied the cinema’s past, present and (potential) future all at once.

Perhaps one way to do this is to consider the principle behind what Merdeka – which became “foreign” at this point – did, in order to survive. At the end of the day, what Merdeka had tried to do with its introduction of internationalist nationalism can perhaps be interpreted fundamentally as an act of “passing” (borrowing a term from sociology and critical race theory). According to Nicole Rousseau, three levels of passing can be discerned. In the context of race, “[a]t the basic level of passing, an individual might occasionally accept the mistaken assumption that she or he is in fact white”. On the other hand, “[t]he fundamental level of passing suggests a complete transformation of individuals whereby they actually cast off their black identity and reality and replace it with a white identity and reality. The adjustments made on this level are not merely cosmetic. Instead, individuals must make profound changes in their thoughts, memories, beliefs, history, culture, language, politics, ethics, and so forth”. A complex level of passing, in comparison, “is more purposefully planned. [For example,] individuals might work on one side of town under the premise of being white, where they could earn money and advancement, or even attend a university as a white student. Yet when returning home at night or during holidays, they resume their black lives... [I]n order for individuals to navigate this dual reality, they must move seamlessly from one world into another, all the while keeping their two worlds... completely separate”.³⁹⁷

Swiftly becoming the minority and much hated Other in the industry, Merdeka *tried* to cross over and be accepted into the realm of Malaysian cinema, which it was denied entry of, by reinventing itself. What it did essentially amounted to a complex level of passing wherein Merdeka navigated dual realities, moving from one world to another in order to gain the

³⁹⁷ On the politics of passing, see, for example, Elaine K. Ginsberg, “Introduction: The Politics of Passing”, in Elaine K. Ginsberg ed., *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, p.1-18 and Nicole Rousseau, “Passing”, in John Stone et al. eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016.

freedoms and benefits – privileges – of being accepted into the dominant community, while still trying to keep the Merdeka and SB (HK) worlds, as well as the old studio and new bumiputera/independent eras, apart as best as possible to the public eye, so as to prevent potential backlash. Elements of its presumed “natural/original” identity as an old Chinese monopolistic studio player were disguised via deliberate, planned alterations and concealments, blurring the hard boundaries laid down by exclusivist ethnonationalism, thus attempting to pass off as friend instead of foe to the new Malay(sian) cinema. Ultimately, it was through such act of passing that the studio legitimized its unwelcome presence and counterintuitive cross-studio inter-ethnic practices during this time, in fact achieving some extent of success as evidenced by the films’ popularity and box-office results, albeit only for a short time.³⁹⁸ This understanding provides historical breadth that would hopefully benefit future discussions on the problem of (over)racialization that still plagues the industry and film history narratives today.

Conclusion

The 1970s was an unusually hostile decade for Merdeka Film Productions. Malay cinema in the peninsula came under the dual revolution of the bumiputera and the nation, its industrial foundation experiencing a fundamental shake-up. Being the only representative left of the preceding studio era and of that era’s characteristic Chinese dominance (being owned by the Shaws), the Chinese-owned Merdeka became the explicit Other against which the fledgling Malay(sian) cinema attempted to define itself. Yet, contrary to most accounts, this

³⁹⁸ Interestingly, this act of passing bears some similarities to the “Ali Baba” alliances formed in post-NEP Malaysia, in which Chinese businessmen formed alliances with Malay bumiputera partners. The latter contributes its political influence and connections whereas the former contributes its capital, skills and technical know-hows. This kind of partnership gave Chinese access to licenses and lucrative government contracts reserved for Bumiputeras (see Chin Yee Whah, “From Tin to Ali Baba’s Gold: The Evolution of Chinese Entrepreneurship in Malaysia”, *International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter*, Issue 45 (2007): p.18).

“Chinese monopoly” did not simply pull out of the scene in the 1970s. Instead, the company tried, albeit only for a short while, to adapt to the new environment by churning out new-style films resulting from a studio revamp in 1974 that gave rise to a brand new production formula.

These new-style films and the discourses constructed around them reflect a unique brand of nationalism – internationalist nationalism. Emphasis was given equally to both concepts of nationalism and internationalism through a combination of cover-ups and cosmeticizing, and border-crossing potentials were simultaneously emphasized and materialized. The mutually-effecting relationship between the two was further exercised and illuminated via the films’ entrance into film festivals, its underlying liberal ideals surfacing often in the form of a value system that comes close to progressive Islam in the films.

With this, Merdeka essentially created its own “nation-of-intent” in the realm of cinema, coming up with its own proposal of what Malaysia’s national cinema should/could be. No doubt this brand of nationalism diverged from the dominant official versions, nevertheless it was a (re)packaging, a “passing” strategy, that could potentially allow Merdeka to fit back into the reconfigured industry. In other words, internationalist nationalism was a vehicle with which Merdeka used to manoeuvre the hostile new landscape, to justify its continued existence and cross-studio practices. This was clearly an attempt made by Merdeka to carve out a survival space for itself against the mounting odds.

Interestingly, while it may seem like Merdeka was innovating to suit the local context, its advocacy for internationalist nationalism was actually rather conveniently founded on its old transnational model of capitalism – a fragment of the “past”, thus simultaneously sustaining and capitalizing on its old network and strengths, its accumulated wealth and resources, in creating this “newness” catered for a new audience, new market and a new set of sociopolitical conditions. In many ways, therefore, this is a brand of Malaysian national cinema that could arguably only be effected, or at least kickstarted, by studio veterans, the Shaws, at that time.

Perhaps this is precisely what made the attempt and Merdeka itself so contentious and politically charged at this historical juncture. Overall, the stark existence of Merdeka and its “Malayised Hong Kong films” clearly show that the epochal shift in Malay(sian) cinema was not simply precipitated by a clean departure of the old Chinese monopoly. There involved a much more complex transborder recalibration of power, resources and imaginations, providing points for thought and reflection that remain salient for the industry even beyond this crucial stage of transition.

Chapter 4

Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *Gong Tau* Films and the “Cinematic Tourist Gaze”

The two preceding chapters examined Malay films produced with Hong Kong intervention. This chapter now turns to look at the Malay-Hong Kong film connections encapsulated within a set of Hong Kong-produced Chinese-language films with “Malay elements”, that is, Hong Kong cinema’s Nanyang *gong tau* horror films. *Gong tau* (降頭) is a Cantonese term familiar to the people of Hong Kong. It literally means “landing (something) unto the head” and is used to denote the practice of black magic. At the same time, the term also recalls a particular horror subgenre in Hong Kong cinema popularly known as *gong tau pin* (降頭片). Among these films, a large number are set against the backdrop of Southeast Asia, a region also commonly referred to as Nanyang in East Asia.

These Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films (港產南洋降頭片) rose to prominence in Mandarin and Cantonese cinemas from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s. They typically feature a protagonist traveling from Hong Kong to Southeast Asia only to become cursed by a kind of black magic supposedly unique to the region. Strange, gruesome events ensue but the calamity eventually ends off with a spiritual battle between evil and good where good always triumphs and the curse is finally broken. As a subgenre of Hong Kong horror cinema, Nanyang *gong tau* films are unique not only in its subject of *gong tau* but also in their specific engagement with Southeast Asia as a geographical and cultural entity. Both in terms of cinema history and Asian cultural history then, this subgenre calls for an in-depth study that has yet to be conducted. For one, how did this subgenre come into formation? Why did it rise

to prominence between the 1970s and 1980s? What sorts of connections and relationships were being forged with Southeast Asia through these films and how so?

Taking these questions as key points of inquiry, this chapter traces the origins and rise of Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films, positing that prior experience with and access to Malay cinema and its film industry equipped filmmakers from Hong Kong with a ready pool of resources to conveniently initiate this subgenre and lay down its defining feature, that is, a Nanyang Orient. At a time when Hong Kong cinema was beginning to shape up its own local identity, such othering of Southeast Asia on the part of Hong Kong cinema done via tapping resources from its Malay counterpart bolsters a notion of the Self based upon a modern, Chinese Hong Kong/primitive, non-Chinese Nanyang binary. In other words, a burgeoning localizing impulse provided the obvious impetus for making the Hong Kong-Malay film connections embedded within early Nanyang *gong tau* films. What this chapter wishes to bring into focus, however, is the little-discussed role that tourism plays in facilitating this. Paying special attention to the motifs of travel and tourism in these films, this chapter casts sight on the simultaneous rise of Southeast Asian tourism in the 1970s-1980s, and contends that a suturing together of the tourist and cinematic gaze underpins the subgenre's orientalizing of Southeast Asia.

This chapter is organized into two parts. In the first part, I will focus on expounding the technical and industrial underpinnings of these films, seeking first to establish "Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau*" as a subgenre of Hong Kong horror cinema by detailing its genre codes and conventions. This is important as subsequent discussion will be based on the premise that these films form a context-specific genre cycle, rather than exist as individual works that merely resemble one another coincidentally. Thereafter, I will posit that the creation of an onscreen Nanyang Orient is as definitive to this subgenre as its central subject of *gong tau* and that, in its early formative years, this Orient was created mainly by means of "Malay-izing" the

region. This, in turn, was materialized by mobilizing connections previously formed between Hong Kong cinema and the Malay film industry. The role that these transborder interactions play in orientalizing Nanyang onscreen marks this subgenre's unique course of development. Thereafter, in the second part of this chapter I attempt to situate the discussion within the sociocultural context of the 1970s-1980s, contending that the Nanyang Orient central to this subgenre was created precisely to feed a Hong Kong "cinematic tourist gaze" that was hungry and scavenging for an object of gaze.

Nanyang *gong tau* as subgenre

Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films have never been recognized as constituting a distinctive genre in narratives of Hong Kong cinema history. However, the term *gong tau pin* ("black magic films" in Cantonese) is widely used on internet forums and fan websites.³⁹⁹ It also appears occasionally in research articles albeit fleetingly, suggesting that there is a sketchy consensus about the existence of a body of films that shares the specific subject of *gong tau* and bears apparent similarities with one another.⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, a survey of Hong Kong cinema filmographies reveals that since the premiere of director Ho Meng-hua's (何夢華) *Black Magic* (降頭) in 1975, the word "*gong tau*" or "*jiang tou*", when pronounced

³⁹⁹ Jiaopian de Ji Yi (膠片的記憶), "Gang Chan Shi Da Jiangtou Pian (港產十大降頭片)". *Mtime*. 11 Jan 2009, <http://group.mtime.com/hkmovie/discussion/363909/>. Accessed 21 Jun 2017; Ainibuaiwole, "Xianggang Jiangtou Dianying Daquan Zenme Kan (香港降頭電影大全怎麼看)". *Baidu Zhidao*. 2 Jun 2012, <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/289791923.html>. Accessed 21 Jun 2017; 30 Something, "Gui Zhihong Xilieshi Dianying" (桂治洪系列式電影). *30 Something*. 9 Nov 2010. <http://thirty-something-hk.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/1981.html>. Accessed 21 Jun 2017; 51 Qu Weijie Zhi Mi Wang (51區未解之謎網), "Xianggang Shida Jiangtou Dianying Jiangtou Dianying Daquan Zonghui (香港電影大全總匯)". *Wushiyiqu* (五十一區). 31 Oct 2016. <http://www.51qumi.com/38956.html>. Accessed 21 Jun 2017; Kaza, "[Jiangtou] ([降頭])". *PChrome*. 28 Jan 2008. <http://mypaper.pchome.com.tw/jasonyeh/post/1302634456>. Accessed 21 Jun 2017.

⁴⁰⁰ See Li Cheuk-to, "Introduction (序言)", in Hong Kong Urban Council ed. *The 13th Hong Kong International Film Festival: Phantoms of the Hong Kong Cinema* (戲園誌異：香港靈幻電影回顧). Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1989, p.8; Cheng Yu, "Under a Spell (香港鬼怪電影札記)" in *ibid.*, p.17. Danny Chan Weng-kit's 2019 article remains the only focused academic study on this subject to date (see Danny Chan Weng-kit, "Spectralizing Southeast Asia: Hong Kong Cinema of Black Magic", *Hong Kong Studies*, Vol.2, No.1 (2019)), no page number.

in Mandarin, rapidly gained currency. Films such as *Magic Curse* (摧花毒降頭, 1975), *Black Magic II* (勾魂降頭, 1976), *The Crocodile Evil* (鱷降, 1986) and *Curse* (處女降, 1988) emerged one after another through till the late 1980s. Correspondingly, many films in this period began to mark themselves with the label of *gong tau* through advertising. An advertisement for *Centipede Horror* (蜈蚣咒, 1982) proclaims that one of its leading actors is a *gong tau* grandmaster (降頭宗師).⁴⁰¹ Similarly, the handbill of *The Boxer's Omen* (魔, 1983) claims that the film was made under the guidance of four *gong tau* masters (降頭師). It even announces that the film “unshackles itself from all the old clichés of ‘*gong tau pin*’” (擺脫一切‘降頭片’旧桥段), further proving that by 1983, *gong tau* films have become a familiar presence in Hong Kong cinema so much so that readily recognizable traits were already detectable. Drawing information from relevant websites, publicity materials, Hong Kong cinema filmographies and film texts, it is indeed possible to identity a sizeable number of these films (see Appendix).⁴⁰² The sketchy impression of a body of films thus far vaguely known as *gong tau pin* can, in fact, come to assume a more defined shape in the form of a Horror subgenre.

Standing out with their central subject of *gong tau* and sharing distinctive genre codes and conventions, these films can be recognized as a subgenre of Hong Kong horror cinema under the name, “Nanyang *gong tau*”. As suggested by the increased circulation of the word in film titles and publicity, in the 1970s-1980s, films revolving around *gong tau* – “black magic”, “curse”, “spell” or “sorcery”, as the word is commonly translated into in advertisements – proliferated. In these films, *gong tau* refers to the evil practice of controlling someone by casting a spell on him or her under the most unsuspecting circumstances. It is a dark sorcery that leads one to lose control and awareness of the self (以毒藥藥人，令人不自知謂之蠱毒).

⁴⁰¹ “Wugong Zhou (蜈蚣咒)”, *Film Biweekly* (電影雙週刊), 21 October 1982, No.97, p.29.

⁴⁰² My discussion henceforth will be based on the filmography in the Appendix behind. I found access to all the film texts listed in it through various means and all other supplementary materials such as handbills and movie magazines are mainly sourced from Hong Kong Film Archive.

⁴⁰³ There are purportedly three main categories of *gong tau*: love *gong tau* (生降/愛情降), death *gong tau* (死降) and fly *gong tau* (飛降). Love *gong tau* causes the victim to fall head over heels with the perpetrator, death *gong tau* would kill the victim if a promise previously made with the perpetrator is not honoured by a stipulated time and fly *gong tau* enables one to gain anything that he or she wishes for. The casting of *gong tau* involves the concocting of a “*gong tau* potion” (降頭油), even though the process and ingredients involved vary across the films. This potion can be mixed into the food of the victim or applied directly onto his or her body. ⁴⁰⁴ Coupled with a spiritual ritual, the *gong tau* potion will start to take effect. Before Ho Meng-hua’s *Black Magic*, I can only identify two known Hong Kong-produced films that touched upon this subject: *Blood Stains the Valley of Love* (血染相思谷, 1957) and *The Curse* (毒降頭, 1965). In the period spanning the 1970s and 1980s, however, at least 22 Mandarin and Cantonese films centering around this subject made it to the big screens. Also, it was only with *Black Magic* that *gong tau* became widely publicized as a “new subject (新題材)”, suggesting that such films were indeed considered novel at the time of the film’s premiere. ⁴⁰⁵ It thus seems reasonable to posit that the shared subject of *gong tau* sets this group of 22 films apart as a distinctive genre in Hong Kong cinema that possesses an observable cycle of the 1970s-1980s.

As with any other genre, these films share certain codes and conventions that reinforce their common identity. While it is generally accepted that the boundaries demarcating each genre are usually more fuzzy than fixed, and that there is innovation within every genre, it is nevertheless possible to identify common characteristics – codes and conventions – among a

⁴⁰³ Opening intertitle in *Black Magic* (降頭, 1975).

⁴⁰⁴ “Bei Xia Le Jiangtou de Ren Hui Ruhe? Qing Kan Dilong de Guai Xianxiang (被下了降头的人会如何? 请看狄龙的怪现象)”, *Southern Screen* (南國電影), February 1975, Vol.204, p.62.

⁴⁰⁵ “Dilong Tianni Li Lili Zhuyan de Yibu Xin Ticao Dianying (狄龍恬妮李麗麗主演的一部新題材電影)”, *Hong Kong Movie News* (香港影畫), January 1975, Vol.109, p.40.

given set of films that create a sense of generic familiarity.⁴⁰⁶ Genre conventions refer to recurring narrative or technical features including plot elements, themes and film techniques, whereas genre codes, also known as iconography, consist of shared symbolic images that carry meaning from film to film, such as objects and settings.⁴⁰⁷ In *gong tau* films, a recurring narrative plot is that of a travel trip between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Traveling to Southeast Asia – or Nanyang, the more common term used in these films – from Hong Kong is imperative to the unfolding of the rest of the narrative. Among the 22 *gong tau* films that I managed to find, 5 involve travel to Malaysia (including Sabah, Sarawak and Borneo), 1 to Singapore, 3 to the Philippines, 1 to Vietnam, 1 to Burma/Myanmar, 11 to Thailand and 2 to “a village in Southeast Asia” or unspecified. The numbers do not seem to tally because some of these films involve travel to multiple Southeast Asian destinations. *Bloody Sorcery* (凶咒, 1986), for example, features protagonists who traveled from Hong Kong to Vietnam, Burma/Myanmar and Thailand. Only two films on the list involve travel exclusively to non-Southeast Asian destinations: *Witch from Nepal* (奇緣, 1986) to Nepal and *Curse of the Zombi* [sic] (屍降, 1989) to Yunnan. *The Boxer’s Omen* also includes a trip to Nepal but the bulk of its narrative takes place in Thailand. Similarly, *Black Magic with Buddha* (腦魔, 1983) features Papua New Guinea alongside Thailand. Judging from this statistic, it is fair to say that the travel destination in these *gong tau* films is almost unanimously Southeast Asia. This shared element of travel also leads to similar filming techniques: most of these films were shot on-location in Southeast Asia and many of them utilized panning and panorama techniques to capture the sceneries of the region. Long takes of Southeast Asian ethnic/tribal performances, such as the

⁴⁰⁶ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction (9th edition)*. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010, p.329 and p.331.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p.330.

Iban tribal dance (Borneo) in *Red Spell Spells Red* (紅鬼仔, 1983) and a supposed Thai tribal dance in *Brutal Sorcery* (毒蠱, 1983), are also common occurrences in these *gong tau* films.

Another recurring narrative plot is that of the protagonist (from Hong Kong) becoming cursed by a *gong tau* master (from Southeast Asia) because of an unfulfilled promise or an unforgiven sin that these protagonists had made or committed in Southeast Asia previously. This most commonly takes the form of a male protagonist failing to return to Southeast Asia within a stipulated time, breaking a promise he had made with a native woman whom he had a romantic affair with during a previous trip to the region (see, for example, *Bewitched* (蠱, 1981), *Brutal Sorcery* and *Bloody Sorcery*). In cases where the wrongdoing is not directly related to romance or sex, such as in *The Boxer's Omen*, *Red Spell Spells Red* and *Dead Curse*, this unforgiven sin stems from some form of harm – theft, murder, blasphemy – previously inflicted by the protagonist or his or her ancestors on Southeast Asian communities, leading to the latter taking revenge by means of *gong tau*.

With this plot of cursing and getting cursed, what inevitably follows is a related plot of undoing the curse or *jie jiang* (解降), as it is called in the films. Here I can say with confidence that every single one of these *gong tau* films has a “good-versus-evil” plot where conflict plays out between the *gong tau* master (evil) and his nemesis (good), who is someone hired or called up by the protagonist’s friends and family to help with undoing the curse. While earlier films such as *Black Magic* and *Black Magic II* simply summon a kind-hearted White Magician to assume this role, subsequent films generally turn to canonical Chinese religions for inspiration. As a result, most of these films include a plot of a Taoist priest or Buddhist monk engaging in a spiritual fight with the *gong tau* master. This conflict eventually culminates in a face-off battle where the *gong tau* master will, without fail, be defeated and the curse is finally broken. Within this long *jie jiang* process, there usually also lies an element of investigation. Part of the *jie jiang* process involves an inquiry into what is causing the protagonist to develop strange

symptoms such as bloatedness, deliriousness, the emanating or attracting of insects, an appetite for live animals, unexplained bleeding or indelible spots. This investigation or mystery-solving is conducted most frequently as a police investigation (*Magic Curse*, *The Oily Maniac* (油鬼子, 1976), *Bewitched*), medical investigation (*Black Magic II*, *Bloody Sorcery*), spiritual investigation (*The Boxer's Omen*, *Brutal Sorcery*, *Red Spell Spells Red*, *Curse* (毒咒, 1985), *Fury of the Heaven* (天煞, 1986)) and an investigation into family history (*Centipede Horror*, *Dead Curse* (猛鬼迫人, 1985)).

Bearing such “good-versus-evil” narrative plots, one implication is that these *gong tau* films share a common theme of good triumphs over evil. Portrayed as the embodiment of evil, the *gong tau* master from Southeast Asia will always be killed by forces of the good such as Taoism or Buddhism at the end of these films. *Bewitched* even goes as far as to end with an intertitle that blatantly says: “Evil can never defeat righteousness (邪不勝正). Anyone who uses ‘black magic’ (巫術) to harm others will eventually be destroyed by the god of righteousness”. Aside from this moralistic theme, *gong tau* films also unanimously emphasize the futility of modern science and medicine. The phrase, “it is a scientific era now (現在是科學昌明的時代)”, recurs across these films in different variations, often appearing in the first half of the film only to be challenged and overturned in the second half. Earlier skepticism of the existence of *gong tau* and confidence in modern, Western science and medicine would always dissipate when it gradually becomes undisputable that strange occurrences and the protagonist’s erratic behaviors are indeed caused by unexplainable spiritual forces. Just as the doctor, played by actor Kwan Hoi-san (關海山) who starred in many of these *gong tau* films, explains in *Brutal Sorcery*: “From the perspective of medical science, I absolutely do not believe in evil sorcery. But reality has left me with no choice but to believe in it (實際上由不得我不信)”.

Having thus laid out the genre conventions of *gong tau* films, readers may have noticed that Southeast Asia or Nanyang, as the region is also popularly called, plays a prominent role in these films. In fact, I maintain that Nanyang as a geographical entity is as central to this body of films as is the subject of *gong tau*. This is supported by the films' iconography (genre codes). In determining this set of films as a genre, iconography is arguably more definitive than narrative, thematic and technical conventions. Many film critics and reporters in the 1970s and 1980s described these films as “*wat dat pin* (核突片)”, a Cantonese term which means disgusting and appalling films, referring more to the films' imagery than their narratives or themes.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, complementary to the subject of *gong tau*, these films thrive on visual excesses and the making of visual spectacles. They typically feature (an excess of) naked female bodies, blood, insects such as centipedes and worms, animals such as chickens and bats, tropical fruits such as coconuts, durians and pineapples. Some, if not all, of these objects are utilized to concoct a visually repulsive or overwhelming spectacle in each of these films, often with supplementary use of special effects.

Importantly, most of these ingredients used in concocting a *wat dat* picture are geographically-coded. Naked female bodies often belong to native, non-Chinese Southeast Asians (although these characters are sometimes played by Hong Kong ethnic Chinese actresses) and tropical fruits are widely regarded as icons of Southeast Asia. Insects and animals form part of a broader imagery of Southeast Asian rural villages and mountains, which often serve as the setting in which the narrative unfolds in these films. Precisely because travel to Southeast Asia is a crucial narrative plot, the region naturally becomes the films' general setting alongside Hong Kong. More specifically, they are commonly set in rural villages such

⁴⁰⁸ “Gui Zhihong Ziren Shi Bianyuan Daoyan (桂治洪自認是邊緣導演)”, *Film Biweekly*, 1 July 1982, no.89, p.16; “Shuang Zhou Xinpian Pingjie: *Mo* (雙週新片評介：魔)”, *Film Biweekly*, 21 October 1983, no.123, p.14 and “Gui Zhihong Liuqinburen Tanghuang Bujing da de Xilan Pai *Mo* Pian Zhuangxie (桂治洪六親不認 堂皇佈景打得稀爛 拍《魔》片撞邪)”, *Southern Screen*, October 1983, Vol.307, p.24.

as Malay kampungs in *Centipede Horror* (Fig. 37) and Borneo longhouses in *Red Spell Spells Red* (Fig. 38), or in mountainous areas such as one in the Philippines in *Magic Curse* (Fig. 39). This in turn led to the inclusion of more iconography specific to Southeast Asia's rural and mountainous landscape. Other than the aforementioned insects and animals, indigenous ethnic groups or hill tribes and their customs are also commonplace in these films. *Magic Curse*, for instance, features tribal costumes and rituals of a make-belief Filipino snake tribe (Fig. 40 and 41), *The Seventh Curse* (原振俠與衛斯理, 1986) exhibits that of a make-belief Thai tribal group (Fig. 42) and *Red Spell Spells Red* presents an Iban tribal dance (Fig. 43). Both in terms of objects and film setting then, it is evident that the iconography – an aspect definitive of the genre – is tightly linked to the geographical space of Southeast Asia in these *gong tau* films.



Figure 37. Malay kampung



Figure 38. Borneo Longhouse



Figure 69. Mountainous areas

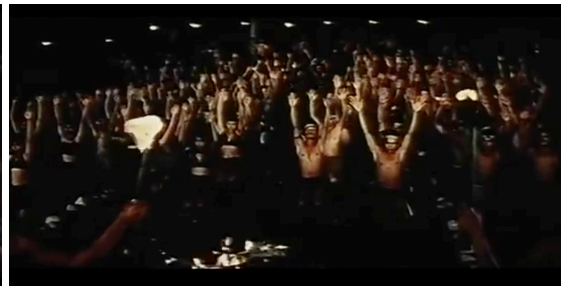


Figure 70 and 41. Tribal costumes and ritual of a make-belief Filipino snake tribe



Figure 42 and 43. A make-belief Thai tribal group and the Iban tribal dance

On top of these codes and conventions, the very subject that renders these films a genre in its own right – *gong tau* – also appears to be inherently connected with Southeast Asia. Films such as *Black Magic*, *Bewitched* and *Crocodile Evil* begin with an intertitle purporting upfront that *gong tau* exists or is popular specifically in the region of Nanyang. A promotional article on *Black Magic* even reported in detail that it is common for women in Nanyang to cast *gong tau* unto men who came from foreign land and who had romantic and sexual relationships with

them so that they would never leave their side.⁴⁰⁹ More fundamentally, as mentioned previously, in terms of statistics Nanyang is identified as the (birth)place of *gong tau* in all but two of these films. Through these ways, *gong tau* clearly became region-specific in this genre; it is a sorcery deemed to be unique to Southeast Asia.

Such geographical specificity central to this body of films call for the qualifier word – “Nanyang” – to be added to the name of this genre so as to highlight its unmistakable preoccupation with Southeast Asia. A brief note about why “Nanyang” is chosen over “Southeast Asia” is in place here. Before the term “Southeast Asia” gained traction during World War Two as part of British war strategy and especially after the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, “Nanyang” was used by the Chinese in East Asia to denote the same region. The term literally translates as the “Southern Ocean” and was principally a product of Chinese overseas migratory history.⁴¹⁰ According to scholar of Nanyang literature Brian Bernards, nearly twenty million sojourners made overseas voyages between southern China and Southeast Asia from the 1850s to the 1940s. Despite the diverse backgrounds of the Chinese travelers and the diversity of places they traveled to in Southeast Asia (mainly British colonial Malaya (now Singapore and Malaysia), Indonesia and the Siam kingdom (now Thailand)), these sojourners imagined the region singularly as the “South Seas”.⁴¹¹ Constituent-wise, this singular entity was not much different from what eventually became known as Southeast Asia following the postwar solidifying of territorial borders. As renowned historian Wang Gung-wu notes, before the 19th century, Nanyang was used to refer to the littoral countries around the area we now know as Southeast Asia, although

⁴⁰⁹ “Shaoshi Yi Zuishengda Zhi Zhenrong Paishe Liuchuan Dongnanya Shenru Shaonvxin Jiangtou Aiqing de Wushu (邵氏以最盛大之陣容拍攝 流傳東南亞 深入少女心 降頭 愛情的巫術)”, *Southern Screen*, January 1975, Vol.203, p.56.

⁴¹⁰ For an etymology of the term, see Li Jinsheng (李金生), “Yige Nanyang, Gezi Jieshuo (一個南洋，各自界說)”, *Yazhou Wenhua* (亞洲文化), Vol.30 (2006): pp.113-123.

⁴¹¹ Brian Bernards. *Writing the South Seas: Imagining the Nanyang in Chinese and Southeast Asian Postcolonial Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016, p.vii.

its boundaries at that time were changeable and still unclear. However, by the end of the 19th century, the Chinese term “Nanyang” came closer to the modern idea of Southeast Asia than any other geographical concept.⁴¹² By and large and especially within (East Asian) popular consciousness, Nanyang and Southeast Asia can thus be regarded as interchangeable terms and this is, indeed, the case with the *gong tau* films in question. Judging from the frequency in which the term is used in the films’ narratives and on publicity materials as compared to “Southeast Asia”, “Nanyang” evidently retained more currency, rendering it a more precise choice in naming this film genre.

Besides “Nanyang”, *gong tau* is preferred here instead of “black magic” or its Mandarin counterpart, *jiang tou*, because majority of these films premiered in Cantonese. Only *Black Magic*, *The Oily Maniac* and *Black Magic II* were screened in Mandarin. Phonetically then, *gong tau* is able to generate a greater sense of generic familiarity especially among audiences who have seen these films. Also, depending on the context of discussion, it is at times also necessarily to tag the label, “Hong Kong-produced”, to this genre. This is because other film industries – defined here mainly in terms of nation as most film industries in Asia began to adopt nationalistic protectionist measures in the 1970s and 1980s – have produced similar films centering around the subject of Southeast Asian sorcery. Indonesian black magic films such as the classic *Mystics in Bali* (1981), for example, were popular in the 1980s. It is therefore essential to indicate in its genre name that these Nanyang *gong tau* films were produced or co-produced by Hong Kong movie companies, in discussions where the place of production is of consequence. Such circumstances would warrant the use of the longer name, “Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films”.

⁴¹² Wang Gung-wu, “Two Perspectives of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore and China”, in Paul Kratoska, Henk Schulte Nordholt and Remco Raben eds. *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*. Singapore and Ohio: National University of Singapore Press and Ohio University, 2005, p.64-5.

Thus far I have predominantly used the word “genre” in my discussion. This was mainly for ease of articulation as I sought first to delineate the particularities of this body of films. Now that its contours have been made clear, it should be noted that Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films more accurately constitutes a *subgenre* of Hong Kong horror cinema. In the 1970s-1980s, besides the better-known *kungfu* and New Wave films, horror was also a prominent genre in Hong Kong cinema. This was largely the result of Hong Kong cinema capitalizing on the popularity of Hollywood horror films, particularly that of the phenomenal *The Exorcist* (1973).⁴¹³ During this period, Hong Kong horror filmmakers departed from the earlier model of adapting from Chinese literary classics such as *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (聊齋誌異), and began to explore different ways of handling the genre creatively.⁴¹⁴ Sammo Hung’s *kungfu* comedy vampire horror such as *Encounters of the Spooky Kind* (鬼打鬼, 1980), Kuei Chih-hung’s psychological gore horror such as the extraordinary *Hex* trilogy (邪, 1980; 邪斗邪, 1980; 邪完再邪, 1982) and stylized New Wave horror such as Ann Hui’s *The Spooky Bunch* (撞到正, 1981), Dennis Yu’s *The Imp* (凶榜, 1981) and Stanley Kwan’s *Rouge* (胭脂扣, 1988) are pertinent examples and evidences of the proliferation and diversity of Hong Kong horror cinema during this period. These films can be grouped under the broad, blanket category of horror, which is a genre recognized primarily by the emotional effect it seeks to arouse – shock, disgust and repulsion, yet they also clearly possess their own respective sets of peculiarities – subjects, conventions and codes – that distinguish them apart from each other, thus affording them the status of subgenres.⁴¹⁵ With its unquestionable intention to

⁴¹³ Sek Kei, “Achievement and Crisis: H.K. Cinema in the ’80s” in Hong Kong Urban Council ed. *The 15th Hong Kong International Film Festival: Hong Kong Cinema in the Eighties*. Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1991, p.58 and Li Cheuk-to, “Introduction (序言)”, in Hong Kong Urban Council ed. *The 13th Hong Kong International Film Festival: Phantoms of the Hong Kong Cinema* (戲園誌異：香港靈幻電影回顧). Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1989, p.8.

⁴¹⁴ Zhou Hao ed. *Shaw Films: The Alternative Cult Films* (邵氏光影系列：第三類型電影). Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) Co., Ltd., 2005, p.173-4 and David Bordwell. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.151.

⁴¹⁵ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction* (9th edition), p.329 and p.340.

disgust and appall (*wat dat*), Nanyang *gong tau* films undoubtedly also belong under the umbrella genre of Horror and should thus be viewed as an addition to this legion of Hong Kong horror subgenres of the 1970s-1980s.

The Nanyang Orient

Having established Nanyang *gong tau* as a subgenre in Hong Kong cinema, questions about Nanyang as represented in these films now abound. What kind of Nanyang is being represented in this subgenre and how did filmmakers from Hong Kong create this particular kind of Nanyang? In this section, I demonstrate that Nanyang exists as an Orient relative to Hong Kong in these films; it is primarily defined in binary opposition to Hong Kong and is monolithic – static and homogeneous.

Nanyang in these films is represented as a place of difference vis-à-vis Hong Kong and this difference hinges principally on an ethnicized dichotomy: modern, Chinese Hong Kong/primitive, non-Chinese Nanyang. Aside from the protagonist's circle of friends and families who have travelled to Nanyang from Hong Kong, ethnic Chinese characters are conspicuously absent from the region in these films. The extent of this can be seen from the fact that if one were to be found in the region, this presence even needs to be specially justified and explained. In *the Boxer's Omen*, for example, when Chen Hung, the Chinese protagonist from Hong Kong, arrives at a Buddhist temple in Thailand, he meets, with great surprise, a monk who speaks fluent Cantonese. In a dialogue that is completely irrelevant to the story, Chen Hung asks the monk, "Reverend, are you from China? (大師，你是中國人嗎？)" The monk then explains that he is Teochew and that his ancestors migrated to Thailand a few generations ago (我是潮州人，我幾代以前移居到泰國來的), emphasizing his ancestral roots and immigrant status. Similarly, in *Red Spells Spell Red*, the Chinese man whom Stella,

the protagonist from Hong Kong, meets in Borneo explains that he is sent to the long house by the Ministry of Development. It therefore seems as though extra steps had to be taken to ensure that ethnic Chinese are not seen as constituting part of a Nanyang landscape. Referring back to the aforementioned geographically-coded iconography, it is also not difficult to see that many of them are being framed as distinctly non-Chinese. Southeast Asian rural and tribal villages such as Malay kampongs, Borneo long houses and other make-belief rural or mountainous villages embody ways of living that are unique to Southeast Asian non-Chinese communities. Indigenous ethnic groups and their customs such as the Malay *sarong* and other tribal dress codes, traditional dances and sacrificial rituals are also ethnic markers and cultural symbols that signify differences with the ethnic Chinese protagonists from Hong Kong. More than being just geographically specific to the region then, Nanyang *gong tau*'s genre iconography is also clearly ethnically-inscribed, albeit only generically marked as "non-Chinese" in direct contradistinction to the protagonists' ethnic Chinese identities.

On top of this ethnicized representation, Nanyang is also portrayed as primitive in contrast to a modern Hong Kong. As mentioned briefly above, the narrative plot of travel conveniently divides the film setting into two – Hong Kong and a Southeast Asian country. This provides an opportunity for a contrast to be set up between the two spaces. Scenes set in Hong Kong are often steeped in symbols of modernity such as hospitals, high-rise buildings and nightclubs whereas those set in Nanyang are, in contrast, often exclusively signposted with primitivism. Besides the portrayal of villages and indigenous ethnic/tribal groups' ways of living, the very absence of symbols of modernity within the space of Nanyang also accentuates the primitivism of Nanyang.

This modern Hong Kong/primitive Nanyang dichotomy is further played up in dialogues. Hong Kong ethnic Chinese protagonists often say lines that emphasize the supremacy of scientific rationality, highlighting their alignment with modernity. Alongside

such self-positioning, dialogues that blatantly label Nanyang as primitive also recur in these films. For instance, in *Bewitched*, the protagonist Inspector Chen has a wife who is “a South Seas Chinese”.⁴¹⁶ In a dinner scene, Chen complains that the steak his wife has prepared is too raw. His wife retorts that steaks taste better this way, to which Chen responds sarcastically: “You Nanyang people are so uncivilized...should we eat with our hands as well? (你們那邊的人真是不開化…要不要用手扒著吃?)”. In the same vein, *Red Spell Spells Red* includes lines such as “(the people of the Iban tribe) live a very primitive life (過的是很原始的生活)” and “the long house is so backward (長屋這麼落後)”. Coupled with the way Nanyang is visually represented in contrast to a modern Hong Kong, these dialogues and lines directly reinforce the modern/primitive divide between the two spaces in these films. Combining this with the Chinese/non-Chinese divide as discussed above, it becomes clear that Nanyang in this subgenre is represented on the basis of a “modern, Chinese Hong Kong/primitive, non-Chinese Nanyang” dichotomy.

Interestingly, while the region is represented as a place of difference vis-à-vis Hong Kong, internal differences *within* Nanyang are instead elided. Nanyang finds representation as a homogenized bloc with generalized traits even though majority of these films are set in specific Southeast Asian countries. This homogenization is closely related to the representation of Nanyang by means of contrast: pulling together everything non-Chinese to create an on-screen Nanyang, these films effectively erased all possible culturally-, nationally-, spatially- and historically-specific differences between the Thai and Malay culture, between the Philippines and Malaysia, between the Iban tribal culture and indigenous Burma culture. Two films in particular – *Bewitched* and its unofficial sequel, *The Boxer's Omen*, epitomize this practice. In *Bewitched*, there are at least three scenes with dialogues that are spoken

⁴¹⁶ Handbill of *Bewitched*.

distinguishably in the Malay language. When Inspector Chen travels to Thailand to find Pondswan, the woman who had purportedly casted a curse on a man charged with murdering his own daughter in Hong Kong, Pondswan speaks to Chen's translator in the Malay language. Similarly, speaking entirely in the Malay language, a local White Magician suggests through Chen's translator that he should look for a Reverend if he wants to break the curse. After the first fight-off between the *gong tau* master and a Buddhist Reverend, Pondswan went to find the *gong tau* master to seek his advice. Her conversation with him is also completely conducted in the Malay language. Apart from dialogues, magic chants and curses in this film are also peppered with Malay-language words such as “sini sana” (here, there), “dunia” (world), “kiri kanan” (left, right). The bewildering aspect of this linguistic observation is that the film makes it known right from the start, through its narrative and setting, that it is set in Thailand and Thailand is not where one would expect to hear the Malay language, since it is neither the country's *lingua franca* nor even a commonly used language in the country.

Bewitched's sequel, *The Boxer's Omen*, takes this practice even further. The film's ending credits claim that four *gong tau* masters from four different Southeast Asian countries participated in this film. They are: Rolando San Junn (Indonesian), Victor B. Pumkpic (Thai), Major Oponpa (Malaysian) and Edmund P. Memeses (Sabah).⁴¹⁷ What is mind-boggling with this special mention is that, despite its hype about the national and cultural diversity of *gong tau* masters, in the film they speak – and chant – a mixture of Tagalog (a Filipino language) and the Malay language.⁴¹⁸ This is besides the fact that the Philippines is not even a nationality represented on the list! What sounds like gibberish to the unknowing ear is thus often a mish-mash of different, actual Southeast Asian languages in these films. In other words, non-Hong Kong, non-Chinese Southeast Asian nationalities, languages and cultures are often melded into

⁴¹⁷ Note that in terms of nationality, Sabah is a part of Malaysia.

⁴¹⁸ I thank Warren Sin for pointing out to me that Tagalog is widely used in this film.

singularity, genericity, homogeneity which is, in turn, taken to represent the whole region of Nanyang or just any other Nanyang country for that matter, in this subgenre.

More tellingly, the regional term “Nanyang” is used interchangeably with specific Southeast Asian country names. In *Bewitched*, Inspector Chen tells his wife: “I am going on a trip to Nanyang (我要去南洋一趟)” when in effect he means to make a trip to Thailand. In *Centipede Horror*, the protagonist’s mother revealed that his father and grandfather once worked as coolies in Nanyang (老爺和爺爺在南洋做過苦力) when she was actually referring specifically to Malaysia. Also, at least two Nanyang *gong tau* films – *Dead Curse* and *Black Magic* – are set in “a village in Southeast Asia (某東南亞鄉村)” or some unspecified place in Nanyang, further proving that intra-regional differences does not matter so much in this subgenre. The fact that Nanyang can be taken both as particular (standing in for specific countries) and general (as a region) illuminates the subgenre’s representation of Nanyang as an essentialized, homogenous bloc. All in all, so long as it looks and sounds different from “everything Chinese” or, more specifically, “everything Hong Kong”, that would more or less suffice as Nanyang or a Nanyang country in these films.

Thus built upon difference and homogeneity, Nanyang can be said to exist as an Orient relative to Hong Kong in these films. By the word “Orient”, I am indeed alluding here to Edward Said’s seminal work – *Orientalism*. As explicated above, Nanyang in these films is fundamentally created by the dual processes of Othering (emphasizing difference) and homogenizing (erasing difference). Such a mode of representation amounts to “orientalizing” in the Saidian sense, where the Orient is created when the place and its people (the Orientals) are “stamped with an otherness – as all that is different, whether it be ‘subject’ or ‘object’ – but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character”.⁴¹⁹ In orientalist representations,

⁴¹⁹ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p.97.

the Orient is unchanging and uniform, “hung together in some profoundly organic way” and is absolutely different from the West, embodying an “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and oriental inferiority”.⁴²⁰ Portraying Nanyang as resolutely non-Chinese, primitive and homogenous, Nanyang *gong tau* films effectively orientalized the region, turning it into an onscreen Orient that serves a superior Hong Kong.

Treading on this well-trodden path of orientalism risks adopting popular theories uncritically. To be sure, Said’s conceptualizations of the Orient and orientalism are largely rooted in the contexts of the Middle East, Islam and Arabic culture and he is mainly concerned with how scholarly texts and the specific relationship between the “East” and the “West” created the Orient of the Near East and Far East. His charges against Orientalists, Oriental studies and orientalism can also at times be unfairly overstated, overgeneralized, reductionist.⁴²¹ For all his charges of essentialism leveled against “the West”, and notwithstanding his occasional efforts cautioning against self-essentialization, Said’s sometimes overly defensive stance in *Orientalism* also ironically reinforces a certain authentic, original Near East and Far East “as such”, unwittingly essentializing “the East” himself.⁴²² A more serious allegation against *Orientalism* relates to Said’s fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and function of Orientalism (Oriental studies).⁴²³ These conditions and problems may seem to render the concept inappropriate or irrelevant to the present discussion on Nanyang *gong tau* films.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., p.42, p.96, p.98 and p.255.

⁴²¹ Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse”, *Khamsin*, No.8 (1981): p.5-26; Aijaz Ahmed, “Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropological Knowledge of India”, *Studies in History*, Vol.7, No.1 (1991): p.135-163 and Donald P. Little, “Three Arab Critiques of Orientalism”, *Muslim World*, Vol.69, No.2 (1979): p.110-131.

⁴²² Edward Said. *Orientalism*, p.127.

⁴²³ In his review of Said’s book, David Kopf argues mainly against Said’s monolithic contention that knowledge produced by Orientalists plainly serves colonialism and is detrimental to “Oriental” societies. He asserts that in other Asian societies apart from the Middle East/West Asia of which Said is primarily concerned with in his book, native intellectuals were in fact impressed with the contributions of some Orientalists, from which they referred to in reconstructing their own histories and to revitalize their own societies and cultures. More fundamentally, Kopf posits that *Orientalism* is not a work of historical scholarship: Said’s “procedure of dropping names, dates, and anecdotes to support a method which is profoundly structural and synchronic is diametrically opposed to history”. According to Kopf, as opposed to Said’s “personal conception” of Orientalism (Oriental Studies), Historical Orientalism was “certainly not a unified set of propositions, universally accepted by all Westerners involved in Oriental administration and scholarship, whose progressive refinement was inseparable from the

However, in my view, Said's comprehensive and theoretically rigorous descriptions of the Orient and processes of orientalizing are helpful in enriching our critical vocabulary especially in attempts to make sense of representations of the Other. Despite *Orientalism's* apparent shortcomings and the undeniable oversaturated use of it in academia, the key problems and ideas raised in the book nevertheless continue to warrant critical engagement and interrogation. In the context of Hong Kong cinema's othering of Nanyang in these *gong tau* films, Said's concept of the Orient is particularly useful because it succinctly encapsulates the particularities of the subgenre's representation of Nanyang. More than being just another representation of the region, Nanyang as an Orient is a *system* of representations. Through othering and essentializing, the region has been made into "a general object" defined via what Hong Kong is not, an isolated "world" separated from Hong Kong that possesses a specific set of characteristics and associations derived from its primary qualities of being different and homogenous, and that would be incessantly recycled in subsequent films of the same kind: irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, spiritual, primitive, stable, long-lived, under-humanized, antidemocratic backward, barbaric, degenerate, uncivilized, retarded.⁴²⁴ Vis-à-vis Hong Kong, Nanyang in these films is made to *systematically* "serve as an illustration of a *particular form of eccentricity* [emphasis mine]", representing an exotic place of both beauty and terror, exhibiting such passive traits as silent indifference, feminine penetrability, supine malleability, and demonstrating such essentialized characteristics as a Nanyang character, Nanyang despotism and Nanyang sensuality.⁴²⁵

Also related to this power structure is the eroticizing of the Nanyang Orient. In a follow-up article on orientalism, Said posits that:

Western powers' gradual acquisition of much of the world's real estate." See David Kopf, "Hermeneutics Versus History", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.39, No.3 (1980): p.495-506.

⁴²⁴ Edward Said. *Orientalism*, p.40, p.44, p.102, p.150, p.205 and p.207.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p.4, p.102 and p.206.

Orientalism is a praxis of the same sort as male gender dominance...the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem and the despotic – but curiously attractive – ruler. Moreover, Orientals, like housewives, were confined to silence and to unlimited enriching production.⁴²⁶

Similarly, in his introduction to a book on imperialist treatment towards ethnic minorities in China, Stevan Harrell highlights the intimate link between eroticism and primitivism:

Sexual relations...are particularly noteworthy in the imagery of civilizing projects. This eroticization and feminization of the peripheral occurs at a series of levels and in a series of differing contexts. At the simplest and most direct level, civilizers of all sorts have seen peripheral peoples as both erotic and promiscuous in their behavior, as being at a lower level of culture where they have not yet learned the proper civilized morals of sexual repression and/or hypocrisy.⁴²⁷

This representation of the inferior orient as embodying “sexual promise (and threat)” adequately describes the way Nanyang is being represented in this subgenre.⁴²⁸ Wives (or their friends) of the Hong Kong protagonists often express anxiety along the lines of: “I am afraid you/he will become bewitched by the women over there and not come back anymore”, betraying an impression of a sexually-charged Southeast Asia (*Brutal Sorcery, Curse, Devil Curse* (猛鬼咒, 1988)). Indeed, the male protagonists often travel to Southeast Asia precisely

⁴²⁶ Edward Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered”, *Race and Class*, Vol.27, Issue 2 (1985): p.12.

⁴²⁷ Stevan Harrell, “Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them”, in Stevan Harrell ed., *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015, p.10.

⁴²⁸ Edward Said. *Orientalism*, p.188.

to seek sexual rendezvous either explicitly or implicitly in the name of sex tourism (*Bewitched*, *Bloody Sorcery*, *Brutal Sorcery*). Importantly, as with typical orientalist representations, this eroticizing of Nanyang is closely linked to the rendering primitive of the region. By virtue of positioning Southeast Asia in direct contradistinction to a modern Hong Kong as mentioned above, sexual encounters with native Nanyang women most often take place in spaces that symbolize nature or primitivism such as beaches (*Bewitched*, *Brutal Sorcery*, *Curse*), rural huts (*Magic Curse*, *The Oily Maniac*) or desolate houses (*Dead Curse*).

All in all then, Said's concept of the Orient provides an incisive angle to understanding the way Nanyang is being represented in these films. With Nanyang defined primarily through difference (primitive, non-Chinese), homogeneity and eroticism, all of which inherently intertwined with each other, the region of Southeast Asia stands as an inferior Nanyang Orient vis-à-vis Hong Kong in this subgenre. Plentiful examples of this abound and to gain a comprehensive view of this, we need only refer to one representative scene in the film widely hailed as the subgenre's cream of the crop by online communities – *The Boxer's Omen*.⁴²⁹ In a curse-concocting scene set in a rural hut in Thailand, three *gong tau* masters purportedly of three different Southeast Asian nationalities cut open the belly of a crocodile. With bare hands, they empty out its bloody insides and place a human corpse into its body (Fig. 44). Time lapses and the *gong tau* masters retrieve the corpse, now completely covered in a multitude of live, crawling worms. The masters then pour water over it, revealing the body of a beautiful woman wearing nothing but long curled golden fingertips used in traditional Thai dances (Fig. 45). The masters then sit adjacent to each other. The first in line takes a bite off a live chicken, shoves some durians into his mouth, chews the mixture and then regurgitates the content onto a plate

⁴²⁹ Jiaopian de Jiyi (膠片的記憶), "Gang Chan Shi Da Jiangtou Pian (港產十大降頭片)". *Mtime*. 11 January 2009, <http://group.mtime.com/hkmovie/discussion/363909/>. Accessed 21 June 2017 and "Dadan Chuangxin de Dianying Yuyan Dianying Ziliaoguan Xuanying Gui Zhihong de Jingdian Zuopin (大膽創新的電影語言 電影資料館選映桂治洪的經典作品)". *Xin Wen Gongbao* (新聞公報). 8 April 2011, <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201104/08/P201104070211.htm>. Accessed 22 Jun 2017.

(Fig. 46). He passes this on to the next *gong tau* master, who shoves it into his mouth, peels a banana, throws the flesh away and chews on the skin (Fig. 47). He vomits on the same plate and passes this on to the last *gong tau* master, who shoves the vomited content into his mouth, cuts the feet off a live chicken, chews on it (with apparent disgust) and then spits everything out again (Fig. 48). They move to beside the motionless naked woman body and shove this concoction into her mouth (Fig. 49). The woman awakens and with full frontal nudity, walks to a statue representing the protagonist from Hong Kong – Chen Hung. In an exaggerated manner, the masters then instruct this seductive femme fatale to kill Chen Hung (Fig. 50). With an overtly *wat dat* scene like this, it is hard not to acknowledge the orientalizing of Nanyang in this subgenre. Portrayed exclusively, unapologetically and across the board as the place of dark, evil spiritual forces, strange, wild occurrences, and alluring, dangerous femme fatales, Nanyang is shaped into an Orient shrouded in mystery, eliciting both fear and awe in the eyes (and hands) of the beholder – Hong Kong. In fact, as mentioned earlier, mystery-solving is a typical narrative plot of the subgenre. Chen Hung got into trouble with the *gong tau* masters precisely because a mysterious vision had led him to enter a Buddhist temple in Thailand, unleashing a myriad of bizarre spiritual events.





Figure 44. Putting a corpse inside a crocodile

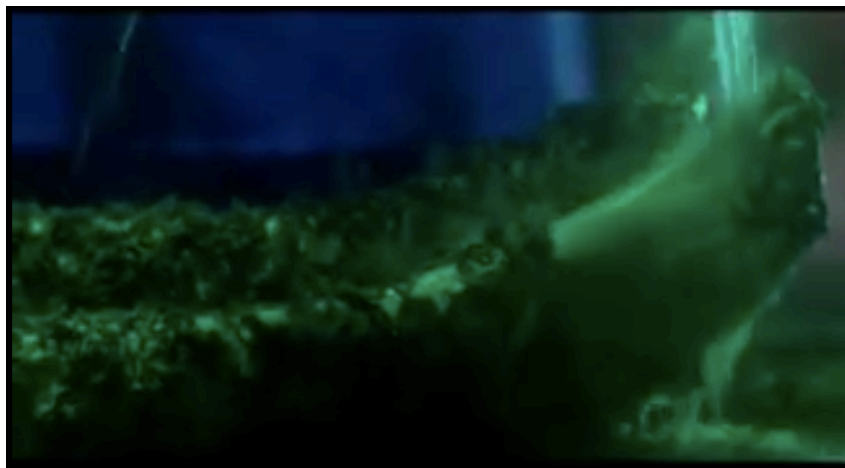


Figure 45. Washing the worms away



Figure 46. Regurgitating a mix of raw chicken and durian flesh



Figure 47. Chewing on banana peel



Figure 48. Chewing on freshly cut chicken feet with apparent disgust



Figure 49. Shoving the concoction into the mouth of the corpse



Figure 50. Femme fatale wearing nothing but long curled golden fingertips instructed to kill Chen Hung

Malay-izing as orientalizing

The discussion above outlined the technical aspects of this subgenre: Nanyang *gong tau* possesses its own unique set of codes and conventions and an orientalized Nanyang is as definitive to it as its subject of *gong tau*. What remains unsaid is the industrial underpinning of the subgenre, of which I will now expound on by showing how the Orient was created on the industrial level. In the following pages, I demonstrate that even though on the whole, Nanyang in these films is an indiscriminate “general object” defined simply in terms of being non-Chinese and non-Hong Kong, in its early formative years, this orientalizing was largely achieved by Malay-izing the region which, in turn, was materialized by mobilizing connections previously formed between Hong Kong and Malay cinemas through the Shaw Brothers. Pioneers of this subgenre conveniently turned their prior experiences with and access to their Malay counterparts into means of orientalizing Nanyang onscreen, marking the subgenre’s unique course of development.

An inquiry into Nanyang *gong tau*'s formative years must begin with its pioneer – Ho Meng-hua. Ho Meng-hua was a veteran director who worked for the Shaw Brothers and was very experienced in making Malayanized Chinese-language films (馬來亞化華語電影). Back in the late 1950s and 1960s, Malayanizing Chinese-language films formed a prominent cultural movement in Malaya. Burgeoning post-war anti-colonial nationalistic Malayan sentiments prompted Malayan cultural worker, Yi Shui (易水), to advocate for films that reflect the lived realities of the people of Malaya, ideally made by filmmakers from Malaya themselves.⁴³⁰ To cater to this huge Malayan market, filmmakers from Hong Kong were also encouraged by their companies such as the Shaw Brothers and Kong Ngee to heed the call for making such Malayanized Chinese-language films. This led to the rise of Hong Kong-produced films shot on-location in Malaya and that were rich in what was called the “Nanyang flavour” or “Malayan colour” (南洋/馬來亞色彩).⁴³¹ Ho Meng-hua's *Rendezvous in the Southern Seas* (南島相思, 1960) and *The Malayan Affair* (蕉風椰雨, 1960) are among the most notable of these attempts.⁴³² After these two films, Ho was also poised to direct another film entitled *Hua Wu Yi Jia* (華巫一家; no English title available), a film about interracial romance between ethnic Malays and Chinese written by a Malayan writer, starring actors from both the Hong Kong Chinese-language and Malaya Malay film industries, even though subsequent lack of

⁴³⁰ Yi Shui (易水). *Malaiyahua Huayu Dianying de Wenti* (馬來亞化華語電影的問題). Singapore: Nanyang yinshuashe (南洋印刷社), 1959, p.2.

⁴³¹ Yung Sai-shing, “Territorialization and the Entertainment Industry of the Shaw Brothers in Southeast Asia”, in Poshek Fu ed. *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008, p.146-9; Stephanie Chung Po-yin, “The Story of Kong Ngee: the Southeast Asian Cinema Circuit and Hong Kong's Cantonese Film Industry” and Stephen Teo, “Singapore Screen Memories: Kong Ngee's Nanyang Trilogy”, in Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Glorious Modernity of Kong Ngee*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2006, p.136 and p.144-159.

⁴³² In a magazine report, Ho Meng-hua mentioned that the happy experiences of shooting on-location in Penang and Kuala Lumpur more than ten years ago for these two films will forever remain in his memory. See “Dilong Xiangfeng Linglingqi Luolie Buxin You Jiangtou (狄龍相逢 00 七 羅烈不信有降頭)”, *Hong Kong Movie News*, March 1975, Vol.111.

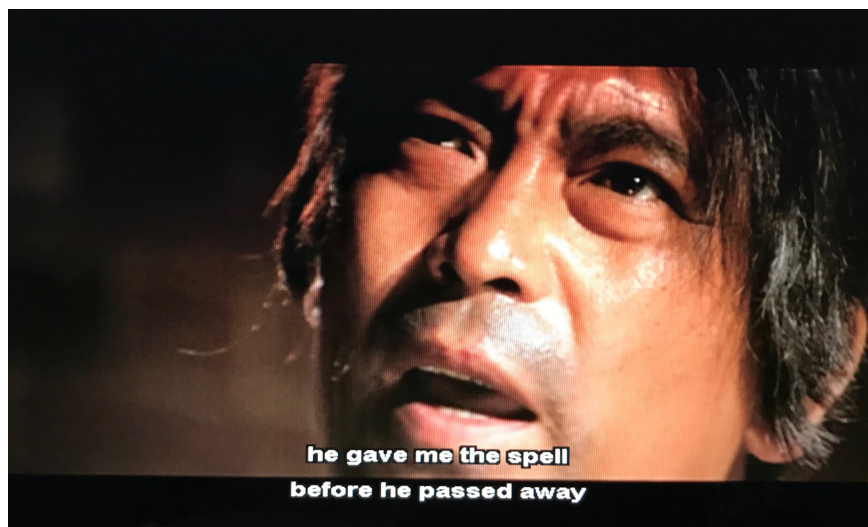
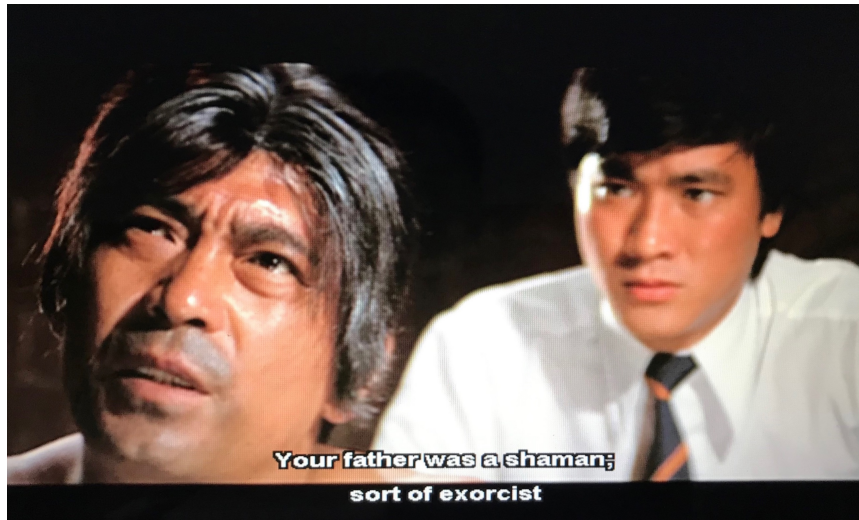
information suggests that this film was probably not made in the end.⁴³³ Despite its seemingly strong momentum, however, this movement did not go far. For the large part, Malayanizing Chinese-language films – especially on the part of Hong Kong filmmakers – turned out to be tokenistic inclusions of tropical landscapes and Malay cultural elements such as Malay songs and dance, Malay kampungs, sarongs and satays (a popular Malay food).⁴³⁴

Effectiveness of the movement aside, Ho's expertise in Malayanizing Chinese-language films would find its way back into his Nanyang *gong tau* films more than a decade later. Two of the earliest Nanyang *gong tau* films – *Black Magic* and *The Oily Maniac*, both directed by Ho Meng-hua, were filmed on-location in Malaysia. The sequel to *Black Magic* – *Black Magic II* (1976), also directed by Ho Meng-hua, was shot on-location in Singapore. Correspondingly, these pioneering works are visibly filled with Malay cultural symbols such as kampungs, sarongs and the (albeit make-belief) Jawi script (traditional Malay-language script) (see Fig. 51). *Black Magic* also taps on the Malay adat (custom) of “nasi kangkang”, which is the production of charmed rice used to summon male obedience by using steam from hot rice to stimulate vaginal fluids that would drip back into the rice. Just as “Nanyang flavour/colour” in the 1950s and 1960s was constructed primarily by means of Malay-izing and by filming in Malaya, Nanyang in these pioneering attempts also carries obvious Malay overtones and aligns itself closely with Singapore and Malaysia, illustrating that “Malayness”, Malaysia and Singapore were as central to Ho Meng-hua's shaping of Nanyang in this subgenre as they were in his earlier Malayanized Chinese-language films. In other words, Ho's prior

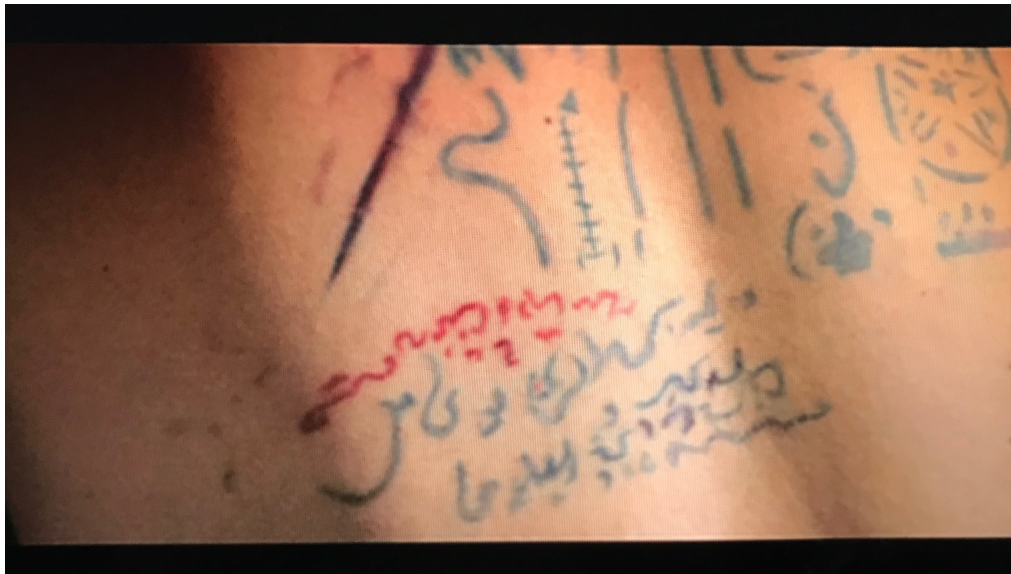
⁴³³ “Shaoshi Waijingdui Fangang ‘Nandao Xiangsi’ ‘Jiaofeng Yeyu’ Paijun Mingchun Jiang Zilai Pai ‘Huawu Yijia’ (邵氏外景隊返港 ‘南島相思’ ‘蕉風椰雨’ 拍竣 明春將再來拍 ‘華巫一家’)”, *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商報), 21 November 1959, p.15.

⁴³⁴ “Xiang Xianggang Huayu Pianshang Jin Yi Yan (向香港華語片商進一言)”, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 26 January 1959, p.17; “Women Buyao Zhezhong Yingpian! (我們不要這種影片!)”, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 30 January 1959, p.12 and “Tantan Malaiyahua Huayu Dianying Wenti (談談馬來亞化華語電影問題)”, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 29 October 1960, p.16.

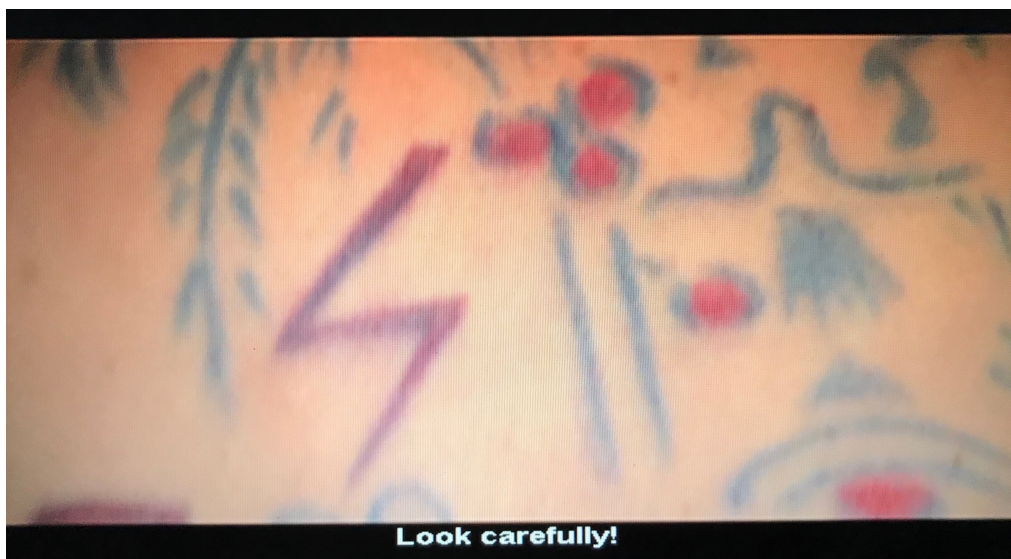
experience both in filming Nanyang and filming *in* Nanyang apparently became a resource that he tapped into, when creating the Nanyang Orient of his Nanyang *gong tau* films.⁴³⁵



⁴³⁵ Interestingly, in later horror films made by Singapore filmmakers such as *Return to Pontianak* (2001), there seems to exist an urge to instead displace and contain Malay folk beliefs in rural, untamed, tropical spaces outside of "Singapore's urban space, its baroque ecology and and its national imaginary of a 'first world' city-nation" (see Sophia Siddique Harvey, "Mapping Spectral Tropicality in *The Maid* and *Return to Pontianak*", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol.29 (2008): p.26). This interesting evolution of how Singapore is being used as film location and as narrative setting (and by whom) in Asian horror cinema leaves a topic for another day.



Look carefully!



Look carefully!

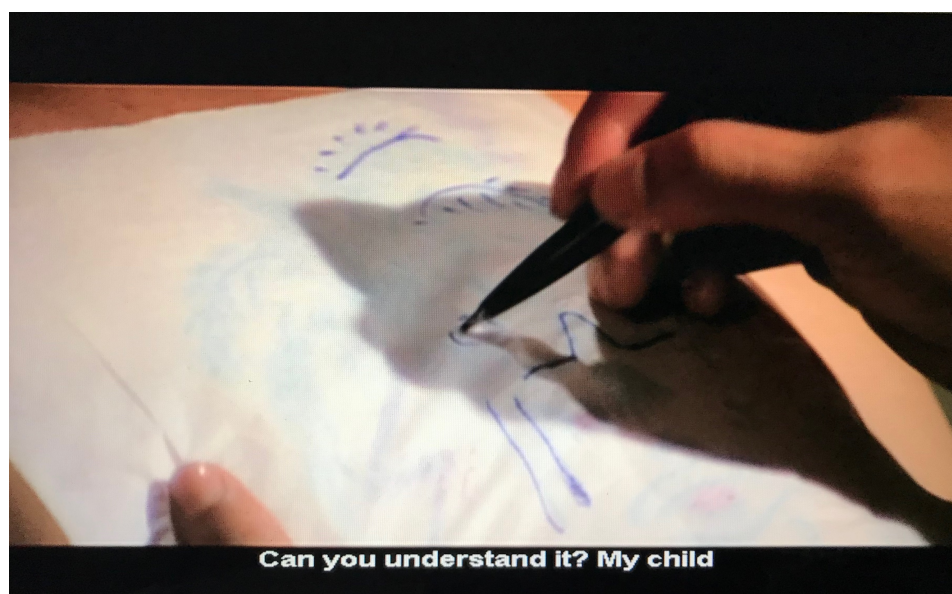




Figure 51. Scene in *The Oily Maniac* where the protagonist copies a “spell” that had been tattooed on his father’s friend’s back. The spell is said to be written in the “Malay” language according to the English subtitles. More accurately, however, the Mandarin dialogue uses the word, “Jawi script (爪哇文)”. Evidently, the film utilizes a make-belief Malay writing script here. When asked if he could understand it since he learned Malay/Jawi when he was young, the protagonist nods his head.

Besides Ho Meng-hua, another figure worth noting here is Chua Lam (蔡瀾). Chua Lam worked for the Shaw Brothers from 1957 till 1982 when he left to join the Golden Harvest Company. For the most part, he was a producer with Shaw.⁴³⁶ Today, Chua is rightly remembered for his remarkable contributions to Hong Kong cinema as film producer but as a result, his attempts at scriptwriting have been heavily overshadowed by this achievement. At an award ceremony in 2006, Chua revealed that he had once written one and a half movie scripts.⁴³⁷ The only full script ever attributed to Chua Lam in Hong Kong cinema filmographies today turns out to be an early Nanyang *gong tau* film that we have been referring to frequently throughout this chapter – *The Oily Maniac*.⁴³⁸ This film is special not only

⁴³⁶ “Profiles”, in Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003, p.309.

⁴³⁷ 25th Hong Kong Film Awards (2006), “Xianggang Dianying Jinxiangjiang (Fei Guanfang) (香港電影金像獎 (非官方))”, 10 May 2014. Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSwwJDd345M> (2:12:25-3:09:46).

⁴³⁸ “The Shaw Filmography”, in Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*, p.346-415 and Hong Kong Film Archive, “Hong Kong Filmography (1914-2010)”. *Hong Kong Film Archive Leisure and Cultural Services Department*. 28 Oct 2011, http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/en_US/web/hkfa/referencematerials/researchmaterials.html. Accessed 22 Jun 2017. In the award ceremony mentioned above, Chua reveals that the other half is an installation of *The Criminals* (香港奇案). A further search will reveal that he is referring to *Long Hu Wu Shi* (龍虎武師).

because it is Chua's only full attempt at scriptwriting. More intriguingly, the film is emblematic of how early Nanyang *gong tau* films were largely founded on connections previously formed between Hong Kong and Malay cinemas.

The Oily Maniac can be regarded as a 1970s Chinese-language remake of three 1950s Malay films. At the beginning of *The Oily Maniac*, an intertitle explains that the film is an adaptation of a famous Malay folklore. Although it is not made known exactly which folklore it is referring to, audiences familiar with Malay culture would immediately recognize that it is that of the Orang Minyak (literally, the "Oily Man"). In fact, the English title of the film bears clear phonetic resemblance to the Malay term, "Orang Minyak". Beyond that, audiences familiar with Malay cinema would also instinctively relate it to a series of wildly popular films that appeared on the big screens nearly two decades before. They are: *Orang Minyak* (The Oily Man, 1958), *Serangan Orang Minyak* (The Oily Man Strikes Again, 1958) and *Sumpah Orang Minyak* (The Curse of the Oily Man, 1958). The former two were produced by Cathay-Keris and *Sumpah Orang Minyak* by Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions. These *Orang Minyak* films formed the second Malay horror cinema phenomenon following the earlier *Pontianak* craze (1957-1965).⁴³⁹

It is no coincidence then, that one of the earliest Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films – *The Oily Maniac*, was produced by the Shaw Brothers with a script written by Chua Lam. Before becoming a well-known producer with the Shaw Brothers and before relocating to Japan and Hong Kong in 1957 and 1963 respectively, Chua Lam grew up in Singapore.⁴⁴⁰ His father, Chua Boon Hean (蔡文玄), worked for the Shaw Brothers as magazine editor and manager and wrote scripts for the Malay counterpart of the Shaw Brothers Company – the

⁴³⁹ Hassan Abd Muthalib. *Malaysian Cinema in a Bottle: A Century (and a Bit More) of Wayang*. Petaling Jaya: Merpati Jingga, 2013, p.73.

⁴⁴⁰ "Profiles", in Wong Ain-ling ed. *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*, p.309.

Malay Film Productions – in the 1950s.⁴⁴¹ Chua would have known about and indeed, could have witnessed the *Orang Minyak* phenomenon in the 1950s. He would certainly have been familiar with the *Orang Minyak* films, especially that of Shaw’s *Sumpah Orang Minyak*, given his proximity with the Shaw Brothers, the Malay Film Productions and the Malay film scene in Malaya. In fact, his script for *The Oily Maniac* clearly recalls all three *Orang Minyak* films. *Orang Minyak* tells the story of “an elusive, ominous figure, covered in dripping black oil...[who] terrorizes kampongs and embarks on a trail of murder. Then the police lay a trap for him in a haunted house”.⁴⁴² Its sequel – *Serangan Orang Minyak* – is about how the Oily Man escapes from prison with the help of his teacher, causing fear in the city, leading to a battle of wits and might with the police. *Sumpah Orang Minyak*’s story revolves around Si Bongkok, a hunchback who is constantly bullied by villagers in his kampong and who is secretly in love with the village chief’s daughter. When he confesses his love, the villagers charge Si Bongkok of contaminating the village and chase him away. Hurt and indignant, Si Bongkok questions the heavens if there is justice in this world. At this, a mysterious spaceship-looking boat descends, bringing Si Bongkok to a neverland where he is transformed into a handsome young man on the promise that he would not boast or be hostile to other human beings. Returning to the village sometime after, a handsome Si Bongkok confesses once again to the village chief’s daughter but in a row with the village villain, she was killed by the latter who in turn was killed by Si Bongkok. As the promise is broken, Si Bongkok turns invisible. He then transforms into an *Orang Minyak* after making a pact with the devil who promised to give him worldly pleasures if he would rape twenty-one girls within seven days and worship Satan.

⁴⁴¹ “Interview with Chua Boon Hean”, 25-26 Jul 1990, Oral History Collection: Chinese Dialect Groups, Accession Number 001157 (Reel 21, 26, 28, 29), National Archives of Singapore. Chua wrote scripts for Malay films under the pseudonym, Sulaiman.

⁴⁴² Unfortunately, the film is considered lost today. We can only piece together the film’s narrative through newspaper reports. See “Oily Man on the Screen”, *The Straits Times*, 14 February 1958, p.10.

The Oily Maniac appears to be an amalgamation of all these *Oily Minyak* narratives and themes. The film's protagonist, Shen Yuan, is a "Nanyang man" with physical disabilities who grew up being bullied and feeling inferior. He is secretly in love with his childhood friend, Chung Yue, whose father accidentally killed someone in a business conspiracy. Placed on death row, Chung's father reveals to Shen Yuan that the latter's father was a *gong tau* master and had left him with a black magic curse. Shen copies down the curse said to be written in the Jawa script. After her father's death, villains continue to harass Chung Yue. Unable to protect her because of his handicap, Shen questions the heavens if there is justice in the world. At this, Shen is reminded of the curse. Chanting the curse, Shen transforms into an Orang Minyak who would go on to kill the people he deems unjust. A battle of wits then ensues between the police and the Orang Minyak, who leaves a trail of oil at crime scenes. Meanwhile, Chung becomes romantically involved with a man who turns out to be a perpetrator of the conspiracy that had killed her father. Chung kills herself upon realizing this and to revenge for her, the Orang Minyak kills the man and is himself killed by the police in the end.

While the film proclaims at the start that it is adapted from a Malay folklore, it is perhaps more accurate to say that *The Oily Maniac* references earlier films of the same subject. The theme of justice, the characterization of the Orang Minyak as an outcast of society and the narrative plot of failed romances triggering the miraculous remedying of handicaps only began with *Sumpah Orang Minyak* for, despite its many variations, the folklore generally tells of an oily monster who sold his soul to the devil and bear malicious intentions of raping virgin women.⁴⁴³ That the narrative is framed as a detective story involving police (good) and villain (evil) is also a cinematic addition to the folklore, although the two Cathay-Keris films were indeed based on true events that were widely reported in local newspapers about a criminal

⁴⁴³ Theresa Bane. *Encyclopedia of Demons in World Religions and Cultures*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012, p.161. This is also the version that is circulating on popular websites and online forums.

covered in grease in 1950s Malaya.⁴⁴⁴ It is thus not too far-fetched to posit that *The Oily Maniac* is a remake of all three *Orang Minyak* films combined. It is indeed also not surprising that as a producer with little experience in scriptwriting, Chua Lam would refer to other previously successful films when attempting to write one himself. This case of remaking popular 1950s Malay horror films into a 1970s Chinese-language Nanyang *gong tau* film thus illuminates the industrial dimension of the subgenre's practice of Malay-izing Nanyang in its formative years: if Ho Meng-hua's prior experience in making Malayanized Chinese-language films equipped him with the expertise of Malay-izing Nanyang as a means of orientalizing it, Chua Lam's actual contact with Malay cinema allowed him to borrow directly from their archives as a most convenient way of creating a generic, non-Chinese Nanyang onscreen.

With these largely Malay-ized films, Ho Meng-hua and Chua Lam created fertile grounds for the development of this subgenre and anticipated the rise of another pivotal figure in the Shaw Brothers Company who would continue to draw resources from the Malay film industry to create a Malay-ized Nanyang, only to abstract this Orient even further. This person is Kuei Chih-hung, director of *Bewitched* and the monumental *The Boxer's Omen*. Kuei Chih-hung is best remembered as a "rebel" in Hong Kong cinema, having directed unconventional, subversive works such as *The Delinquent* (憤怒青年, 1973), *The Killer Snakes* (蛇殺手, 1974) and the aforementioned *Hex* trilogy.⁴⁴⁵ However, just as few would today remember Chua Lam's role as a scriptwriter, Kuei's participation in the Malay film industry is equally, if not even more, obscured from sight, not warranting any substantial mention in a book dedicated to his cinematic achievements.⁴⁴⁶ In the late 1970s, Kuei Chih-hung actually directed at least

⁴⁴⁴ On this note, the *Orang Minyak/Oily Maniac* adaptation presents an interesting case of adaptation on accounts of transmediality, originality and cultural retellings (see Julian Stringer, "The Original and the Copy: Nakata Hideo's *Ring* (1998)", in Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer eds. *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*. London: Routledge, 2007, p.296-307). This is a topic for another day.

⁴⁴⁵ Sam Ho and Li Cheuk-to eds. *Kuei Chih-hung: The Rebel in the System*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2011.

⁴⁴⁶ Only *Sayang Anakku Sayang* is included in his filmography. See *ibid.*, p.118. The only part in the book that briefly mentions this aspect is in Chua Lam's interview of Kuei. See *ibid.*, p.18.

three Malay films for Shaw's Merdeka Studio. These include *The Restless Youth* (Jiwa Remaja, 1975), *My Dear Child* (Sayang Anakku Sayang, 1976) and *The Death Bell* (Loceng Maut, 1976) (See Chapter 3).⁴⁴⁷ Kuei was not officially credited as director in these well-received films but his participation was widely reported in *Southern Screen* (南國電影), Shaw Brothers' official Chinese-language movie magazine. He even contracted a liver disease when filming *The Death Bell* in Malaysia and this illness would go on to affect his career in the years to come.⁴⁴⁸

Kuei's participation in the Malay film industry is relevant here as this experience gave him access to resources that he would later bring over into the making of his landmark Nanyang *gong tau* films. By resources, I am referring specifically to actor Hussein Abu Hassan (胡仙哈辛), who starred in Kuei's Malay film, *The Death Bell* (1976), as a chief villain and later in Kuei's Chinese-language film, *Bewitched* (1981), as a Thai *gong tau* master. I have previously described the practice of Malay-izing as orientalizing in Kuei's *Bewitched*: even when the film is not set in Malaysia or Indonesia, where the Malay language is commonly used, it is nonetheless largely utilized to create a mish-mashed "Nanyang language". This may have something to do with Kuei's casting of Hussein Abu Hassan, whose participation in the film may have provided convenient access to this non-Sinitic Southeast Asian language. More importantly, the casting of Hussein Hassan as a Thai *gong tau* master clearly reveals how, in the subgenre's early years, the Malay-izing of Nanyang served to homogenize the region rather than to feature a unique Malay culture: on one hand, Kuei relied on his access and familiarity specifically with the Malay film industry to create a non-Chinese Other but on the other hand, this non-Chinese Other does not represent a Malay Other *per se*, as Hussein's real-life

⁴⁴⁷ "Cai Lan Gui Zhihong Shuai Jishu Renyuan Zaifu Malaixiya Paishe Dierbu Wuyupian Ernü Siqing (蔡瀾桂治洪率技術人員再赴馬來西亞拍攝第二部巫語片兒女私情)", *Southern Screen*, October 1975, Vol.212, p.48; "Gui Zhihong Mai Jidan (桂治洪賣雞蛋)", *Southern Screen*, September 1977, Vol.234, p.44 and "Gui Zhihong Daoyan Zuopin Fengge Guili Duozi Haibao Xuandeng (桂治洪導演作品 風格瑰麗多姿 海報選登)", *Southern Screen*, September 1980, Vol.299, p.1-2.

⁴⁴⁸ "Zai Dama Paipian Shi Ceng Shi Bujie Haichan Gui Zhihong Huan Ganyan Bingfei Duzi Shengchong (在大馬拍片時曾食不潔海產 桂治洪患肝炎並非肚子生蟲)", *Southern Screen*, July 1977, Vol.232, p.64.

“Malayness” as an ethnic-Malay actor from Malaysia is completely effaced in the film due to its Thailand setting and the positioning of him as a Thai *gong tau* master. Malay-as-Other construed by mobilizing “Malayness” is here only taken to stand in for or to symbolize a larger-scale Nanyang-as-Other. In this way, Kueh Chih-hung effectively further abstracted the Nanyang Orient laid down by his Shaw Brothers predecessors somewhat ironically by Malay-izing it, consolidating a generic, homogenized Nanyang Orient that would become a cornerstone of the Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre. From the case of Ho Meng-hua to Chua Lam to Kuei Chih-hung then, it seems clear that although in the overall sense, Nanyang is an indiscriminate “whole” shaped simply in terms of being non-Chinese and non-Hong Kong, in the subgenre’s formative years, this orientalizing was achieved mainly by Malay-izing the region which, in turn, was materialized when pioneers from Hong Kong mobilized their prior experiences with and access to the Malayan/Malaysian (Malay) cinema and its film industry. These transborder interactions mark the subgenre’s unique course of development.

History of Southeast Asian tourism

With this, the contour of Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* films is delineated: this subgenre possesses its own unique set of codes and conventions, orientalizes Southeast Asia and interacted closely with Malay cinema and its film industry during its formative years. It rose to prominence within the specific timeframe of the 1970s-80s, before which only two such films could be identified and after which the numbers dwindled drastically, pointing to the speedy loss of charm that the subject of Nanyang *gong tau* had on Hong Kong filmmakers from the 1990s onwards. It is to this specific timeframe that I now turn in this section, as I seek to investigate why, with all its peculiarities outlined above, did this subgenre rise to prominence between the 1970s and 1980s?

The travel motif between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia in these films points to a little-discussed dimension – that of tourism – in seeking answers to this question. Hoping to unpack the seemingly intimate entwinement between cinema and tourism in this subgenre, in the rest of this chapter I will focus my investigation on the cross-sections between cinema and tourism in shaping the Nanyang Orient that is fundamental to these films (though it must be emphasized that it is not my intention to push for a singular cause-and-effect explanation in doing so). This renders a sketch of Southeast Asian tourism history necessary to begin with. In the history of modern mass tourism, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that tourism experienced rapid development as a major way of attracting foreign capital into Southeast Asia, quickly becoming institutionalized in the region. According to tourism studies scholar Linda Richter, it was only from the year 1970 onwards, that tourism in most parts of Southeast Asia turned from something that “just happened” to something that is consciously planned. Many countries began to draw up national plans to develop its tourism industry and this often involved the founding of National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and building of infrastructures and/or incentives for the construction of tourism facilities.⁴⁴⁹ As such, by the 1990s, tourism has become one of Southeast Asia’s foremost industries.⁴⁵⁰ In the case of Indonesia, for example, tourism was identified as an important source of foreign exchange earnings in the first five-year development plan made under the Suharto regime in 1969, and in the 1970s, the nation obtained sizeable World Bank loans for large tourism projects in Bali.⁴⁵¹ In fact, the first integrated tourism development that signified the institutionalization of mass tourism in Southeast Asia was Nusa Dua – the beach resort in Bali. Planning for this 350-ha resort

⁴⁴⁹ Linda Richter, “Tourism policy-making in Southeast Asia: A twenty-first century perspective”, in Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell eds. *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008, p.135-6 and Colin Michael Hall. *Tourism in South and Southeast Asia*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000, p.16.

⁴⁵⁰ Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell, “Introduction: Tourism in Southeast Asia Revisited”, in Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell eds. *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*, p.8-10.

⁴⁵¹ Shinji Yamashita, “Southeast Asian Tourism from a Japanese Perspective”, in Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell eds. *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*, p.192.

commenced in 1971 under the direction of Bali Tourism Development Corporation and the first hotel opened in 1983.⁴⁵²

As countries in Southeast Asia relished in their newfound enthusiasm and, indeed, an overwhelming success in international mass tourism, it also became clear that two particular forms of tourism – sex and ethnic tourism – has come to dominate the region’s tourism scene during this period.⁴⁵³ In other words, the predominant tourist gaze directed towards Southeast Asia in the 1970s-80s by international travelers was one that was in search primarily of an erotic, exotic and homogenous Southeast Asia. Joining the array of theorists who have variously developed the concept of the “gaze” (such as Foucault, Lacan, Sartre, Laura Mulvey, bell hooks, Derrida, E. Ann Kaplan, John Berger, etc.), sociologist John Urry first ushered the concept into tourism studies in 1990.⁴⁵⁴ Urry posits that:

[t]he tourist gaze is not a matter of individual psychology but of socially patterned and learnt “ways of seeing” (John Berger, 1974). It is a vision constructed through mobile images and representational technologies. Like the medical gaze, the power of the visual gaze within modern tourism is tied into, and enabled by, various technologies, including camcorders, film, TV, cameras and digital images.⁴⁵⁵

Like most other theorists of the “gaze”, Urry founded his theory on the premise that gazing is a learned ability.⁴⁵⁶ It is an epistemic field constructed linguistically as much as visually, a performance that orders, shapes and classifies rather than reflects the world. It is the

⁴⁵² Colin Michael Hall. *Tourism in South and Southeast Asia*, p.110.

⁴⁵³ Robert E. Wood, “International Tourism and Cultural Change in Southeast Asia”, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1980): p.573.

⁴⁵⁴ John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1990.

⁴⁵⁵ John Urry and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2011, p.3.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., p.2.

“discursive determinations” of socially constructed seeing or of “scopic regimes”.⁴⁵⁷ In this light, tourists do not see objects and buildings “as such”. What is being seen is partly constituted as signs and tourism is precisely about the collection of signs – the (re)production of ever new objects of and for the tourist gaze by an array of tourist professionals.⁴⁵⁸ Clear markers are provided through complex processes of production that generate and sustain regular, meaningful and profitable tourist gazes, so that tourists can learn how, when, what and where to gaze at each place of attraction.⁴⁵⁹ The key implication of understanding tourism this way is that processes by which the tourist gaze is constructed and reinforced – including what authorizes it, what its consequences are for the places which are its object of gaze, and how it interrelates with other social practices – can no longer remain unnoticed.⁴⁶⁰

Urry’s formulation of the tourist gaze has rightly been criticized for its privileging of the visual in tourism studies and for affording too much emphasis on the role that the tourism industry plays in shaping tourist experiences. However, the links he drew between tourism and the concept of the gaze undeniably provide a salient perspective to understanding the power relations within the sociocultural practice of tourism, particularly in the case of 1970s-1980s Southeast Asia, where tourism was still a fledgling concept and countries therefore needed to actively promote themselves as attractive, newly-available tourist destinations. NTOs and tourism professionals in Southeast Asia at that time were eager to structure a viable tourist gaze directed towards themselves – one that could attract and guide potential and often clueless tourists as to how, when, where and what to see.

While each country deployed different promotional tactics, it soon became apparent that the tourist gaze projected towards Southeast Asia during this period was more often than not structured primarily along the lines of sex. Female eroticism was commonly utilized as a

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p.4.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p.8.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p.3.

key selling point in tourism promotion initiatives across NTOs in the region. As one scholar puts it, “it is almost impossible to find an official piece of [Southeast Asian] tourism promotional material that does not feature a beautiful young woman, the most famous of all being ‘Singapore Girl’, the young woman in her *sarung-kebaya* [sic] who graces Singapore Airlines promotional material”.⁴⁶¹ Sex tourism was also specifically promoted in several parts of Southeast Asia, most notably in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, albeit at times simply via a lack of intervention and regulation.⁴⁶² Until the end of the 1980s, for example, the Thai government openly promoted sex tourism as a means of foreign exchange and job creation, affording Thailand the notorious reputation of “Brothel of Asia”, “Thighland” and a “world-famous sex paradise”.⁴⁶³ According to Erik Cohen, the Pattaya Beach in particular boomed into a popular sex tourism destination for tourists (especially among the Germans and the Arabs) from the late 1970s to the 1980s.⁴⁶⁴ Similarly in the Philippines, the State overtly encouraged the use of “hospitality girls” in tourism and its Ministry of Tourism recommends various brothels in their promotional guides.⁴⁶⁵ Motels in Manila also became known for their association with sex tourism and a “fresh peach on every beach” was, in fact, a government promise at least until the Aquino administration.⁴⁶⁶ Likewise, in Indonesia, just like Thailand’s Pattaya Beach the Kuta Beach rose in popularity as a sex tourism destination where the proverbial “Four S’s” of beach resort tourism – sex, sun, sand and sea – seamlessly came together.

⁴⁶¹ Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell, “Introduction: Tourism in Southeast Asia Revisted”, p.6.

⁴⁶² Ibid., p.227.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Erik Cohen, “Thailand in ‘Touristic Transition’”, in Peggy Teo, T.C. Chang, and K.C. Ho eds. *Interconnected Worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia*. London: Pergamon, 2001, p.159.

⁴⁶⁵ John Urry and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, p.67.

⁴⁶⁶ Linda Richter, “Tourism Policy-making in Southeast Asia: A Twenty-first Century Perspective”, p.142.

That the region as a whole became so closely tied to eroticism during this time is further evidenced by the way Southeast Asia was represented in European tourist guidebooks, one of which proclaimed that:

Thailand is a world full of extremes and the possibilities are unlimited... especially when it comes to girls. Still it appears to be a problem for visitors in Thailand to find the right places where they can indulge in unknown pleasures. It is frustrating to have to ask in broken English where you can pick up pretty girls. Roise has done something about this. For the first time in history, you can book a trip to Thailand with erotic pleasures included in the price.⁴⁶⁷

In fact, the situation was so rife that it elicited protests from feminist groups across Asia. Women's groups in Seoul and Tokyo staged demonstrations in 1973 against sex tours held throughout Southeast Asia. In 1981, feminist organizations in the Philippines protested against the structural inequalities that made such sex tours possible for Japanese men.⁴⁶⁸ Also targeting this phenomenon of male Japanese tourists engaging in sex tourism in Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines and Thailand particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, an anti-sex tourism movement developed among feminists in Japan.⁴⁶⁹

Besides eroticism and sex tourism, another image and mode of tourism that came to be closely associated with the region during this time was ethnic tourism and its associated trait of exoticism. It is difficult to reach a consensus on what exactly constitutes ethnic tourism especially in the face of another similar category – cultural tourism, but it suffices here to

⁴⁶⁷ Thanh-Dam Truong. *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in South-East Asia*. London: Zed Books, 1990, p.178, qtd. in Shinji Yamashita, "Southeast Asian Tourism from a Japanese perspective", p.198.

⁴⁶⁸ Lisa Law. *Sex Work in Southeast Asia: The Place of Desire at a Time of AIDS*. London: Routledge, 2000, p.101.

⁴⁶⁹ Shinji Yamashita, "Southeast Asian Tourism from a Japanese Perspective", p.199.

understand ethnic tourism the way Valene Smith first defined it: “[e]thnic tourism is marketed to the public in terms of the ‘quaint’ customs of indigenous and other exotic peoples, exemplified by the case studies on the Eskimo, the San Blas Indians of Panama and the Toraja in Indonesia”.⁴⁷⁰ This mode of tourism is specifically concerned with visiting exotic and often marginal destinations with the intention of observing the cultural expressions and lifestyles of “exotic peoples”, of being exposed to and experiencing some form of cultural otherness.⁴⁷¹ Typical activities include visits to native homes, attending dances and ceremonies and possibly participating in religious rituals.⁴⁷² Tourists may go to see folk costumes in daily use, shop for handicrafts in bazaars and learn some native conduct or language.⁴⁷³ Whether such activities are “natural” or staged, in ethnic tourism, the focus of tourist interest is on the cultural practices which define a unique ethnicity.⁴⁷⁴ It promises the tourist an opportunity to see at least some portions of the “exotic peoples” indigenous/tribal/aboriginal/native culture.⁴⁷⁵ A particularly useful way of encapsulating the essence of ethnic tourism is the “Four H’s” acronym: habitat, heritage, history and handicrafts.⁴⁷⁶

If sex tourism was particularly prevalent in a few select Southeast Asian countries, ethnic tourism was a much more widespread practice throughout the region. Hill tribe village tours and jungle trekking in Northern Thailand became popular alongside the aforementioned

⁴⁷⁰ Valene Smith. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, p.4.

⁴⁷¹ R. W. McIntosh and C. R. Goeldner. *Tourism: Principles, Practices and Philosophies (6th edition)*. New York: Wiley, 1990, p.139-140, qtd. in Brian King, “What is Ethnic Tourism? An Australian Perspective”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 15, Issue 3 (1994): p.173 and Robert E. Wood, “Tourism and the State: Ethnic Options and Constructions of Otherness”, in Michel Picard and Robert Everett Wood eds. *Tourism, Ethnicity and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p.1.

⁴⁷² Philip Feifan Xie. *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism*. Bristol: Channel View, 2011, p.3.

⁴⁷³ Dean MacCannell, “Reconstructed Ethnicity Tourism and Cultural Identity in Third World Communities”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol.11, Issue 3 (1984): p.377.

⁴⁷⁴ Robert E. Wood, “Ethnic Tourism, the State and Cultural Change in Southeast Asia”, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol.11, Issue 3 (1984): p.360.

⁴⁷⁵ Valene Smith. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, p.10.

⁴⁷⁶ Philip Feifan Xie. *Authenticating Ethnic Tourism*, p.8.

island and beach tourism in the Southern Thai islands since the 1970s.⁴⁷⁷ The Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT; previously TOT) frequently featured pictures of tribal groups working in their colourful poppy fields, highlighting the “simple, unspoiled” tribal life up in the North and every foreign (i.e. outside Thailand) guidebook emphasized that in Northern Thailand, there are several culturally distinctive “tribes” that are worth visiting.⁴⁷⁸ In fact, “Exotic Thailand” was the name of a newssheet distributed by TAT and one of its promotional slogans was: “Thailand – the most exotic country in Asia”.⁴⁷⁹

The situation was not much different in most other parts of Asia. Since the 1970s, ethnicity became fashionable in Indonesia. The most popular ethnic tourism destinations in Indonesia centered around South Sulawesi and Bali, where the Torajan and Balinese people lived. The 1973 airing of a British-produced television documentary in France, Switzerland and Belgium featuring a Torajan aristocrat’s funeral ritual, coupled with the publication of a National Geographic article on the history and culture of the Torajan people in 1972, Torajan entrepreneurs’ printing of guidebooks featuring Sa’dan Torajan culture in the early 1970s, the declaration by Indonesia’s Director General of Tourism in 1984 that Tana Toraja is “the touristic *primadona* of South Sulawesi” and the Indonesian government’s commitment to promoting the country’s outer islands as tourist destinations in the 1974 Second Five Year Plan all served to promote greater tourist traffic into the mountainous Toraja highlands.⁴⁸⁰ From 1971 to 1979, a series of seminars was also held under the joint auspices of the Directorate General of Culture and the Directorate General of Tourism, resulting in the “doctrine of cultural

⁴⁷⁷ Victor King, “Anthropology and Tourism in Southeast Asia: Comparative Studies, Cultural Differentiation and Agency”, in Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell eds. *Tourism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and New Directions*, p.63.

⁴⁷⁸ Linda K. Richter. *The Politics of Tourism in Asia*, p.96 and Jean Michaud, “A Portrait of Cultural Resistance: the Confinement of Tourism in a Hmong Village in Thailand”, in Michel Picard and Robert Everett Wood eds. *Tourism, Ethnicity and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*, p.129.

⁴⁷⁹ Erik Cohen, “Thailand in ‘Touristic Transition’”, p.158.

⁴⁸⁰ Joel S. Kahn, “Culturalizing Malaysia: Globalism, Tourism, Heritage, and the City in Georgetown”, in Michel Picard and Robert Everett Wood eds. *Tourism, Ethnicity and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*, p.104 and Victor King, “Anthropology and Tourism in Southeast Asia: Comparative Studies, Cultural Differentiation and Agency”, p.60.

tourism” for Bali. This established the Balinese Commission of Cooperation for the Promotion and Development of Cultural Tourism (Komisi Kerjasama Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Wisata Budaya), of which one of its chief objectives was to increase and extend the use of culture for the development of tourism.⁴⁸¹ Partly as a result of such promotional and exposure efforts, tourist flows to South Sulawesi and Bali steadily swelled since the 1970s.

Similarly in Malaysia, longhouses in Sabah and Sarawak where the minority Iban and Kayan communities live, different ethnic cultures and cuisines (Chinese, Indian, Malay) in Georgetown, Penang and the Malay cultural legacy of the country were put on conspicuous display in tourism promotional materials and were consumed by the horde of tourists entering Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁸² In Singapore, in the late 1970s and the 1980s, the Cultural Theatre on Grange Road offered tourists a package of cultures entitled “Instant Asia”, which was a forty-five minutes staged spectacle of Chinese, Malay and Indian “cultural traditions” involving classical Chinese opera, Chinese lion dance, Malay “folk” dance and an Indian “traditional” dance (with a snake charmer).⁴⁸³

Evidently then, alongside sex tourism and erotica, ethnic tourism and exotica were undeniably a predominant mode of touristic experience promoted and experienced in 1970s-1980s Southeast Asia. More than any other types of tourist gazes proposed by John Urry (such as the romantic gaze, reverential gaze or the mediatized gaze), at the time when Southeast Asia first opened its doors to mass international tourism, the predominant tourist gaze directed towards the region focused primarily on sex and ethnicity. It was structured, both on the part of the tourism industry and on the part of international tourists themselves, in a way that primarily assumed and sought (female) erotica and (ethnic) exotica as its objects of gaze. It is

⁴⁸¹ Colin Michael Hall. *Tourism in South and Southeast Asia*, p.52.

⁴⁸² Victor King, “Anthropology and Tourism in Southeast Asia: Comparative Studies, Cultural Differentiation and Agency”, p.66 and Joel S. Kahn, “Culturalizing Malaysia: Globalism, Tourism, Heritage, and the City in Georgetown”, p.104.

⁴⁸³ Lawrence Wai-teng Wong, “Commodifying Ethnicity: State and Ethnic Tourism in Singapore”, in Michel Picard and Robert Everett Wood eds. *Tourism, Ethnicity and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*, p.85.

also illuminating that, in the field of tourism at least, regionalization was indeed a strategy adopted by the region's countries at that time. Collective efforts were undertaken by various Southeast Asian NTOs to promote tourism in and of the region as a whole. Since the 1980s, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) took a keen interest in consolidating a coordinated approach to tourism development among its members. One of the organization's most visible public faces was the ASEAN Tourism Forum, which comprised of a trade fair and conference forum for businesspeople and public officials.⁴⁸⁴ The overwhelming success of the 1987 Visit Thailand Year campaign also spurred various ASEAN government tourism boards to combine forces and this culminated in the Visit ASEAN campaign in 1992.⁴⁸⁵ In fact, tour operators often organized tours to Southeast Asia in a way that covers vast areas of the region within a short period of time, rather than stay in any one particular Southeast Asian country for a prolonged period of time.⁴⁸⁶ Such collaborative efforts perpetuated and reinforced the image and impression of a unified Southeast Asia, presenting a cogent coherent image of the region to potential tourists.⁴⁸⁷ As Peggy Teo, T. C. Chang and K. C. Ho put it, to the traveling "outsider" who knows little about Southeast Asia, such referencing to a pan-Southeast Asian identity seemed to make sense despite the fact that politically, the region was actually fraught with disagreements and conflicts during this Cold War period.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁴ Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael Parnwell, "Introduction: Tourism in Southeast Asia Revisited", p.4.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p.7.

⁴⁸⁶ Robert E. Wood, "Ethnic Tourism, the State and Cultural Change in Southeast Asia", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol.11, Issue 3 (1984): p.359.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Peggy Teo, T.C. Chang, and K.C. Ho, "Introduction: Globalisation and Interconnectedness in Southeast Asian Tourism", in Peggy Teo, T.C. Chang, and K.C. Ho eds. *Interconnected worlds: Tourism in Southeast Asia*, p.6.

The cinematic tourist gaze

This seeming digression into tourism history is in fact crucial to understanding the context in which the Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre rose to prominence in the 1970s-1980s. At the same time when sex and ethnic tourism were peaking in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong cinema was, on the contrary, facing the threat of a collapse. The rise of television, changing socio-economic conditions in Hong Kong, closing of Southeast Asian and Taiwanese distribution networks, intensifying competition especially from Hollywood, Taiwanese and Japanese cinemas as well as the sudden death of Bruce Lee were some key factors leading to the decline of an originally thriving Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s-1980s. Yet, it was precisely this state of precarity or, as Stephen Teo puts it, a state of “transition” that also prompted the proliferation of Hong Kong cinematic genres.⁴⁸⁹ Film magazines in those days frequently reported that constantly venturing into new genres was Hong Kong cinema’s way of coping with the rapidly changing appetite of its audience.⁴⁹⁰ As director Ho Meng-hua explained,

The market trend today is very unstable. Many producers are confused by today’s film market trends, not knowing where to go from here. In the past, when *wuxia* or song-and-dance comedies or *huangmeidiao* films were trending, making one of those would almost definitely guarantee profit. But now, if there is nothing special or new in your films, you could probably secure only three days of exhibition.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁹ Stephen Teo, “The 1970s: Movement and Transition”, in Poshek Fu and David Desser eds. *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.107.

⁴⁹⁰ “New trend in films for 1975”, *Southern Screen*, January 1975, No.203, p.18.

⁴⁹¹ “Zai Yingcheng Canting Fang Daoyan Hemenghua Paidianying Yao Chuqizhisheng (在影城餐廳訪導演何夢華 拍電影要出奇制勝)”, *Southern Screen*, December 1975, No.214, p.50.

This is a time when there is no clear trend in Hong Kong cinema. Everyone in the industry is looking for new, fresh subjects... and *Black Magic* is the result of one such attempt.⁴⁹²

In other words, in the 1970s-1980s, faced with an impending fate of an industry collapse, Hong Kong cinema was constantly hungry and searching for new objects of gaze to bring onto the big screen. This frenetic hunt coincided with a larger identity search that was happening in Hong Kong at the same time. A myriad of factors including the 1966 Star Ferry incident, the series of labour riots in 1967 and the changes in British governance policy these events led to, the student movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Cultural Revolution happening just across the borders, the gaining of international recognition by the PRC, talks of a pending handover of Hong Kong back to the PRC, maturation of the postwar generation, an economic boom followed by the rise of Hong Kong as an international finance capital, etc., contributed to the rise of Hong Kong localism between the late 1960s to the 1980s, particularly in the 1970s. “A distinct local identity, *Heunggongyahn* 香港人” (or “Hongkongers”/“The Hong Kong Man”), “a distinct Hong Kong local culture”, “a new collective sensibility in the newly emergent indigenous culture of Hong Kong”, or “a sense of collective belonging, however vague”, emerged for the first time in the 1970s.⁴⁹³ “[R]ooted in consumerism and Cantonese pop culture” and reflective of a turn from the earlier “refugee mentality” to a localized “market mentality”, this Hong Kong identity was also precipitated by increased interaction with

⁴⁹² “Fajue Xinxian Ticao Hemenghua de Xin Changshi Suishu Qumoshenguai Pian Que Wu Mixin Qiwei (發掘新鮮題材 何夢華的新嘗試 雖屬驅魔神怪片 卻無迷信氣味)”, *Southern Screen*, April 1975, No.206, p.65.

⁴⁹³ Sebastian Veg, “The Rise of ‘Localism’ and Civic Identity in Post-handover Hong Kong: Questioning the Chinese Nation-state”, *The China Quarterly*, Vol.230 (2017): p.323; Ho Wai-chung, “Between Globalisation and Localisation: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music”, *Popular Music*, Vol.22, No.2 (2003): p.147; Lee Ou-fan, “Postscript: Hong Kong – A Reflective Overview”, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol.10, No.4 (2007): p.499; Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover. *City On Fire: Hong Kong Cinema*. London: Verso, 1999, p.7-8 and p.14 and Chu Yiu-wai. *Hong Kong Cantopop: A Concise History*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017, p.7-8 and p.40-42.

mainland China in the late 1970s via the Guangzhou-Kowloon Through Train, as “Hong Kong people began to see a sharp distinction between ‘we’ (the locals) and ‘them’ (the new immigrants) with ‘a new sense of pride and superiority’”.⁴⁹⁴

Hong Kong cinema’s search for fresh new subjects in the 1970s – its need to innovate and reinvent itself to cater to changing market tastes – was thus intimately tied to a rising sense of the Hong Kong Self and a growing desire to assert and articulate Hong Kong (cinema)’s individuality. This most famously culminated in the consolidation of the Hong Kong New Wave and the rise of Cantonese cinema in the 1970s, but the orientalizing mechanism inherent in the Nanyang *gongtau* subgenre suggests, equally, that it was under similar activating conditions that these films rose to popularity in the same decade, with a clear Self/Other divide (modern, Chinese Hong Kong/primitive, non-Chinese Nanyang) lying at the heart of this “new subject (新題材)” serving unambivalently to highlight and affirm the superiority and victory of the Hong Kong subjectivity over Southeast Asia.⁴⁹⁵ In this respect, Danny Chan’s analysis of the relationship between Hong Kong subjectivity and the spectralization of Southeast Asia in these films is illuminating and well worth considering.⁴⁹⁶ In his article, Chan saliently points to Hong Kong’s “deep-seated national ambiguity” as a driving force behind the subgenre’s orientalizing impulse. Although local consciousness undoubtedly grew in Hong Kong in the 1970s, nationalism was, however, left out of the picture, given Hong Kong’s status as a British colony due to be returned soon to the PRC; from a British crown colony to a Chinese Special Administrative Region, the cultivation of national awareness had either been non-existent or incompatible with Hong Kong’s cultural imaginary. This stood in stark contrast to the anti- and

⁴⁹⁴ Sebastian Veg, “The Rise of ‘Localism’ and Civic Identity in Post-handover Hong Kong, p.323; Dale Lu, Eric Ma and Gordon Matthews. *Hong Kong, China: Learning to Belong to a Nation*. London: Routledge, 2008, p.38 and Chu Yiu-wai. *Hong Kong Cantopop*, p.42

⁴⁹⁵ “Dilong Tianni Li Lili Zhuyan de Yibu Xin Ticai Dianying (狄龍恬妮李麗麗主演的一部新題材電影)”, *Hong Kong Movie News* (香港影畫), January 1975, Vol.109, p.40.

⁴⁹⁶ Danny Chan Weng-kit, “Spectralizing Southeast Asia: Hong Kong Cinema of Black Magic”, *Hong Kong Studies*, Vol.2, No.1 (2019), no page number.

postcolonial movements that were sweeping across (if not already succeeded) across Southeast Asia at that time. In fact, throughout the development of citizenship in the city, it had always been ethnicity, instead of nationality, that articulated difference between local and foreign populations. Thus, Chan asserts that in those highly uncertain times of the 1970s-1980s in Hong Kong, whether as a result of colonial de-emphasis or postcolonial re-emphasis of nationality, Hong Kong was caught in a state of “national ambiguity” that emits a sense of defectiveness and awkwardness. More than ever, the imagination of Hong Kong as a community was desperately in need of an (ethnic) “Other”, in order to re-imagine the status quo of the city beyond the normalcy of nationalization in postcolonial Asia as a form of cultural and political empowerment.

In this context, the *gong tau* films’ spectralizing and orientalizing of Southeast Asia was one means in local popular culture to satiate this craving. Catering mainly to Hong Kong audiences, these films served as a form of self-defence, a kind of compensation for the city’s “national ambiguity”, which helped to allay the fears and anxieties of a community torn apart by (post)coloniality and nationality. Through foregrounding the city’s affiliation with Westernization and modernity, that is, through identifying with and ideologically re-imagining itself to be “the West” vis-à-vis Southeast Asia as “the Rest”, the normalcy and ubiquity of nationalization are being downplayed and, by doing so, Hong Kong is shown to be able to sustain its close affinity and identification with global capitalism, Westernization and civil service efficiency from its colonial to “postcolonial” transition, therefore gaining imaginary and discursive advantages over other postcolonial nation-states, especially those in Southeast Asia. In short, Chan makes the convincing case that:

Imagining Southeast Asia in terms of black magic, evil sorcery and pornographic representations is a chronic compensation for Hong Kong’s national ambiguity: On the

one hand, these former colonies had all become sovereign independent states long before Hong Kong concluded the negotiation of its future between the British and Chinese authorities (which resulted in the Sino–British Joint Declaration of 1984). On the other hand, to sustain its own imagination and, more often, its cultural and institutional supremacy over other Asian counterparts, Hong Kong turned to its own capitalistic achievement, market economy and civil service efficiency. In short, although Hong Kong has never been and will never be a nation on its own, its high degree of Westernization and economic accomplishment over other decolonized Asian countries have strengthened its transnational imaginaries and defined its geopolitical status, even if such imaginaries are full of racial and sexual prejudices in the names of black magic and evil sorcery.⁴⁹⁷

Notwithstanding Chan's own prediction of Hong Kong's future state of nationality, the article succinctly summarizes the psyche behind Hong Kong cinema's orientalizing of Southeast Asia during this time. However, unmentioned in Chen's analysis is the existence of a pivotal accomplice that was crucial in facilitating this act of imagination. What makes this subgenre unique amongst other contemporaneous films in its mechanism of elevating the Hong Kong Self through orientalizing Southeast Asia (such as many of Bruce Lee's *kungfu* films, where the villains are often non-Chinese Southeast Asians), is the enabling role that tourism plays in facilitating this power relationship. In this subgenre, the cultural practice of Hong Kong filmmaking aligned itself closely to that of tourism, essentially picking up the tourist gaze projected unto Southeast Asia that was, as mentioned, structured predominantly through the lens of sex and ethnicity at that time. A searching Hong Kong cinema thus found and absorbed unto itself an already trending orientalizing tourist gaze for its own purposes, rather

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

conveniently using tourism industry's popular othering practices and readymade orientalist representations of the region to mediate Hong Kong cinema's own treatment of Southeast Asia on film, in this sense creating a "cinematic tourist gaze" that brought the subgenre's definitive Nanyang Orient into existence. Indeed, Hong Kong cinema's intertwined desires for novelty and self-assertion which translated from the city's need to reconfigure its own identity easily overlap with the self-serving emotional goals of sex and ethnic tourism, which promise to provide self-gratification and self-attainment through the consumption of unfamiliar objects and encounters. In other words, the contrast in state of development between the two industries during this time, as well as the larger sociopolitical context of 1970s Hong Kong, rendered tenable a cross-industrial intersection in the Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre, since the tourism industry's phenomenal success and the grip it had on popular imagination at that time – particularly the characteristic of otherness embodied within – could usefully be capitalized by a Hong Kong cinema that was itself rapidly losing its audience while at the same time beginning to consolidate its own sense of self(-pride). Such sensitivity to the enabling function of tourism in the orientaling mechanism of this subgenre allows us to better trace the intersection of different cultural industries at work in formulating and sustaining particular geocultural imaginations.

Referencing and replicating the tourist gaze

Bringing this further, this means that the subgenre can be viewed as a result of a "de-differentiation" of the tourist gaze. Similar to what Michel Picard calls the "touristification of society" and what Paolo Favero refers to as "touristic ways of seeing", John Urry posits that as tourism rapidly grew into one of the most pervasive modes of experience and perception in modern times, the tourist gaze overflows – de-differentiates – into other spheres of cultural and

social activities.⁴⁹⁸ Indeed, returning back to the films, the de-differentiation of the tourist gaze into Hong Kong cinema through the Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre, or the suturing together of the cinematic and tourist gaze in it, is evidenced by the constant *referencing* and *replication* of sex and ethnic tourism practices in the films. For one, references to Southeast Asia sex and ethnic tourism are commonplace in these films. In *Bewitched*, for example, when protagonist Lam Wai first bumped into Pondswan in Thailand, without any promptings he immediately mistook her for a sex worker and invites her to accompany him to the Pattaya Beach. That this place was suggested could not have been at random given Lam Wai's misunderstanding of Pondswan's occupation. By the time *Bewitched* premiered in the early 1980s, as mentioned above the Pattaya Beach was already a prominent sex tourism destination. Besides naming actual sex tourism destinations in Southeast Asia, names of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) specific to the region are also more than once being mentioned in these films. In *Bloody Sorcery*, for example, the protagonist joked about the Vietnam Rose (越南玫瑰) when he was about to take a break from the Vietnam War and go for a Rest and Recreation (R&R) trip. The term "Vietnam Rose" was used during the Vietnam War to describe a type of STD affecting those who engaged in local sex services, especially the American soldiers.

Sex tourism-specific references are also made on a more general level. I mentioned previously that wives (or their friends) of the protagonists often express fears along such lines: "I am afraid you/he will become bewitched by the women over there and not come back anymore". This represents only one side of the story. There exists a flipside to this because conversely, native Southeast Asian women whom the protagonists met on holiday also frequently express similar anxieties: "You foreign men are all the same; leaving after having

⁴⁹⁸ Michel Picard, "Cultural Heritage and Tourist Capital: Cultural Tourism in Bali", in Marie-Françoise Lanfant, John B Allcock eds. *International Tourism: Identity and Change*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1995, p.46; Paolo Favero, "'What a Wonderful World!': On the 'Touristic Ways of Seeing', the Knowledge and the Politics of the 'Culture Industries of Otherness'", *Tourist Studies*, Vol.7, Issue 1 (2007): p.51-81 and John Urry and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, p.115 and p.132.

fun here and once you leave, you will never come back again” (*Bewitched, Brutal Sorcery*). These fears and anxieties shared by both the woman at home and the woman abroad can be taken as two sides of the same coin: the prevalence of sex tourism in Southeast Asia. This is because such sentiments clearly reflect the popular impression (on the part of the protagonists’ wives) as well as the actual trend (on the part of the native women) of male, heterosexual foreigners entering Southeast Asia only to seek temporary, pecuniary and commitment-free flings with local women in the region i.e. sex tourism. Indeed, upon returning to Hong Kong after enjoying a sexual holiday, the male protagonists often tell his (male) friends back at home that the rendezvous in Southeast Asia was merely “just a game” (逢場作戲罷了; 玩玩罷了). He has no intention of returning a second time, nor does he intend to stay in touch.⁴⁹⁹ Such frivolous attitudes confirm both the wives’ and the native Southeast Asian women’s fears, thereby validating and reinforcing the impression of a sexually-charged Southeast Asia where sex tourism is rife, and at the same time reveal that the male protagonists’ perception and expectations of tourism in Southeast Asia are indeed largely framed through the lens of sex tourism. On a similar note, in *The Boxer’s Omen*, when Chen Hung returned to Hong Kong after a long stay in Thailand, his girlfriend teased that he must have frequented brothels there and warned him not to transmit any STDs to her. Evidently then, throughout this subgenre, direct and subtle references to the prevalence of sex tourism in Southeast Asia are repeatedly being made and it is via this constant referencing that the films pick up and propagate the idea of Southeast Asia as an erotic tourist destination.

Besides sex tourism-specific references, ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia is also frequently alluded to. In films such as *Dead Curse*, key terms of ethnic tourism such as indigenous peoples (土著/土人), tribes (部落), traditional customs (傳統習俗) and rituals (儀

⁴⁹⁹ Key examples include *Bewitched* and *Brutal Sorcery*.

式) are peppered in dialogues and lines used to describe or refer to Southeast Asia. In films based on actual recognizable Southeast Asian habitat, heritage, history and/or handicraft (the “4 H’s” of ethnic tourism), specific Southeast Asia ethnic tourism signs directly found representation on-screen. For example, in *Red Spell Spells Red*, Borneo and Sarawak are represented through longhouses (長屋), marriage trials (試婚) and headhunting tribes (獵頭族). Whether generic or contextualized, these ethnic tourism-specific references highlight the peculiarities, the otherness or the “quaint-ness” (in Valene Smith’s terms) of indigenous ethnic or tribal groups in Southeast Asia, representing the region primarily through the lens of ethnic tourism. More subtly, one particular “H” of ethnic tourism – handicraft – plays a prominent role in Nanyang *gong tau* films: the cursed object that the protagonists bring home from Southeast Asia is, more often than not, a tribal-looking necklace.

Sex and ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia are not simply being referenced to in these films; they are also represented in full. I have previously listed travel as one of the subgenre’s conventions. This act of traveling often assumes the form of mass tourism. The protagonists/characters from Hong Kong often arrive in Southeast Asia as part of a tour group or holiday/R&R trip (*Bewitched*, *Centipede Horror*, *Bloody Sorcery*). At times, the protagonist is, himself, a tour guide bringing groups from Hong Kong to Southeast Asia (*Fury of the Heaven*). More specifically, these characters are commonly on some form of sex or ethnic tourism trips. In *Bewitched*, after arriving at Pattaya Beach, Lam Wai and Pondswan enters a sexual relationship. A few days later, when Lam Wai is preparing to return to Hong Kong, he gives Pondswan a sum of money despite her reluctance to accept it. Thereafter, he declared to his colleagues back at home that he does not intend to maintain contact with her, replicating a behavior closely resembling that of sex tourism as explicated above. Indeed, in the first place, Lam Wai arrived in Thailand precisely on a tour group package. Similar narrative patterns recalling practices of sex tourism recur in films such as *Bloody Sorcery*, *Devil Curse* and

Avengers from Hell. On the same note, *Red Spell Spells Red* epitomizes the representation of Southeast Asia ethnic tourism in this subgenre. On a mission to “shoot mystical feature films” in Southeast Asia, a documentary filming crew traveled to Malacca from Hong Kong to film the “stone coffin” said to be cursed by a “Red Dwarf Ghost” and thereafter to Borneo, to shoot and experience the “world famous mysterious Long House” occupied by “uncivilized barbarous head-hunters” who “still” practice the “custom of ‘Trial Marriage’” and celebrate a “distinctive New Year full of wild excitements”.⁵⁰⁰ All in all, whether by means of referencing or through direct representation of sex and ethnic tourism practices, in no small part Southeast Asia in these films was created eminently through the lens of sex and ethnic tourism.

Another important way through which the cinematic and tourist gaze entwined with each other is through the “look of the camera”.⁵⁰¹ In her analysis of the male gaze in cinema, Laura Mulvey compellingly highlighted the importance of camera techniques in constructing and framing the dominant male gaze: “[p]laying on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire”.⁵⁰² This emphasis on camera techniques in understanding the cinematic gaze is particularly salient to our present discussion because of the significance afforded to the camera apparatus in both tourism and cinema.

In these Nanyang *gong tau* films, the filmic camera often functions exactly like a tourist’s camera. In many instances, cinematic filming mirrors tourist photography, effectively merging the two gazes into one. Certain camera techniques are commonly utilized in these films: on-location shots, panning, panorama, long takes and full-length portrait shots. The first three techniques are often employed to capture the sceneries (habitat) of Southeast Asia

⁵⁰⁰ Handbill of *Red Spell Spells Red*.

⁵⁰¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, *Screen*, Vol.16, Issue 3 (1975): p.17.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

whereas the latter two are mobilized mostly to record Southeast Asian ethnic or tribal peoples' performances as well as to feature the bodies and costumes (history and heritage) of these "exotic peoples". Not only do these techniques allow and invite audiences to assume the gaze of a tourist on a sex/ethnic tour, thus rendering them virtual tourists to Southeast Asia, they also directly mimic the tourist's second pair of eyes – the tourist's camera. Photography has been described as being "the most important technology for developing and extending the tourist gaze", especially since its popularity boomed with the inauguration of the cheap kodak camera in the twentieth century.⁵⁰³ On several occasions, especially for scenes shot on-location in Southeast Asian villages, hills, forests, mountains and beaches, and for those that utilize the aforementioned panning and panorama techniques, the visuals in these films indeed closely resemble tourist photographs and videos. Filmic shooting in this subgenre thus effectively doubles up as tourist photography and the look of the filmic camera sutures not only with the gaze of the tourist but also with that of his/her camera as well. In fact, this is also embodied by the films' promotional literature, many of which feature photographs clearly resembling those taken on ethnic tourism tours.⁵⁰⁴

That the element of tourism was key to the conceptualizing of this subgenre is also evidenced by Kuei Chih-hung's positioning of his *gong tau* film, *Bewitched*, as a pioneering "travel film". In 1982, director Cheuk Pak-tong's (卓伯棠) *Marianna* (賓妹/你要活著回去), a film about a Hong Kong businessman incurring the wrath of a Filipino indigenous tribe after toying with tribe member Marianna's feelings, premiered and was promoted as Hong Kong cinema's first "travel disaster film (旅遊災難片)".⁵⁰⁵ Director of several landmark Nanyang *gong tau* films – Kuei Chih-hung – publicly disputed this claim, claiming that his 1981 film –

⁵⁰³ John Urry and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, p.170.

⁵⁰⁴ "Hong Guizai (紅鬼仔)", *Film Biweekly*, 3 June 1982, No.87, p.10 and cover page.

⁵⁰⁵ "Bin mei (賓妹)", *Film Biweekly*, 3 June 1982, No.87.

Bewitched – should be accredited with that title instead.⁵⁰⁶ Whether Kuei’s objection is justifiable is inconsequential here. Rather, and more importantly, this contention attests to the fact that during this time, the idea of mass international tourism (and especially to Southeast Asia) has indeed entered popular consciousness and has, to a considerable degree, caught the attention of filmmakers in Hong Kong. The names of various Southeast Asian NTOs or travel agencies also appear not infrequently in closing credits of Nanyang *gong tau* films, further highlighting the participation of the tourism industry in shaping this subgenre and the tangible connection between these films and the burgeoning Southeast Asian tourism scene at that time.

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Conclusion

Hong Kong cinema’s orientalizing of Southeast Asia in Nanyang *gong tau* films can be seen as being a result of the city’s defensive reaction towards its own ambiguous state of nationality. While this state of psychological flux manifested also in several other production and stylistic practices in Hong Kong cinema during the same era, the case of Nanyang *gong tau* films highlights, in particular, the enabling role played by contemporaneous tourism practices.⁵⁰⁸ Prior experience with and access to the Malay film industry, coupled with the de-differentiation of a burgeoning Southeast Asian tourist gaze structured primarily along the lines of sex and ethnicity, provided Hong Kong cinema with readily available resources and a pair of readymade glasses through which it could use to cruise and construct Southeast Asia for

⁵⁰⁶ “Gui Zhihong Jiang *Mo de Diyici* (桂治洪講《魔》的第一次)”, *Southern Screen*, August 1983, No.305, p.55.

⁵⁰⁷ Examples include *The Boxer’s Omen*, *Red Spell Spells Red* and *Centipede Horror*.

⁵⁰⁸ Research in this area is aplenty. For more recent works, see, for example, Esther Yau. *Fruit Chan’s Made in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009; Liew Kai-khiun, “Intersecting Anglicization and Sinicization: Hong Kong Cinema and the Modernized Colonial”, *Cultural Studies*, Vol.26, No.5 (2012): p.765-781 and Julian Stringer, “Location Filmmaking and the Hong Kong Crime Film: Anatomy of a Scene”, in Esther Yau and Tony Williams eds. *Hong Kong Neo-Noir*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, p.159-177.

purposes that were fundamentally not so dissimilar as the tourism industry itself. This tapping on past relationships and the alignment with one of the fastest growing industries in the 1970s-1980s provided easy labour and justification for the subgenre's shaping of a Nanyang Orient at the hands of its Hong Kong beholder.

Talk about Hong Kong cinema's orientalizing practices invariably opens up a discussion on Hong Kong cinema's treatment of otherness, particularly in the process of localization. On this note, it is worth noting that since the late 1960s, besides reasons related to mass tourism, Southeast Asians became a rapidly growing visible presence within Hong Kong society itself first in the form of migrant labour and later as refugees. As Hong Kong transited into a labour-deficit service economy, labour surplus economies which included many Southeast Asian countries at that time became a key source of labour for Hong Kong, with majority of these migrant workers entering the city to be domestic helpers (mostly female) for middle- and upper-class Chinese families, particularly after 1975 when the Standard Employment Contract was introduced. In the late 1970s, the Vietnam War also caused a stream of refugees to escape into the city.⁵⁰⁹ These movements *from* Southeast Asia *to* Hong Kong, clearly also class-based and highly gendered, might also have contributed to the shaping of Hong Kong's perception of the region as reflected in the *gong tau* films. Nevertheless, despite having important implications on Hong Kong identity and regional cultural relationships, as mentioned in the Introductory chapter, the topic of Southeast Asia as Hong Kong (cinema)'s internal and external Other has received scant scholarly attention. This chapter's focused study on the Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre represents but a small step to this end. Additionally, this chapter hopes to signal but a beginning to the study of this subgenre. Its intersections with cult

⁵⁰⁹ Ken Young and Kevin Hewison, "Introduction: Globalization and Migrant Workers in Asia", Ken Young, "Globalization and the Changing Management of Migrating Service Workers in the Asia-Pacific", and Kevin Hewison, "Thai Workers in Hong Kong", in Ken Young and Kevin Hewison eds. *Transnational Migration and Work in Asia*. London, Routledge, 2006, p.1-12, p.15-36 and p.90-109; Ronald Skeldon, "Labour Migration to Hong Kong", *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, Vol.12, No.2 (1995): p.201-218 and Lisa Tyler and Michael Hoover. *City On Fire: Hong Kong Cinema*. London: Verso, 1999, p.15.

cinema and culture, as well as the international trend of exploitation-horror and sexploitation in the 1970s and 1980s, potentially provide a different angle to approaching the early internationalization or globalization of Hong Kong cinema – a topic that could well benefit from expanding beyond the by now well-worn refrain of *kungfu* and swordplay.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ Although this chapter focuses on the relationship between the rise of Southeast Asian tourism and that of the Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre, another important factor that warrants deeper examination is Hong Kong cinema's participation in the global exploitation film market/trend during this time. Aside from kungfu and swordplay films, in its attempt to internationalize in the early 1970s, SB (HK) also began to distribute adult films which were not only widely popular among local audiences in Hong Kong, but also in Europe and North America at that time. This coincided with the rise of exploitation cinema in the latter two regions, where Mondo/shockumentary films, grindhouse cinemas, adult movie theatres and other institutions constituting the exploitation film industry grew and enjoyed sustained popularity from around the 1960s to the 1980s. Indeed, *Black Magic* premiered in North America in 1979 and *Black Magic II* (retitled *Revenge of the Zombies*) in 1981, both brought into the American exhibition circuit by World-Northal Corporation (previously Northal Films) – a distribution company based in the United States that specialized in bringing Asian films into American grindhouse theaters in the 1970s-80s. Subsequently, a film entitled *Black Magic Terror* advertised as *Black Magic III* was brought into North America in 1985 by exploitation cinema mogul Dick Randall, this time in the form of Video Home System (VHS) tape. This “pseudo-sequel” to Ho Meng-hua's *Black Magic* films is actually an Indonesian Malay-language film, *Queen of Black Magic* (Ratu Ilmu Hitam, 1979). All these seem to suggest that the global demand for exploitation films that revel in exoticism and eroticism may have also driven the production of these Nanyang *gong tau* films during this time. This, however, exceeds the scope of my research at this point and remains a topic for future investigation.

Chapter 5

Mapping Media Capitals in Asia

Chapters 2 to 4 extended a close study of Hong Kong-Malay cinematic connections embedded within three sets of films, unveiling an underexposed trajectory in transnational Asian and Southeast Asian cinemas. These case studies illuminate the various politics and processes of the early transnationalizing of Malay cinema, and extends our understanding of Hong Kong cinema's transborder dealings beyond the familiar scope of Chinese-language cinemas. In this chapter, I attempt to theorize the power relations that structure these border-crossing operations. I will use the concept of the media capital to meditate on the vexed relationship that Hong Kong cinema seemed to have, with Southeast Asia in the late 1960s to the 1980s, as reflected in its engagement with the Malay film industry and the region as a geopolitical and cultural construct laid out in this dissertation.

Looking to consolidate not just the movements but also the dynamics therein, overall this chapter puts forth the idea that the episodes teased out in this dissertation can perhaps be read as a story of incompatible desires surrounding media capital status. The failure on the part of the Shaws in trying to replicate, unto the developmental blueprint of Malay(sian) cinema, what was essentially *its own experience* of “copying” and “learning” from *Japanese* cinema in the 1950s to the 1970s in order to gain media capital status, seems to suggest that the newly reconfigured Malay(sian) film industry was headed towards a different understanding of success as Hong Kong and Japanese cinemas. The connections and *disconnections* between Hong Kong and Malay cinema perhaps fundamentally tell a story of the historical restructuration of dynamics between media capitals in Asia: Hong Kong-as-media capital most certainly did try to transcend cultural familiarity in extending its reach, but in the case of sustaining its Malay film enterprise, this venture ended up with limited success, as a

fundamental *misalignment of desires* obstructed Hong Kong cinema's attempt to transplant its own success model into a new time and space as a means of sustaining its Malay film subsidiary, thus revealing, to some extent, the limits of Hong Kong's transborder operations.

To lay out this narrative, I will first provide an introduction of Michael Curtin's media capital theory, upon which I will problematize the theory's emphasizing of cultural affinity over geographical proximity in examining relationships between places. I make the case that the film connections studied in this thesis necessitate an expansion of the theory's notion of spatial thinking, particularly in the context of Hong Kong. Thereafter, noting that as a regional center of media activity specializing in Malay cultural production, Singapore was effectively a media capital in its own right while simultaneously functioning also as a subsidiary in relation to Hong Kong in the early to mid-twentieth century, and that Hong Kong cinema's engagement with Southeast Asia in the 1960s to the 1980s can be read as an attempt in sustaining the city's media capital status, I will close with some observations about the fraught exchanges that took place between Hong Kong and Malay(sian) cinema, seeking a preliminary explanation for the proven unsustainability of this transfer/exchange model. I will show that the means of transfer and exchanges explicated in this dissertation actually distinctly resemble that between Hong Kong and Japanese cinema which took place in the 1950s-1970s, and that the differences in reception and outcome between these two instances reflect the contestation between liberal capitalist and non-aligned (cf. the Non-Aligned Movement) ideals. In this way, this chapter contemplates not only on the nature of the Hong Kong-Malay film connections forged during those transformative times, but also on the theorization of Hong Kong-as-media capital.

Theorizing Hong Kong-as-media capital

The theorization of the “media capital” is an ongoing project led by film and media studies scholar, Michael Curtin. Attempting to transcend the limiting organizing principles of nationalism, media imperialism and economic determinism in studies of transnational media flows, Curtin proposes to understand centers of media activity not in terms of distinctive nation-states, but rather as centers that have specific logics of their own which do not necessarily correspond to the geography, interests or policies of particular nation-states.⁵¹² These centers, called “media capitals”, are “powerful geographic centers that tap human, creative and financial resources within their spheres of circulation in order to fashion products that serve the distinctive needs of their audiences”.⁵¹³ Their influence is dependent upon their ability to monitor and discern the imaginary worlds of their audiences and to gather and operationalize resources within their cultural domain. The word, “capital”, here takes on both the meanings of a center of activity and the concentration of resources, reputation and talent. Thus, the idea of media capitals points both to the leading statuses of particular cities as well as the transnational regimes of accumulation and flows that promote the concentration of resources in these specific locales.⁵¹⁴

Three key principles are imperative to the emergence of media capitals: the logic of accumulation, trajectories of creative migration and forces of socio-cultural variation. In essence, the logic of accumulation refers to the innately dynamic and expansionist tendencies

⁵¹² By shifting analytical focus from nation-states to cities (though importantly not disavowing the former), the media capital approach, with its cultural geography-informed perspective, potentially addresses the reductionism of the political economy or media imperialism approach, and other nation-based approaches, where emphasis tends to be placed on transnational mergers, acquisitions and cultural hegemony particularly on the part of Hollywood, which have arguably reproduced an impoverished understanding of transborder media flows. Aimed at addressing the supposed tension between political economy and cultural studies scholarship, and between media imperialism and global studies in the study of film and television, Curtin’s concept of the media capital seeks not to diminish the importance of economic or national forces, but rather to elaborate more fully, the complex logics of global or transnational media flows beyond modernization, development and media imperialism theories (see Michael Curtin, “Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol.6, No.2 (2003): p.203 and p.206).

⁵¹³ Michael Curtin, “Comparing Media Capitals: Hong Kong and Mumbai”, *Global Media and Communication*, Vol.6, No.3 (2010): p.265.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. and Michael Curtin, “Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows”, p.205.

that all capitalist enterprises exhibit. Media companies seek efficiencies through the concentration of productive resources and extension of markets so as to utilize their productive capacity fully and realize the greatest possible return. Trajectories of creative migration refer to the ways in which a city attracts and manages talents, creating a creative cluster that is imperative to the emergence of media capitals, since audiovisual industries are especially reliant on creative labor as a core resource. Forces of socio-cultural variation refer to intervening factors such as government regulation, political intervention, cultural and social differences, etc.⁵¹⁵ In short, the concept of the media capital characterizes media powerhouses as sites of mediation; they are locations where complex forces and flows interact, of which success is necessarily relational, subject to competition from other cities that aspire to capital status.⁵¹⁶ In Curtin's words, it is thus,

a concept that at once acknowledges the spatial logics of capital, creativity, culture, and polity without privileging one among the four... The concept of media capital encourages us to provide dynamic and historicized accounts that delineate the operations of capital and the migrations of talent, while at the same time directing our attention to socio-cultural forces and contingencies that can engender alternative discourses, practices, and spatialities.⁵¹⁷

With its foregrounding of location, the media capital approach is particularly invested in interrogating *spatial dynamics* under conditions of global capitalism. It encourages a spatial

⁵¹⁵ Michael Curtin. *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, p.10-19 and Michael Curtin, "Conditions of Capital: Global Media in Local Contexts", in Lin Jinquan ed. *Internationalizing "International Communication"*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014, p.113-116.

⁵¹⁶ Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows", p.205 and Michael Curtin, "Comparing Media Capitals: Hong Kong and Mumbai", p.265.

⁵¹⁷ Michael Curtin, "Conditions of Capital: Global Media in Local Contexts", p.116.

examination of the shifting contours of production and distribution and of accumulation and dissemination, that both shape and are shaped by the imaginary worlds of audiences.⁵¹⁸ In doing so, the concept addresses the problem of characterizing flows as “sometimes too ambiguous”, which can lead to the obscuration, even negation, of the space- and time-based power relations that structure these flows.⁵¹⁹ For even though flows are complex and disjunctive, as Curtin rightly cautions, “it is nevertheless important to anchor our analyses of flow to particular sites where cultural, social and economic power condense. Locations still matter”.⁵²⁰ The media capital approach thus productively enables us to regard centers of media activity not as coherent, bounded, self-contained entities in studying media flows – a common problem in the political economy and media imperialism approaches – while still acknowledging and identifying their existences as spatial configurations. Instead of boundaries or containers embodying essential qualities, they are conceived as meeting places where local specificity arises out of migration, interaction and exchange, making it possible to speak of cultural spheres of influence, complex patterns of flow, and the uneven and often conflict-ridden development of contemporary media in a more grounded, layered and comprehensive manner.⁵²¹

Identifying the methodology’s core principle as being “implicitly spatial”, Curtin lays out in clear terms the central research questions that the media capital theory seeks to understand, as listed below [all emphasis mine]:

- *Where and why do certain locations emerge as significant centers of media production, creativity and cultural power? Why do they succeed?*
- How does it operate in relationship to various states, markets and audiences?

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p.117.

⁵¹⁹ Michael Curtin, “Locations and Flows: Media Capital in Global Context”. *Flow Journal*. 2008. http://flowjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/michael_curtin.pdf. Accessed 5 November 2020.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ Michael Curtin, “Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows”, p.205 and p.221-222.

- *What is its relationship to other media capitals?*
- *What is the extent of their geographical reach?*
- *How do spatial dynamics influence power valences among groups, institutions, and societies?*
- *Who has the power to produce, to distribute, and to prefer particular images and ideas?*
- What are the essential principles that inform the production, circulation, and social uses of modern media?
- What are the relations between global, national, and local institutions?
- *What are the patterns of dominance and subordination?*
- How do these relations of power affect creative workers and media users?
- *How do they affect the socio-cultural fortunes of human communities?*
- To what extent might we expect alternative centers of cultural production, such as Cairo, Mumbai and Hong Kong, to flourish and prosper?
- *What does the history of a particular media capital tell us about processes of globalization?*
- In essence, how might we begin to map the complicated contours and practices of global media? ⁵²²

These questions provide salient points of entry in thinking about the relationship between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia as forged through the film connections examined in this dissertation. According to Curtin, media capitals are usually port cities with long histories of transnational cultural engagement, where ideas, goods, and people flow through; “the most successful media capitals tend to be seaports that have been centers of flow within the global system for some time”. ⁵²³ This most certainly includes Hong Kong, a city with longstanding cosmopolitan status that has, at least since the 1800s, embedded and institutionalized such flows. In articulating Hong Kong’s emergence as a media capital, Curtin places much emphasis on the Shaw Brothers, explaining that the media conglomerate’s historical development in

⁵²² Ibid., p.206; Michael Curtin. *Playing to the World’s Biggest Audience*, p.9 and Michael Curtin, “Conditions of Capital: Global Media in Local Contexts”, p.111.

⁵²³ Michael Curtin, “Comparing Media Capitals: Hong Kong and Mumbai”, p.266 and Michael Curtin, “Locations and Flows: Media Capital in Global Context”.

cinema and television adequately brings into focus the three key principles of media capital within an Asian context. These include: the Shaws' success in building the largest vertically integrated film studio next to Hollywood in scale by the end of the 1950s, coupled with its later success in monopolizing Hong Kong's television scene (i.e. the logic of accumulation); its ability in recruiting and grooming talent, which led it to becoming a magnet for aspiring artistes and a renowned center of creativity among Chinese societies worldwide (i.e. trajectories of creative migration); the city's relative political stability sheltered by the early benign neglect of the British colonial regime, its convenient and largely unobstructed access to distribution channels in Macau, Taiwan and Southeast Asia by the middle of the 1950s, as well as the city's growing wealth and influence during the 1960s and 1970s as a regional trade and finance center for all of East Asia (i.e. forces of socio-cultural variation). The manifestation of these principles rendered Hong Kong a central node in a vast and complex field of media flows and transactions which had, for a long time, managed to distinguish itself against competing rivals such as Tokyo, Shanghai and Hollywood.⁵²⁴ It thus "makes sense to refer to Hong Kong as a media capital... situated at a nexus of flows among Chinese societies".⁵²⁵

Curtin's articulation of Hong Kong-as-media capital is no doubt historically accurate and methodologically persuasive. Yet, at the same time, it is hard to overlook the overwhelmingly Chinese-centric characterization in his description of the capital's operations, recalling the problem of a "Chinese preoccupation" mentioned in the Introductory chapter. In speaking about the city's logic of accumulation, for example, Curtin focuses exclusively on the flow and condensation of resources and capital within Chinese-language film and TV networks, and his accounts of creative migration to Hong Kong is geared towards movements of ethnic Chinese from around the world: "director Peter Chan hails from Bangkok, actress Michelle

⁵²⁴ Michael Curtin. *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*, p.29-46.

⁵²⁵ Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows", p.222.

Yeoh from Malaysia, singer/actress Faye Wong from Beijing, actor/veejay David Wu from Seattle, director Sylvia Chang from Taipei and TV executive Robert Chua from Singapore”.

⁵²⁶ Statements that situate Hong Kong within a resolutely Chinese media sphere also recur in Curtin’s assessment of Hong Kong’s capital status: Hong Kong is “the central node in the intricate circuits of Chinese popular culture”; “capital, expertise, and cultural resources from Chinese societies around the world flow through Hong Kong”; “Hong Kong is very Chinese and remarkably Western... It exists at the center of flows among Chinese communities”; “although it increasingly competes with Beijing and Shanghai, the city still serves as a nexus for flows within a Chinese cultural sphere. It also serves as a site where media practitioners from all over cultural China congregate”. ⁵²⁷

Evidently, the same “Chinese preoccupation” that overshadows studies of Asian film networks is also clearly detectable here. Also not unlike the former, although Southeast Asia is duly acknowledged as an important market for Hong Kong cinema particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, the region nonetheless remains an exclusively “Chinese Southeast Asia” in Curtin’s conceptualization. Here, the Shaws’ engagement with the region is pretty much understood within the scope of the Chinese diaspora, and even though nods to non-Chinese language endeavors were sometimes being made, they were mostly made as passing remarks that await deeper interrogation and further unpacking:

The Shaws expanded their enterprise across national boundaries primarily in pursuit of ethnic Chinese customers, catering to them with films that drew from popular Chinese operas, featuring legendary characters in mythical settings. They invoked themes and narratives from the past as a way to tap into that which remained common among

⁵²⁶ Ibid., p.220.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p.219-220 and Michael Curtin, “Conditions of Capital: Global Media in Local Contexts”, p.123.

diasporic Chinese, but they also developed movies for ethnic Malay audiences, and they acted as regional distributor for several Hollywood studios, serving audiences across ethnic boundaries. As a Chinese family enterprise, they were discreet and even secretive, but they were also flexible, willing to exploit opportunities wherever they presented themselves.⁵²⁸

This apparent sidelining of non-Chinese trajectories is perhaps predetermined by the basic premise on which Curtin sets out in his study. When Curtin began studying Hong Kong-as-media capital, he had his parameters already set around the notion of “Chinese media”. This, in turn, was motivated by a desire to move beyond speaking perennially and increasingly unproductively about Hollywood hegemony in understanding transnational media flows. “What if,” Curtin asks, “for example, Chinese feature films and television programs began to rival the substantial budgets and lavish production values of their Western counterparts?”; “My initial interest in Chinese media was sparked by the realization that they, too, are globalizing alongside and intersecting with Western media”.⁵²⁹ Taking “Chinese media” to be a competing and competent parallel to “Western Hollywood”, and thus, a fruitful point of departure to achieving the kind of multicentric critique that he aspires towards, Curtin’s study of Hong Kong-as-media capital correspondingly becomes a study of “Chinese media”, where its spatial configuration and the spaces to – and through – which it extends its reach are identified and included primarily based on principles relating to “Chineseness”. This is rather in line with Michael Keane’s understanding of how media capitals work and compete with each other, when he posits that “cultural affinities are the key to the emergence of newcomers. Linguistic specificity drives the production of domestic content in many countries within Asia... These

⁵²⁸ Michael Curtin. *Playing to the World’s Biggest Audience*, p.35.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p.4 and p.23.

countries target world markets in two ways: by networking production in culturally proximate countries... or by reformatting content and erasing obvious signs of origin to secure international market".⁵³⁰ One also suspects if there is a direct correlation between this inclination and the "Chinese preoccupation" present in Hong Kong film (history) studies, since much of Curtin's research is indeed based on currently available literature on Hong Kong film history.

While cultural and linguistic affinity, in this case shared experiences of Chineseness and Chinese diaspora, was no doubt the key drive behind Hong Kong's extensive media and cultural reach, an overconcern with this axis creates blind spots in current theorization of Hong Kong-as-media capital, as other factors not directly related to Chineseness but which have nonetheless impacted Hong Kong's status and operations as a media capital remain largely uninterrogated. The foregoing chapters, for example, have shown the intimate entwinement between the fates of Hong Kong and Malay cinema. Cross-border exchanges brought about by sociopolitical changes in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia between the 1960s and the 1980s had a direct impact on the development of both industries, be it the creation of new genres (Malay James Bond and Nanyang *gong tau*), new trends ("new style" Malay films and Hong Kong cinema's Nanyang Orient) or new beginnings (Hong Kong cinema's localization and Malay cinema's nationalization). These exchanges of resources and capital call for a closer look into how Hong Kong cinema utilized non-Chinese currency in its capacity as media capital.

Indeed, as mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, accusations were made against the Shaws that their Hong Kong enterprise was built on the blood, sweat and tears of their Malay counterpart in Southeast Asia. The tapping on Malay (film) resources to serve orientalizing purposes outlined in Chapter 4 was also clearly exploitative in nature. At the same time, a

⁵³⁰ Michael Keane, "Once Were Peripheral: Creating Media Capacity in East Asia", *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol.28, No.6 (2006): p.847.

complex mechanism of internationalization and nationalization/localization was explicitly at work in facilitating these exchanges that cannot be adequately explained using the usual cultural affinity/proximity model. Curtin explains that “to say that media capitals are relational is to acknowledge that they are constantly absorbing influences from near and far, distinguishing their productions from competitors, and extending the circulation of artifacts as far as possible within existing institutional and cultural spheres of possibility”.⁵³¹ The case of Hong Kong-Malay film connections illustrates that a media capital theory invested in questions concerning patterns of power and the sociocultural fortunes of different communities in transborder media flows must, indeed, actively look for answers “as far as possible” beyond the Chinese dimension in the context of Hong Kong-as-media capital, and engage with critical questions “near and far” relating to cultural differences and borrowing outside of the Chinese media sphere.

Similarly, the case of the Nanyang Orient delineated in Chapter 4 also makes it clear that even within the realm of Chinese-language film production itself, the relationship between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia is, in fact, not always that benign and amiable, and can also break away from the binds of kinship, particularly when the former intersects with the non-Chinese dimension of the latter. Southeast Asia as a geopolitical and cultural construct has always been ethnically and linguistically diverse and Hong Kong cinema did, indeed, encounter, conceive and consider the region in more varied ways than is currently being recorded. This once again highlights the need to adopt a more differentiated understanding of spaces, in this case of Southeast Asia, outside the ethos and pathos of the Chinese diaspora, in order to fully appreciate the complexities of transborder media and cultural flows across Asia.

In short, a predominantly “Chinese” frame of spatial thinking in conceptualizing Hong Kong-as-media capital is unable to satisfactorily account for the heterogeneity of Southeast

⁵³¹ Michael Curtin. *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*, p.287.

Asia that Hong Kong was once closely in contact with, nor can it capture the diversity and depth of locations and communities that Hong Kong-as-media capital had once extended its reach to. The media capital theory holds that “media capital is geographically relational. That is, one cannot imagine a capital without envisioning a terrain over which it holds sway and a constellation of related nodes of cultural endeavor”.⁵³² This is undoubtedly a worthy pursuit that could probably be pushed further by envisioning a larger map of “terrains” and “constellations”, and by reconsidering what may be qualified as “related nodes”.

The limits of Hong Kong’s transborder reach

Using the Hong Kong-Malay film connections as case in point, the media capital theory’s (over)reliance on cultural affinity can perhaps be balanced out with a renewed focus on *geographical* proximity. Indeed, as mentioned in the Introductory chapter, the very reason why Hong Kong even became involved with Malay filmmaking in the first place (before going on to monopolize the entire industry eventually), was precisely because entrepreneurs such as the Shaws had traveled and relocated to Southeast Asia, thereby finding themselves to be in close *geographical* contact with the vast Malay population of the region. It was thus geographical proximity, rather than cultural or linguistic affinity, that prompted these Chinese businessmen to invest in the Malay film industry, leading eventually to the “Hong Kong cinema-inflected” Malay-language cultural products and Hong Kong cinema’s Malay-izing practices that I have examined in this dissertation.

Paying notice to this particular spatial dynamic intrinsic to Hong Kong cinema potentially pulls the study of Hong Kong-as-media capital out of the restrictive “Chinese media circle”. At the same time, it also lights up an avenue through which one could productively

⁵³² Ibid., p.285.

think about the relationship between Hong Kong and Malay cinema as forged through these connections. Rather than viewing them simply as a matter of opportunism that arose out of geographical convenience, through the media capital lens the Hong Kong-Malay cinematic crossovers can be framed as an attempt to expand or, more accurately, to sustain Hong Kong's then diminishing transborder reach in Southeast Asia, as part of managing its media capital status; the cinematic entanglements and disentanglements between Hong Kong and the Malay Peninsula mediated through the Shaws in fact record the ambitions and changing fates of different locations in Asia as spheres of media and cultural influence during those transformative decades.

From the very beginning, Malay cinema was no mere side business to Hong Kong-based media conglomerates like the Shaws and Cathay. Earlier chapters have illustrated that these Chinese businessmen, whose businesses were based mainly in Chinese-language cinemas, in fact also held monopoly over the Malay filmmaking enterprise. With the exponential growth of influential studios such as the Shaws' Malay Film Productions and Cathay's Cathay-Keris Studio, a congregation of Malay creative talents in the city and favorable sociopolitical conditions at that time, at least from the 1940s to the 1960s Malay cultural production thrived in Singapore, and the Singapore-based studio era is today being acknowledged as the golden age of Malay cinema (see Chapter 3). Just as Hong Kong's media capital status in the twentieth century culminated primarily from its leading role in Chinese-language film production, it thus seems equally plausible to also consider Singapore at that time as a media capital most prominently known for being a center of Malay film production, though, like Hong Kong, media flows of varying nature were mediated through this cosmopolitan port city as well. At the same time, however, *in relation to Hong Kong* Singapore-as-media capital simultaneously functioned almost like a *subsidiary*, with financial and creative control – indeed, overall ownership – held almost completely in the hands of the former. Vis-à-vis its comparatively

much more expansive Chinese-language film business, the Shaws managed the Malay Film Productions (MFP) almost akin to a subsidiary company in corporate terms, with controlling interest held by the holding or parent company. Owned and run by the Shaw family, in some ways the MFP provided the massive Shaw enterprise with benefits of diversified risk and alleged asset supplement, although it remained a separate and distinct legal entity with independence in liabilities, taxation and governance, subjected to the laws of Singapore where it operated. Elsewhere, this trans-lingual venture has also been described as an “alter-centre” of Sinophone cinema – a centre or node in the interweaving routes and borders that traverse a symphonic/cacophonic Sinophone cinema stemming from the “establishment of film enterprises by ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia during the mid-twentieth century”.⁵³³

From the late 1960s onwards, however, the Shaws began to struggle to sustain this subsidiary – or alter-centre – under its sway. As detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, dramatic political changes in Singapore and Malaya (later Malaysia) towards the end of the 1960s dictated a need to shift the center of Malay film production away from Singapore to newly independent Malaysia. This shift was not simply a change in location of production base. Underlying the Shaws’ move from Singapore to Malaysia was in fact a question of how to transplant its center of Malay media dominance into a new time and space, thereby replicating their Malay media subsidiary and its former success onto a new spatial and temporal configuration. Simultaneously, SB (HK)’s Southeast Asian markets were also rapidly diminishing during this time largely due to changing geopolitical factors. At the turn of the decade the Shaws thus seemed to be rapidly losing their foothold in the region both in terms of their Malay filmmaking enterprise and with regards to market opportunities at large. In this light sustaining its Malay

⁵³³ Wang Yiman, “Alter-Centring Sinophone Cinema”, in Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo eds. *Sinophone Cinemas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014, p.32 and p.42-43.

capital seemed to also present a way through which the Shaws could reaffirm their standing in the region.

Preceding chapters have demonstrated that the way through which the company tried to tide through this transition, was to transfer readily available resources from their SB (HK) center to the new building ground, under the professed pretext of saving Malay cinema and helping the Malaysian nation develop a competitive independent industry. Using their access to advanced technologies and to “the world” as a bait, the company tried to negotiate for a space in newly-configured Malay(sian) cinema to continue its operations. Nonetheless, as previously demonstrated, this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. The hand extended by Hong Kong was now met with suspicion and resistance; Malaysia’s eagerness to (re)gain autonomous control over this key cultural institution led to a rejection of Hong Kong’s continued involvement and influence in Malay cinema. Failing to replicate its former glory, the Shaws eventually shut down the last Malay film studio owned by Hong Kong businessmen i.e. the Merdeka Studio, signaling not just the disintegration of the memory of Singapore-as-Malay media capital in the formal blueprint of Malay(sian) cinema, but also Hong Kong’s official separation from its former “subsidiary”.⁵³⁴

Viewing the changes in relationship between Hong Kong and Malay(sia) cinema in this way as a radical reconfiguration of the parent-subsidiary dynamic intrinsic to the operation of Hong Kong-as-media capital, the efforts made on the part of the Hong Kong film magnate to preserve its stake in Malay cinema upon losing its Singapore center can be read as an attempt to sustain, stabilize and expand Hong Kong’s media capital status, strength and influence amidst turbulent geopolitical changes. On this level, the connections between Hong Kong and

⁵³⁴ In the context of Singapore cinema, Sophia Siddique frames this as constituting part of a “canonical disjunctural narrative”, which records the history of Singapore cinema with the slow death of the industry in the late 1960s, followed by general inertia in the 1970s-1980s and an explosion of works by Singaporean filmmakers in the 1990s. See Sophia Siddique. “Images of the City-nation: Singapore Cinema in the 1990s”. PhD thesis, University of Southern California, 2001, p.21 and p.69.

Malay cinema in the late 1960s to the 1980s in fact reflect a change in relationships between centers of media flows in Asia, entailing the overlapping stories of Hong Kong losing control of and breaking away from its Southeast Asian subsidiary and source of non-Chinese capital, Singapore losing its status as a Malay media capital, and Malaysia negotiating new terms of engagement with Hong Kong. Returning back to the enterprise of theorizing Hong Kong-as-media capital, in the final analysis this both affirms Hong Kong's attempt at transcending cultural and linguistic affinity in expanding its sphere of influence, and exposes the limits of its transborder reach – an uncharacteristic hitting of a wall for the Shaws, whose exceptional resourcefulness and astuteness in mining new markets and navigating difficult market conditions have, to a significant extent, contributed to the emergence of Hong Kong as a media capital in Asia.⁵³⁵

Misalignment of desires

By extension, it is precisely in this uncharacteristic failure that the nature of the crossovers examined in this dissertation can potentially be further elucidated. The media capital framework above illuminates an important dimension of the Hong Kong-Malay film connections – that of ambition. More than just an expression of expansionist ambition on the part of the Shaws and a demonstration of individual and national identities on the part of the Malay(sian) film industry, the fraught exchanges that led to the breakdown of relationship between the two seemed to be anticipated by a fundamental mismatch of desires pertaining to media capital status. This collision of desires can be located in the pathways of recycled

⁵³⁵ As Curtin describes, the Shaws is known for their outstanding capability of breaking into new markets: “[d]eftly adapting to shifting conditions, he repeatedly refigured the geography his operations, thereby sustaining the profitability of Shaw Brothers’ core entertainment enterprises despite dramatic social, cultural, and political changes throughout the twentieth century” (see Michael Curtin. *Playing to the World’s Biggest Audience*, p.45-46).

templates and ideas of success drawn out by the Shaws, wherein another media capital of Asia – Japan – inevitably comes into the picture.

A comparative perspective would reveal that the “bait” thrown out by the Shaws in a bid to sustain its subsidiary and therefore, its transborder influence, was actually intricately tied to the Shaws’ own encounters with Japanese cinema; the means through which the Shaws attempted to sustain its Malay media center was strikingly similar to the way Hong Kong cinema *itself* found its way to capital status, that is, by means of “copying” and “learning” from Japanese cinema in the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Stephanie DeBoer’s study on this topic is instructive here. Approaching coproduction as a “technology of assemblage” – that is, to understand coproduction not only in material terms such as technological expertise and equipment but also as encompassing a range of production practices including film and media imaginaries, promotional and production practices, industry mandates and aspirations, etc. – in *Coproducing Asia: Locating Japanese-Chinese Regional Film and Media*, DeBoer illustrates the processes of technology transfer and Hong Kong cinema’s “strategy of copying” in Hong Kong-Japan co-productions.⁵³⁶ Citing examples such as the SB (HK)-Daiei Studio colour coproduction, *Princess Yang Kuei Fei* (1955), and films directed by Inoue Umetsugu for SB (HK), many of which are “‘Chinese’ Hong Kong copies of Japanese film” like the 1967 *Hong Kong Nocturne*, DeBoer convincingly argued that Hong Kong gained access to the ways of becoming a media capital in capitalist “Free Asia” by way of Japan, crucially through processes of transfer and translation at play in these co-productions.⁵³⁷

These processes hold particular relevance to understanding the Shaws’ way of engaging with the newly reconfigured Malay(sian) cinema, as it becomes evident that this was in fact a manifestation of the company’s circulation of success templates. As far as Hong Kong was

⁵³⁶ Stephanie DeBoer. *Coproducing Asia: Locating Japanese-Chinese Regional Film and Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014, p.5.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p.64.

concerned, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s Japan was the leading film industry to emulate. Post-war American-led policies had featured Japan at the head of a “flying geese model” of regional development, where Tokyo stood at its infrastructural forefront, staving off communism and maintaining a “free” capitalist Asia (in Cold War terms). A forerunner in technological advancement and economic growth at that time, Japan was often recognized by other regional actors as a mediator of the modes and ideals of capitalist development, including global technomodernity, throughout the region.⁵³⁸ This was also the case in postwar Asian cinema. The Asian Film Festival, for example, was first initiated and led by Japanese producers. From its inception, the festival was intensely invested in maintaining an Asia decidedly set within capitalist circulation, transfer and collaboration. Japan was also figured as a more developed horizon of access to international, often notionally American, formats of film production, even though its cinema was simultaneously coming into focus as a highly competitive national cinema in its own right.⁵³⁹

Co-producing with Japan thus first and foremost “offered a possibility of access to Tokyo’s holdings of advanced technologies in film production”, thereby opening up a channel via which the Shaws could leap into the leadership ranks of Asian cinema, with its newly acquired technical capacity to producing films that were available and attractive to a “world” (i.e. in the capitalist terrain) audience.⁵⁴⁰ The Shaws’ use of Eastmancolor in these films, for example, was thought to have brought Hong Kong cinema to the international standards of the color age, thus becoming “ever more proximate to the markets potentiated in its achievement of international film standards that were held to be more palatable to a developed world”.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p.57. See also Kinnia Yau. *Japanese and Hong Kong Film Industries*, p.58.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p.71 and p.73. See also Kinnia Yau. *Japanese and Hong Kong Film Industries*, p.88; Michael Baskett, “Japan’s Film Festival Diplomacy in Cold War Asia”, *The Velvet Light Trap*, No.73 (2014): p.12-13 and Lee Sangjoon, “The Emergence of the Asian Film Festival: Cold War Asia and Japan’s Reentrance to the Regional Film Industry in the 1950s”, in Daisuke Miyao ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p.230-231.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p.46 and p.60.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p.73. See also Kinnia Yau. *Japanese and Hong Kong Film Industries*, p.104.

Indeed, at a time when industries in Asia sought to penetrate increasingly “global” arenas of development, the major studio players in both Hong Kong and Japan in the postwar era shared an understanding that “internationalization and technological innovation depended upon one another”.⁵⁴²

In the same vein, with the production of “Hong Kong copies of Japanese film” aided by a Japanese crew, SB (HK) gained “new film technologies as a means of access to the prosperity of an ‘advancing’ globe during the Cold War era”.⁵⁴³ The word “technologies” here transcends the scope of filmmaking machinery: Japanese director Inoue Umetsugu’s body of scripts and films provided a readymade narrative and generic stockpile for the Shaws’ exploitation of new markets. Here, Japanese genres, narratives and imaginaries themselves provided a form of technology transfer in the sense that Inoue’s youth-oriented and energetic extravaganzas, linked to the latest in American-style entertainment, became a significant format through which SB (HK) began to image the ideals of the “new age” of the “international” in their own works, infusing Hong Kong film with a kind of modernity that articulated internationalist links and modern aspirations.⁵⁴⁴ In the context of Inoue’s work in Hong Kong, to copy Japanese modes and practices of filmmaking was thus to open the door to a range of receptions and attitudes toward the internationalist “technomodernities” – or rather, a technomodernist form of internationalism – invested in the circulations of a “Free (capitalist) Asia”, ultimately producing the effect of bringing Hong Kong itself within the arc of global modernity.⁵⁴⁵

In these ways, the Shaws effectively combined technological innovation (understood in its narrow sense) with a broader endeavor of stylistic refashioning through film technologies transferred by way of Japan, and in so doing, consolidated Hong Kong’s place in an

⁵⁴² Ibid., p.63 and p.75.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p.60.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., p.70 and p.74.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p.68, p.71 and p.74.

international and rapidly changing regional market, successfully positioning themselves at the center – as a capital – of the developing standards of an international film culture and towards what was perceived as “the world”. The fact that many of the films which Inoue chose to remake had been big hits in Japan previously also increased the likelihood of “recycled success” in Hong Kong.⁵⁴⁶ In sum, scrutinizing the processes of transfer in Hong Kong-Japan co-productions, DeBoer puts forth a strong case that:

The Shaw Brothers Hong Kong studios addressed their own drives toward technological development in part through... a strategy of “copying”. This practice applied not simply to Japanese film narratives or imaginaries but also to the Japanese industry’s efficiencies in production and film technologies, particularly widescreen cinemascope and colour techniques. The stakes of such efforts at replication held particular resonance within the contemporary Cold War restructurings of the region.⁵⁴⁷

Centered in Japanese industries, technology transfer and knowledge were thus significant gateways of access to a new technomodernism that was to solidify Shaw Brothers’ place in world markets; [...] coproductions with Japan... [were utilized] as a means of gaining access to the film and media technologies of more “advanced” industries. It was in this way that producers and industrialists of Hong Kong or Taiwan of the 1950s and 1960s sought to insert their films into the international (read Euro-American) standards of world filmmaking at the same time.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., p.58-59, p.64, p.70.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p.57.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p.61 and p.124.

This *modus operandi* is notably similar to the case of technology transfer between Hong Kong and Malay cinema. Chapters 2 and 3 delineated a similar structure of movement informed by the same kind of developmentalist discourse and liberal internationalist ideals.⁵⁴⁹ The roles, however, were switched this time, with SB (HK) transplanting its own production practices into its Malay counterpart, and with the studio – representing Hong Kong – positioning *themselves* as the gateway to “the world” vis-à-vis Malay(sian) cinema, in a pitch to appeal to the local bumiputera community. Juxtaposing the case of Hong Kong-Japanese and Hong Kong-Malay cinematic exchanges, it seems clear that the Shaws were trying to superimpose the (successful) developmental trajectory of its Hong Kong studio onto the blueprint of its evolving subsidiary in its attempt to hang on to it. Tempting the local industry with the prospect and know-hows of attaining competitive capital status, the Shaws duplicated its own encounters with Japan onto Malaysia as a show of competence and fundamentally as a promise of success.

Counterproductively, though, it was precisely this act of superimposition that planted the seed of discord. Here a foray into Malaysia’s foreign relation history is in place. Since gaining independence in 1957, in broad terms Malaysia has responded positively to (neo)liberal economic globalization. Especially during the early nation-building years, the government pursued laissez-faire policies and a broadly favourable attitude toward the private sector economy.⁵⁵⁰ By the early 1970s, however, wary of Chinese influence from within and guarded against the infiltration of “Western” ideologies with their liberal sensibilities, as mentioned in Chapter 3 the government turned increasingly to interventionist methods and what may be

⁵⁴⁹ The procedure of “cover-ups” mentioned in Chapter 3 is also present in the Japan-Hong Kong case. Kinnia Yau points out that “while Shaw Brothers tried its best to import Japanese experts and technologies, the company also covered up their origins and nationalities by every means. In particular, they requested Japanese staff to use Chinese screen names (see Kinnia Yau. *Japanese and Hong Kong Film Industries*, p.82 and p.92).

⁵⁵⁰ Joan M. Nelson, “Introduction”, in Joan M. Nelson, Jacob Meerman, Abdul Rahman Embong eds. *Globalization and National Autonomy: The Experience of Malaysia*. Singapore: Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publishing, 2008, p.10-11 and p.15.

called “economic nationalism”.⁵⁵¹ This was actually in line also with Malaysia’s official foreign relations position – that of Third World non-alignment – from the late 1960s through to the end of the 1970s.

Albeit only momentarily and in retrospect possibly unsuccessfully, an important force that threatened to destabilize the dichotomous Cold War structure was that of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). While several precursors to the movement have variously been identified, the story of the NAM cannot be told separately from that of the Bandung Conference. In 1955, as a result of their frustration with the political logjam surrounding new membership in the United Nations, the governments of newly independent Indonesia, Ceylon, India and Pakistan jointly organized the Bandung Conference. Dubbed a conference that “symbolized the moment of arrival for the Third World”, the meeting was attended by delegations from twenty-nine primarily new nation-states or nationalist movements in Asia and Africa, including President of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, leader of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, future Prime Minister of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah and Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China, Zhou Enlai.⁵⁵² At the conference, these leaders pursued the collective interests of newly independent countries, such as advancing decolonisation and developing an independent common voice in international affairs, pledging their opposition to colonialism and commitment to national liberation.⁵⁵³ The conference ended with a condemnation of all manifestations of colonialism and a call for increased technical and cultural cooperation among governments of Asia and Africa, as well as the self-determination of peoples and nations, among others. The “Ten Principles (Dasa Sila)” listed in the Final Communiqué, for example, included “respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly

⁵⁵¹ Johan Saravanamuttu. *Malaysia’s Foreign Policy, The First Fifty Years: Alignment, Neutralism, Islamism*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publishing, 2010, p.139-140.

⁵⁵² Mark T. Berger, “After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.1 (2004): p.10 and p.12.

⁵⁵³ Amitav Acharya, “Studying the Bandung Conference from a Global IR Perspective”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.70, No.4 (2016): p.347.

or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations” and “abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers”.⁵⁵⁴

The meeting was ultimately a loud display of Afro-Asian solidarity that would develop into what is now known as Third Worldism. As Mark Berger notes, the historic meeting at Bandung became the *de facto* touchstone of a wide array of initiatives associated directly and indirectly with Third Worldism; the idea of the Third World was increasingly deployed to generate unity and support among a growing number of nation-states whose leaders sought to displace the “East-West” Cold War dynamic and foreground the “North-South” conflict.⁵⁵⁵ As “a political theory and practice”, Third Worldism to a large degree converged with the ideals underpinning the Bandung Conference, seeing “the major fault-line in the global capitalist order as running between the advanced capitalist countries of the West and the impoverished continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America... [taking the] national liberation struggles in the Third World as a major force for global revolution”.⁵⁵⁶ By the 1970s, the world is said to have ushered in the “golden age of Third Worldism”, as the decade witnessed the emergence of a number of new rulers who adopted a distinctly revolutionary Third Worldist tone and outlook in Asia, Africa and Latin America.⁵⁵⁷

Symbolic of early Third World solidarity, the Bandung Conference is today considered by some as a pivotal event that paved the way for the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁵⁵⁸ Amitav Acharya, for instance, holds that the aforementioned “abstention principle” enshrined

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p.357.

⁵⁵⁵ Mark T. Berger, “After the Third World?”, p.10.

⁵⁵⁶ Andrew Nash, “Third Worldism”, *African Sociological Review*, Vol.7, No.1 (2003): p.95.

⁵⁵⁷ Mark T. Berger, “After the Third World?”, p.10.

⁵⁵⁸ Amitav Acharya, “Studying the Bandung Conference from a Global IR Perspective”, p.357; Mark T. Berger, “After the Third World?”, p.12 and Amitav Acharya and Tan See Seng, “Introduction: The Normative Relevance of the Bandung Conference for Contemporary Asian and International Order”, in Amitav Acharya and Tan See Seng eds. *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order*. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008, p.9.

in the Final Communiqué became one of NAM's founding declaratory principles.⁵⁵⁹ Broadly speaking, the NAM came into being in the late 1950s and consolidated itself in the 1970s as a Third Way to navigate the bipolar international Cold War order. It was a foreign policy framework that crucially allowed smaller and weaker states of the Third World to avoid entanglement with alliances or Power Blocs that were organized along the East-West Cold War divide, and to avoid having to serve the narrow particularistic interests of great powers.⁵⁶⁰ Member states were invested in finding a way that could allow them to avoid getting involved directly in ideological warfare between the Soviet Union and the US, and that could further their efforts in self-determination, the pursuit of world peace and the search for a more equitable and just global order.⁵⁶¹

This need for a “third way” emerged in large part because by the mid-1960s, even though most of the areas in Asia and Africa had won their political liberation, it was nonetheless felt that most of these newly-independent nations were still economically poor and dependent on the industrialized countries. In other words, a new political order had already arisen atop the ruins of colonialism and old-style imperialism, but the old economic order – one dominated by industrialized or developed countries – still persisted. Thus, as a means of asserting their autonomy and expressing solidarity, state representatives gathered in a declaration of non-alignment in the first NAM Summit Conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, convened by leaders of India, Indonesia, Egypt, Syria and Yugoslavia in 1961. Like the Bandung Conference, early NAM meetings emphasised issues of decolonization and independence.⁵⁶² Its members' shared interest lies in the greatest possible degree of sovereignty and freedom of action, and in the opportunity to promote their national interests to an international public. These constituted

⁵⁵⁹ Amitav Acharya, “Studying the Bandung Conference from a Global IR Perspective”, p.357.

⁵⁶⁰ Amitav Acharya and Tan See Seng, “Introduction”, p.9.

⁵⁶¹ Abdullah Kamarulnizam, “Malaysia's Role in Invigorating NAM's Bandung Spirit”, *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategy*, Vol.40, No.1 (2013): p.26-27.

⁵⁶² S.C. Gangal, “Non-alignment and The Third World: Convergence and Divergence”, *International Studies*, Vol.20, No.1-2 (1981): p.194-195.

the movement's enduring programmatic core, leading to concepts and initiatives such as the "New International Information Order" and "New International Economic Order".⁵⁶³ Whether the NAM can be considered successful remains debatable to this day, but it is clear from its members' conference speeches, pronouncements, resolutions and declarations, that a key principle underscoring the movement was that "freedom", for these countries, did not hold the same meaning as that which was envisioned by the capitalist camp; "Free Asia" was not the only world order that the region could aspire towards.

As a newly-independent nation, Malaysia stood firmly on the side of the NAM despite being a "late comer to the idea of Afro-Asian cooperation and solidarity".⁵⁶⁴ Caught in a conflict with Indonesia in the late 1950s and the 1960s, Malaysia was not involved in the Bandung Conference that was helmed by Indonesia's then President, Sukarno. In fact, at that time Malaysia's foreign relations stance was also anything but neutralist, with the immediate post-independence policies introduced by then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, being strongly pro-Western and anti-Communist in orientation. The non-aligned countries were also especially unhappy with Malaysia after its failure to vote with the neutralist countries at the United Nations, which planned to propose compromise resolutions on the question of disarmament.⁵⁶⁵

Malaysia's turn towards the NAM would only take place in the late 1960s. In a Malaysian Day broadcast in 1966, Tunku Abdul Rahman significantly admitted to a shift in foreign policy "to keep pace with the trend of events in the world".⁵⁶⁶ Two months later, Foreign Minister Tun Ismail, expounded on the nature of this shift in a speech:

⁵⁶³ Jürgen Dinkel. Trans. Alex Skinner. *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927 – 1992)*. Leiden: Brill, 2019, p.159, p.160, p.197 and p.201.

⁵⁶⁴ Abdullah Kamarulnizam, "Malaysia's Role in Invigorating NAM's Bandung Spirit", p.30.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Johan Saravanamuttu. *Malaysia's Foreign Policy, The First Fifty Years*, p.90.

We look forward to the day when outside powers both great and small will accept our right as a region (i.e. Southeast Asia) and as constituent nations of this region, to sustain our distinctive ways of life in freedom and prosperity, without interference...⁵⁶⁷

By 1968, Tun Ismail had also put forward in Parliament his seminal “Ismail Peace Plan”, which called for the neutralization of Southeast Asia guaranteed by the major powers, the signing of non-aggression pacts, and the declaration of a policy of coexistence.⁵⁶⁸

This shift in foreign relations policy was prompted by events happening at the turn of the decade that prodded the hitherto cautious Malaysia into a concerted diplomatic drive to win friends in Afro-Asia, and later, also in Eastern Europe.⁵⁶⁹ In particular, its failure to gain a seat at the Cairo Non-aligned Nations Conference in 1964 largely due to Indonesian interference, and the rejection of Malaysia’s bid to join the Afro-Asian People’s solidarity Organization in 1965 sparked off considerable domestic debate on foreign policy. An Alliance Parliamentary Group was thus formed to review foreign policy, and a diplomatic counteroffensive was launched in subsequent years. These efforts eventually won Malaysia “the recognition of a number of African and Asian countries and eventually support from twenty-eight countries to attend the following year’s conference at Algiers”. Malaysia’s initial non-neutralist postures thereby gave way to actions that turned towards identification with the Afro-Asian world.⁵⁷⁰

This non-alignment stance was further strengthened throughout the 1970s with a change in government leadership. In 1970, with a delegation led by then Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak just shortly before his succession as the nation’s prime minister in the same

⁵⁶⁷ Qtd. in *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.91.

⁵⁶⁹ These events include: a pending full British withdrawal by the mid-1970s, continued Indonesian diplomatic provocation and political manoeuvring within the ruling party UMNO and in Parliament (which demanded the Tunku administration to reposition Malaysian foreign policy towards Third World countries, particularly its neighbouring Southeast Asian nations). See *ibid.*, p.89 and p.92.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.89, p.90 and p.103.

year, Malaysia attended its first non-aligned nations conference at Lusaka. This marked the NAM's official acceptance of Malaysia as a "non-aligned" nation.⁵⁷¹ In his speech to the conference, Razak spoke glowingly of the NAM and identified Malaysia's foreign policy goals as being unambiguously consonant with its principles.⁵⁷² This outlook would later be carried forward by Datuk Hussein Onn, who served as Malaysia's Prime Minister from 1976 to 1981 following the unexpected death of Tun Razak.⁵⁷³ According to Johan Saravanamuttu, the government's forceful push towards the NAM throughout this new decade was backed by a new elite ideology that aroused within the Malaysian ruling party (UMNO). Tunku's stepping down from power was accompanied by the ascendancy of a younger crop of UMNO, who drew support from a larger supportive core of UMNO rank and file that had been dissatisfied with the policies of the Tunku era. This group's renewed appreciation of the nature of Malaysia's national needs and interests led to the rise of a new ideology that took its theoretical underpinnings from the tenets of "Third Worldism", neutralism, and economic nationalism (the latter leading to the newly-implemented NEP mentioned previously in chapter 3). This was buttressed by a national image of a multipolar international system in which Malaysia's national interests were tied with those of the Third World bloc of nations.⁵⁷⁴ In fact, the ascension of Tun Razak to power in 1970 itself could be seen as the domestic impetus to such a change, for he had always shown a tendency to move towards the Afro-Asian bloc of

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p.118.

⁵⁷² Part of Tun Razak's speech as follows: "Today with the détente between the two power blocs, it is an important responsibility of the Non-aligned Group to ensure that the interests of the big powers do not converge at the expense of the medium and small powers. The hegemonistic tendencies on the part of the major powers which appear to be under various guises and with various justifications must be resisted. Furthermore, the world today is no longer bipolar [...] I submit that here the non-aligned countries have an extremely important role to play and have a unique duty to discharge if we are to remain loyal to the principles of co-existence and to our basic tenets of non-alignment in our efforts to bring about a harmonization of international relations on the basis of respect for independence and integrity of states" (Qtd. in *ibid.*). Accordingly, Malaysia's policymakers subsequently reinstated their non-aligned stand and consistently made it clear that they did not subscribe to the so-called "Domino Theory" put forth by the capitalist bloc. At one point, party theoretician Ghazali Shafie even went on Radio-Television Malaysia to explain that in both theoretical and practical terms, the domino theory had little relevance to the states of Southeast Asia. See *ibid.*, p.127.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p.167.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., p.149, p.152, p.154 and p.155.

countries even as Deputy Prime Minister to Tunku Abdul Rahman.⁵⁷⁵ In any case, from the time of Tun Razak to that of Hussein Onn, Malaysia's foreign policy had become fairly stabilized, with the fundamental posture being one of neutralism and non-alignment.

Malaysia's commitment to non-alignment presents a possibility of undertaking an alternative path and vision of internationalization, particularly during the height of the movement in the 1970s. Drawing strength from the non-aligned movement, at this historical juncture Malaysia seemed to be on track to developing a postcolonial mode of engaging with the world without needing to comply (fully) with the liberal globalization model or standards set and governed by the West (or the global North). While it would be difficult to prove that these ideas that floated on the level of foreign diplomacy and foreign relations had, in some ways, influenced the outlook of the local Malay(sian) film community, the public debate about Malay autonomy in Malay(sian) cinema, the rejection of "foreign influence" in the development of Malaysia's local/national film industry on both the industrial and political level, and the resistance coming from within the local Malay film industry to continue the practice of "copying" and "learning" from Hong Kong cinema, triggered by the Malay Bond films and Merdeka's new-style films, certainly made Malay(sian) cinema appear to be more aligned with this strand of internationalism than with that which the Shaws had proposed. Mapping onto its Malay(sian) counterpart/subsidiary the Hong Kong-Japanese model of transfer, perhaps from the outset this enterprise was already bound to fracture, since the model itself was unambivalently founded on the US-led capitalist camp's idea of a "Free Asia" which, on one hand, featured both Hong Kong and Japan, but on the other, was increasingly out of step with the newly independent, postcolonial Malaysia.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., p.151.

⁵⁷⁶ Indeed, Lee Sangjoon notes that Japan and Hong Kong were "strategic grounds" for The Asia Foundation (TAF) – a San Francisco-based quasi-nongovernmental organization established in 1961 as the Committee for Free Asia (CFA), originally intended to propagate US foreign policy interests in Asia. TAF would later become involved in motion picture projects in Asia in an attempt to further their cause, supporting the Asian Film Festival led by Japan and Hong Kong's Asia Pictures company (which positioned itself as a crusade against Communism),

It may also be worthwhile at this point to note the significant rise of Islamic revival (*dakwah*) movements that took place in Malaysia during the same time (mentioned also in Chapter 3). While the gestation period of the *dakwah* movement predated the tumultuous year of 1969, it was only during the mid-1970s that the movement came to full term in Malaysia, creating a huge impact “for at least one whole decade from 1975 until 1985”.⁵⁷⁷ The *dakwah* movement was marked by a highly visible Islamic consciousness and widespread evidence of a new devoutness, driven by the mobilization of the Muslim community by various organizations pursuing the fundamentals of Islam and a “pure” Islamic way of life. Most *dakwah* groups eschewed materialism and followed a simple way of life that was at odds with liberal capitalism and consumerism.⁵⁷⁸ The movement was thus often perceived to be in opposition to the economic, political, and social supremacy of their Western counterparts, and was defined as a symbol of difference between the traditional and the Western.⁵⁷⁹ For Malay Muslim women, for example, this meant a “re-education or re-socialization process, whereby women can be rescued from the throes of Westernization which has permeated Malay culture”.

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Historian Cheah Boon Kheng posits that the *dakwah* movement was largely an urban phenomenon led by a new Malay intellectual elite class.⁵⁸¹ In this regard, the Islamic revival movement constituted another dominant ideology that was gaining currency within the urban Malaysian society in the 1970s, and which, to some extent, complemented the self-reliant

for example. See Lee Sangjoon, “Creating an Anti-Communist Motion Picture Producers’ Network in Asia: the Asia Foundation, Asia Pictures, and the Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.37, Issue 3 (2017): p.517-538.

⁵⁷⁷ Judith Nagata, “Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revival in Malaysia”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.53, No.3 (1980): p.413 and Cheah Boon Kheng. *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publishing, 2002, p.168.

⁵⁷⁸ Cheah Boon Kheng. *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, p.167 and p.169.

⁵⁷⁹ Aurangzaib Alamgir, “Islam and Women’s Rights: Discourses in Malaysia”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol.114 (2014): p.873.

⁵⁸⁰ Wazir Jahan Karim. *Women and Culture: Between Malay Adat and Islam*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992, p.227.

⁵⁸¹ Cheah Boon Kheng. *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*, p.167.

inclination of the aforementioned political ideology of the new generation (although *dakwah* groups would later become an oppositional force to the ruling Malaysian party before becoming absorbed into the dominant system). The *dakwah* sensibility, being part of what is now considered as Islamic globalization, contributed to the overall *zeitgeist* of 1970s Malaysia, which played out a real possibility of partaking in a world system without needing to submit to rules set by the Cold War superpowers. As mentioned, this negotiation of, or deliberation over, how and what it means to engage and disengage with global norms and trends, seemingly manifested in the behaviors of Malay cultural workers in Malaysia, who maintained that a clean break from foreign control and influence is imperative to making films on their own terms. The unsustainability of the Hong Kong-Japan model of transfer in the Malay(sian) context thus fundamentally points to an incompatibility of the maps possibly predetermined by a mismatch of desires that transpired at the nexus of contesting internationalisms.

Conclusion

In summary, rather than reflecting a cordial codependent relationship, the intensifying transfer of capital and resources between Hong Kong and Malay cinema in the late 1960s to the 1980s instead discloses a tense, destabilizing relationship. Underneath the uneven and oftentimes unhappy exchanges between the two industries lie a fundamental misalignment of desires – a fissure in visions about the futures of Asian cinemas – which conceivably predicated the venture's unsustainability. While the Hong Kong-Japan crossovers enabled Hong Kong to successfully gain access to the means of becoming a media capital like Japan, on the contrary its attempt to map the same model unto the spatial configuration of Malay(sian) cinema was unsuccessful and unwelcomed, leading to its failure in sustaining its subsidiary and possibly indicating a rare misreading of the times by the Shaws and a limitation in their ability to deftly

navigate a different film and political culture. At the same time, Malaysia was caught at a juncture of restructuration. This refers not only to the massive (re)nationalizing project activated post-1969, but also to its rethinking of how to engage, in a most viable way, with the rest of the world. For its newly reconfigured film industry, at this fledging stage it was necessary to reconsider what modernization and internationalization meant for its community, screen and audiences, particularly in the aftermath of national liberation and in light of Malay cinema's long history with Hong Kong-based media conglomerates. Understanding this entwinement between Hong Kong and Malay cinema during this critical period thus enables us to assess the current states of both industries with greater historical and theoretical depth, enriching our understanding of Hong Kong cinema's transborder practices, as well as the beginnings of Malay(sian) cinema.

Conclusion

The foregoing chapters examined the various crossovers between Hong Kong and Malay cinema that foregrounded the production of three different sets of films from the late 1960s to the 1980s: made-in-Hong Kong Malay James Bond films, “new style” Merdeka films based off earlier SB (HK) films and made with overwhelming “aid” from the SB (HK) studio, and the Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* subgenre, which was established through an act of Malayizing-as-Orientalizing in its formation stage. I have demonstrated the flow of resources between the two industries, including the transfer of human personnel, technology, expertise, stories and imageries. I have also shown that social and political changes in Hong Kong and the Malay Peninsula during those highly fluctuating times provided the impetuses for these crossovers. These include Singapore’s crackdown on labour movements in the late 1960s, the subsequent shift of Malay film production base from Singapore to Malaysia, Malaysia’s nationalization and restructuration in the mid-1970s, the rise of international mass tourism, as well as Hong Kong’s development of a local identity.

Unlike crossovers between other Chinese-language localities and industries, these movements transcended comparatively larger cultural distances and more pronounced ethnic differences. Through comparative analysis and a close study on how and what these crossovers manifested into in these films, I illustrated that these differences were crucially mediated, though certainly not without conflict and contestation, through a reworking of the Malay body, an act of passing and the suturing together of the tourist and cinematic gaze. Yet, in spite of these mediations, the exchanges between the two industries are nonetheless fraught with tension and frictions. The episodes teased out in this dissertation can perhaps be read fundamentally as a story of evolving dynamics among Asian media capitals. A fundamental misalignment of desires regarding the futures of Asian cinemas and the attainment of media

capital status, primed by competing internationalisms, underlie the oftentimes unhappy exchanges between Hong Kong and Malay cinema in the 1960s-1980s and predicated the venture's unsustainability. Attempting to map its own experience of becoming a media capital by way of Japan unto the development blueprint of a newly-configured Malay(sian) cinema, Hong Kong-as-media capital ultimately failed to sustain Malay cinema – and by implication, its Southeast Asian subsidiary – under its sway.

Taken together, these chapters highlight the fact that the localization of Hong Kong cinema in the 1970s and 1980s and the restructuration/nationalization of Malay(sian) cinema from the late 1960s to the 1970s were, to some degree, mutually effecting. Despite possessing little apparent cultural and linguistic affinities with each other, Hong Kong cinema was in several ways instrumental to the founding and reshaping of the Malay (later Malaysian) film industry and eventually, Hong Kong cinema itself also tapped into Malay cinematic and cultural resources for its own self-shaping purposes, having been in close *geographical* proximity with the Malay film industry since the early twentieth century. Understanding this entwinement between Hong Kong and Malay cinema during this critical period thus enables us to assess the current states of both industries with greater historical depth, enriching our understanding of Hong Kong cinema's transborder practices, as well as the beginnings of Malay(sian) cinema.

Bringing the hitherto largely isolated study of Malay cinema into consideration while at the same time stressing that Hong Kong's cinematic border-crossings were not facilitated or prompted exclusively by experiences of Chinese migration, diaspora and affiliation, this dissertation stretches the boundaries of the study of Asian cinematic and cultural networks. At bottom line, the very existence of these films itself illuminates the necessity of addressing the limiting preoccupation with Chineseness and a "Chinese Southeast Asia" when thinking about Hong Kong cinema's border-crossing endeavours, as well as Malay cinema studies'

territorializing tendency when thinking about the industry's scope of operations, in order to grasp, more fully, the extent and intricacies of transborder Asian cinematic, capital and cultural networks. Importantly, looking (and searching) beyond these limitations also opens up new windows of opportunity to interrogate, with greater historical depth and scope, issues of otherness and inter-Asian sense of places that arise at these nexuses. As Yiman Wang perceptively notes, particularly in the context of Hong Kong or Chinese-language film studies, there is a need to "problematize the current depoliticizing tendency in celebrating successful crossover stories, which conveniently imply the all-encompassing quality of Chinese cinema"; we need to scrutinize "not just what can be assimilated, how to assimilate, but also what and why some elements remain or are flaunted as the foreign; how the ambiguous modes of address allow us to better understand border politics".⁵⁸²

The case studies here also paint the picture of a little-known aspect of transnational Asian and Southeast Asian cinemas, replete with the politics and power relations involved. Foregrounding the border-crossing movements of Malay cinema, above all this dissertation transnationalized Southeast Asian film studies, dismantling the academic ghetto that the discipline has long been confined within. Hoping to have contributed a small step towards bridging the gap between Malay and Hong Kong cinema in transnational Asian film studies, and another step towards softening the ossified borders of Southeast Asian film studies, this study hopes to have also provided useful material for future research on media flows across cultural and linguistic divides, particularly between East and Southeast Asia.

⁵⁸² Wang Yiman, "The 'Transnational' as Methodology: Transnationalizing Chinese film Studies Through the Example of *The Love Parade* and its Chinese Remakes", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol.2, No.1 (2008): p.19.

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Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

No.	Title	Date of Premiere (dd/mm/yy)	Production Company	Distribution Company	Presented by (出品)	Executive Producer (監製)	Production Manager (製片)	Director	Script- writer	Main Cast	Place(s) of Black Magic	Remarks
1.	Black Magic 降頭	02/10/1975	Shaw Brothers (H.K.) Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟 (香港) 有 限公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有 限公司		Shaw Run-me 邵仁枚	Chang Li- zhu 張麗珠	Ho Meng- hua 何夢華	Ni Kuang 倪匡	Ti Lung 狄龍 Lo-lieh 羅烈 Lily Li 李麗麗 Ku Feng 谷峰 Tanny Tien Ni 恬妮 Gu Wen- zong 顧文宗	Unspecified. However, beginning intertitle states: “Black Magic, called <i>gong tau</i> in the region of Nanyang...” (蠱毒，南洋 一帶稱之“降 頭”) Filming locations: Malaysia, Thailand	
2.	Magic Curse 摧花 毒降 頭／ 人蛇 女巫	1975	Filmline Enterprises 威靈影業 公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有 限公司		Cheung Chung- lung 張從龍	Chan Lau 陳樓	To Man- bo 杜文波 Tony Liu Chun-ku 魯俊谷 Gwon Yeong- sun 權寧純 (권영순)	Tony Liu Chun-ku 魯俊谷	Jason Pai Piao 白彪 Pinky de Leon 蘋琪狄 玲 Chan Lau 陳樓 Tan Chia-	The Philippines, Borneo	Hong Kong- Korea- Philippine s co- productio n.

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

bee
陳赤美
Lau
Hok-nin
劉鶴年
Angela
Wang
En-chi
王恩姬
(왕은희)
Nam
Su-jung
南水晶
(남수정)
Hwang
Kun-chi
黃健次
Choe
Mu-ung
崔戊雄
(최무웅)
Roger
Cooquia
羅渣高
Vic
Silayan
域士
Phillip
Coo
高比立
Jeon
Suk 田

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

									淑 (전숙) Hwang Kun 黃建 (황건) Cho Kin 曹健		
3.	The Oily Maniac 油鬼子	18/09/1976	Shaw Brothers (H.K.) Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟 (香港) 有 限公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有 限公司	Shaw Run-run 邵逸夫	Chen Lieh 陳烈	Ho Meng- hua 何夢華	Chua Lam 蔡瀾	Li Hsiu- hsien 李修賢 Chen Ping 陳萍 Lily Li 李麗麗 Hua Lun 華倫	Malaysia	
4.	Black Magic 2 / Reven ge of the Zomb ies 勾魂 降頭	09/12/1976	Shaw Brothers (H.K.) Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟 (香港) 有 限公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有 限公司	Shaw Run-run 邵逸夫	Chen Lieh 陳烈	Ho Meng- hua 何夢華	Ni Kuang 倪匡	Ti Lung 狄龍 Lo-lich 羅烈 Lily Li 李麗麗 Ku Feng 谷峰 Tanny Tien Ni 恬妮 GuWen- zong 顧文宗	Singapore	Originally titled 《还魂降 头》.

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

5.	Aven gers from Hell 鬼域 (之 《色 鬼》 (I want my baby)	02/04/1981	Shaw Brothers (H.K.) Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟 (香港) 有 限公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有 限公司	Shaw Run- me 邵仁枚	Mona Fong 方逸華	Chan Hiu- mei 陳曉梅 Lawrence Wong Ka- hee 黃家禧	Lee Pooi- keun 李沛權	Law Kar 羅卡	Phillip Chan Yan-kin 陳欣健 Yiu Wai 姚煒 Lily Chan 陳莉莉	The Philippines	
6.	Bewit ched 蠱	11/09/1981	Shaw Brothers (H.K.) Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟 (香港) 有 限公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有 限公司		Mona Fong 方逸華	Wen Po Nan 溫栢南	Kuei Chih- hung 桂治洪	Szeto On 司徒安	Ai Fei 艾菲 Melvin Wong 黃錦榮 Fanny Fen-ni 芬妮 Lily Chan 陳莉莉 Lin Wei-tu 林偉圖 Jenny Liang 梁珍妮 Hussin Bin Abu Hassan	Thailand	Research by Kueh Chih- hung. (“資料收 集 桂治 洪”) Introduc ing: renowned Malay sorcerer Hussin Bin Abu Hassan. (“介紹馬 來西亞籍 大巫師 胡仙哈 辛”)

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

										胡仙哈 辛		
7.	Centi pede Horro r 蜈蚣 咒	29/10/1982	Nikko Internation al Productions & Films 日光電影 製作有限 公司	Winson Entertainmen t 潤程娛樂有 限公司	Edward Hoh Yue- yip 何裕業	Stephen Chan Chue- Gwong 陳曙光	Peng Cheng 彭成	Keith Li 李百齡	Chan Suet- ming 陳雪明 Nikko Creative Departm ent 日光創 作組	Li Tien- lang 李殿朗 Miu Kiu Wai 苗僑偉 Hussein Abu Hassan 胡仙哈 辛	Malaysia (filming location: Singapore, Malaysia)	Lawrence Wong Ka-hee as productio n advisor. “Starring Malaysian black magic master Hussein Hassan”. (馬來西亞 亞降頭宗 師 胡仙 哈辛 領 銜主演) “Special guest star: F. C. Chan Malaysian centipede king”. (特 別介紹 馬來西亞 蜈蚣王 陳福才

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

											客串主演)
8.	The Black Magic with Buddha 腦魔	25/05/1983	Lo's Film (H.K.) Co. 羅氏影業公司		Grace Tang Chia -li 王唐嘉麗	Wong Lit Tat (Lo Lieh) 王立達 (羅烈)	Peng Cheng 彭成	Lo Lieh 羅烈	Chiu Chi-kin 趙志堅	Yu On-on 余安安 Chen Kuan-tai 陳觀泰 Lo-lieh 羅烈 Linda Chu 楚湘雲 Elaine Jin 金燕玲 Moon Yiu-wah 門耀華	Papua New Guinea, Thailand
9.	Brutal Sorcery 毒蠱	28/09/1983	Continental King Lung Movie Production Limited 五洲景龍影業	Ng Chow Ging Lung (Hong Kong) 五洲景龍	Li Hong-yu 李匡宇	Yuen Singan 袁善根 Richard Cheung-Kuen 張權	Tang Hsu 徐棠 Alice Lee Mei-Seung 李美嫦	Pang Ling 彭齡	(Dialogue) Ding Yu 丁羽	Newton Lai Hon-chi 黎漢持 Lily Chan 陳莉莉 On Hei-lai 安希麗 Kwan Hoi-San 關海山	Thailand

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

										Fong Yau 方野 Tong Yeuk-ching 唐若青 Pak Sha-li 白沙力 Fong Ping 方萍		
10.	The Boxer's Omen 魔	29/10/1983	Shaw Brothers (H.K.) Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟(香港)有限公司	Shaw Brothers Pte. Ltd. 邵氏兄弟有限公司	Shaw Run-run 邵逸夫	Mona Fong 方逸華	Lawrence Wong Ka-hee 黃家禧	Kuei Chih-hung 桂治洪	Szeto On 司徒安	Phillip Ko 高飛 Lin Shao-yen 林曉燕 Wai Kar-man 衛嘉文 Wang Lung-wei 王龍威 Elvis Tsui 徐錦江 Bolo Yeung 楊斯	Thailand, Nepal	Research by Kueh Chih-hung. ("資料收集 桂治洪") Som Jai Boon Song credited as Thai abbot. (泰国金铁金佛寺主持), Rolando San Junn as

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

									Som Jai Boon Song Rolando San Junn Victor B. Pumkpic Major Oponpa Edmund P. Meneses		Indonesia n bomoh (印尼降头师), Victor B. Pumkpic as Thai bomoh (泰国降头师), Major Oponpa as Malaysian bomoh (马来西亚降头师), Edmund P. Meneses as Sabah bomoh (沙巴降头师).
11.	Red Spell Spells Red 紅鬼仔	09/11/1983	Nikko International Productions & Films 日光電影製作有限公司	Edward J. N. Ho 何裕業	Stephen Chan Chue-Gwong 陳曙光	Betty Lam 林嘉莉 Ho Kian-ngiap 何建業	Titus Ho 何永霖	Chan Suet-ming 陳雪明 Nikko Creative Departm ent	Ken Tong 湯鎮業 Poon Lai-yin 潘麗賢 Chia Lun	Malaysia (including Borneo)	Ho Kian-ngiap (何建業) as production advisor. Malaysian film king Hussein

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

								日光創作組	嘉倫 Hussein Abu Hassan 胡仙哈 辛 Ismail Mahyon Wan Ting- fong 溫婷芳 Wong Cheung- fok 王長福 Leung Hoi-tin 梁海天 Choi Kam- lung 蔡金龍 Moon Yiu-wah 門耀華	Hassan. (“馬來西 亞影帝 胡仙哈 辛”) Guest starring Black Magician Wong Cheung- fok. (“巫 師 王長 福客串演 出”)
12.	Curse 毒咒 ／十 嫁妖 女	26/04/1985	Artview Investment Co., Ltd. 雅慧投資 有限公司	Lui Ming (International) Film Enterprise 雷鳴 (國際) 電影貿易公 司 (香港)	Chan Leung 陳量	Wong Hei- wan 黃希雲	Pang Ling 彭齡	Szeto On 司徒安	Lai Qui 麗莎 Fong Yau 方野 Kwan Hoi-san 關海山	Thailand

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

								Ng Hong- sang 吳抗生 Newton Lai Hon-chi 黎漢持 Lam Kau 林蛟 Chung Ying- tong 鍾應堂 Chan Ying-lik 陳鷹力 Chang Yung 曾容 Cheung Hoi 張海 Ridley Tsui Bo-wah 徐寶華 Chui Bo-hei 徐寶熙	
13.	Dead Curse	21/11/1985	Lui Ming (Internation al) Film	Lui Ming 雷鳴	Rankie Fung	Chong Biu-man 莊保文	Lo Biu- lun 盧保倫	Kiki Sheung	Unspecified. Beginning intertitle:

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

猛鬼 迫人	Enterprises 雷鳴 (國 際) 電影貿 易公司 (香 港)	Gwok-fai 馮國輝 Gu Sam- lam 古森林	Gu Sam- lam 古森林	Tin-ngo 商天娥 Poon Chun- wai 潘震偉 Maria Yuen Chi-wai 玄智慧 Kwan Hoi-san 關海山 Elaine Kam Yin-ling 金燕玲 Angela Yu- chien 于倩 Lau Dan 劉丹 Wu Feng 胡楓 Wong Man- ying 黃曼凝 Fung Sau-wai 馮秀慧	“A village in Southeast Asia” (东南亚某乡 村)
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Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

									Ga Bo 嘉寶 Mama Hung 錢似鶯 Che Hung 謝虹 Fong Chow 方洲 曾穎欣 謝天華 田治義	
14.	Fury of the Heaven 天煞	04/01/1986	Artview Investment Co., Ltd. 雅慧投資有限公司	Lui Ming (International) Film Enterprise 雷鳴(國際)電影貿易公司(香港)	Chan Leung 陳量	Chan Mei-ling 陳美玲	Pang Ling 彭齡(鵬靈)	Szeto On 司徒安	Newton Lai Hon-chi 黎漢持 Lok Man 洛敏 Lai Qui 麗莎 Hung Leung-sek 熊良錫 Kwan Hoi-san 關海山 Fong Yau 方野	Thailand

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

									Yuen Biu-wan 袁步雲 Ng Hong- sang 吳杭生 Pak Man-biu 白文彪 Huang Qiang 黃強 Chang Yung 曾容 Little Unicorn (Siu Kei-lun) 小麒麟	
15.	Witch from Nepal 奇緣	27/02/1986	Golden Harvest Productions 嘉禾電影 (香港)有 限公司	Raymond Chow 鄒文 懷	Anthony Chow 鄒 定歐	Twiggie Au 歐錦屏	Ching Siu Tung 程 小東	Tsui Jing Hon 徐 正康	Chow Yun Fat 周潤發 Chu Po Yee 朱 寶意 Lam Kit Ying 藍 潔瑛 Dick Wei 狄 威 Wu	Nepal

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

									Hang Sheng 吳杭生	
16.	The Seven th Curse 原振 俠與 衛斯 理	17/10/1986	Golden Harvest Productions 嘉禾電影 (香港)有 限公司	Leonard Ho 何冠昌	Wong Jing 王晶 Chua Lam 蔡瀾	Chen Li Hua 陳莉 華	Lam Ngai Kai 藍乃 才	Wong Jing 王 晶 Yuen Kai Chi 阮繼志 Adapted from a Ni Kuang novel.	Chow Yun Fat 周潤發 Chin Siu Ho 錢小豪 Maggie Cheung 張曼玉 Sibelle Hu 胡慧 中 Dick Wei 狄 威 Tsui Sau Lai 崔秀麗 Elvis Tsui Kam Kong 徐 錦江 Ni Kuang 倪匡 Wong Lai Ying 黃 麗英 Josephine Lam Kei Yan	Thailand

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

林琪欣
杜妍慧
Elsie
Chan 陳
奕詩
Nina Li
Chi 利
智
Derek
Yee
Tung
Sing 爾
冬陞
Wong
Yue 汪
禹
Yasuaki
Kurata
倉田保
昭 Kara
Wai
Ying
Hung 惠
英紅
Wang
Lung
Wei 王
龍威
Wong
Jing 王
晶 Chor
Yuen 楚

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

										原 Ken Boyle Hsu Shu Yuan 徐 淑媛 Joyce Mina Godenzi 高麗虹	
17.	Blood y Sorcer y 凶咒	11/12/1986	Hop Chung Film (H.K.) Ltd. 合眾電影 (香港) 有 限公司	星加坡金年 影片有限公 司	Jintana Ferreira 蔣杰	Luk Pak- sang 陸柏生	K. K. Wong Kin- kwan 黃健軍 (黃建軍)	Do Gung- yue 杜岡雨	Do Gung- yue 杜岡雨	Jason Pai-piao 白彪 Fung Tin-na 馮天娜 Ku Feng 谷峰 Jo Jo Ngan Lai-yue 顏麗如 Kwan Hoi-san 關海山 Alan Chan Kwok- gwong 陳國光 Han Ying- chieh 韓英傑	Burma/Myan mar, Vietnam (but not portrayed as related to <i>gong tau</i> in this film), Thailand

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

									Ho Pak-kwong 何柏光 Cheung Lai-ying 章麗英 熊幼麟 李麗盈		
18.	Crocodile Evil 鳄降 ／色 恶淫 魔	1986	华新电影 公司		Chui Kin-chau 徐健秋	刘尼	Tu Lu-po 杜魯波	Tu Lu-po 杜魯波 林豈 (dialogue) 薛羣	Kwan Hoi-san 關海山 Lau Ying-hung 柳影虹 Hon Kwok-choi 韩国材 Ku Feng 谷峰	Thailand	Filmed under the guidance of famed Thai bomoh Mr. Chainai. (“蒙泰国名降头师差乃先生指导拍摄，仅此鸣谢”)
19.	Curse 处女 降	14/01/1988	P. T. Insantra Film 鷹山影业 公司	Angle Jo 赵天使	Luk Pak-sang 陸柏生	Hung Fung 洪鋒	Patrick Kong Yeung 江揚	Ying Saan Scriptwriting Unit 鷹山編 劇組	Maria Yuen Chi-wai/Hyun Ji-hye 玄智慧 (현지혜) Isabel Lopez Elisa Ye 于芷蔚	The Philippines	Guest starring Susan Brandy. Doctor on spiritual studies provides authoritative information

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

										Hung San-nam 洪新南 Philip Ko-fei 高飛 Tin Ching 田青 Chan Lap-ban 陳立品 Hung Fung 洪鋒	on for filming. (“灵魂 学博士： 李鹏达 提供权威 性资料拍 摄”)
20.	The Devil Sorcery 半暹降	30/01/1988	Hop Chung Film (H.K.) Co. Ltd. 合眾电影(香港)有限公司 Kim Hin Film Enterprise Co. Ltd. 金鑫电影企業公司	Film City Distribution Ltd. 富城影片发行有限公司	Leow Swee-kim 廖瑞金 Lin Hoi-yuk 林海玉	Jintana Ferreira 蔣杰	K. K. Wong Kin-kwan 黃健軍 (黃建軍)	Do Gung-yue 杜岡雨	Do Gung-yue 杜岡雨	Kim Gee-mei 金姬美 Alan Chan Kwok-gwong 陳國光 Ku Feng 谷峰 Kwan Hoi-san 關海山 Stephen Chan-yung 陳勇	Thailand, Malaysia

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

								Tin Ching 田青 Lau Yat-fan 劉一帆 Lee Lu- chai 李律齊 Chan Fuk- choi 陳福財 Jintana Ferreira 蔣杰 Hui Ying- ying 許瑩英 To Man- bo 杜文波 Cheung Yim-wa 張艷華	
21.	Devil Curse 猛鬼 咒	1988	Lucky Star (H.K.) Film Co. 吉星(香 港)影片公 司(台灣) Filmline Enterprises	Cheung Chung-lung 張從龍 George Ng Ka-kui 吳家駒	George Ng Ka-kui 吳家駒	Tu Lu-po 杜魯波	(dialogu e) 王遜	Sun Xing 孫興 Emily Chu Bo- yee 朱寶意	Thailand

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography

			威靈影業 公司							Ku Feng 谷峰 Yip Yuk- ping 葉玉萍 Kwan Hoi-san 關海山 Chu Kong 朱剛 Chow Kong 周江 Alan Chan Kwok- Kuen 陳國權 金賽鳳	
22.	Curse of the Zomb i 屍降	1989	Hop Chung Film (H.K.) Co. Ltd. 合眾电影 （香港） 有限公司	Jintana Ferreira 蔣杰	馬愛蓮	馬鞍 K. K. Wong Kin- kwan 黃健軍 (黃建軍)	李浩	李浩	Lau Siu Kwan 劉少君 Angela Tsang Siu Yin 曾小燕 Anna 安 娜 洪鋒 馬鞍 阿 星 彼特 阿菊	Yunnan	

Appendix: Hong Kong-produced Nanyang *gong tau* filmography