

The Research on the Hong Kong's Ideological Identity in Days of Being Wild

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Abstract. At a time when Hong Kong's ideological identity is diverging from that of mainland China, *Days of Being Wild*, as a film that profoundly insinuates the problem of Hong Kong's identity, lurks as a root cause and a solution to the problem of resolving the conflict between Hong Kong and mainland China. At present, the ideological research on the film is mainly focused on post-colonial studies, and the value of the film for Hong Kong identity studies is not well understood. This article uses the ideological analysis of the film in John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* of *Cahiers du Cinéma* to analyze the background characters and the ideology of the film, identifying two different attitudes to identity in Hong Kong during the same period: the "Hong Kong Chinese" who accepted the handover and the "Hong Kong Chinese" who accepted the handover. The film's ideological analysis reveals two different attitudes towards identity in Hong Kong during the same period: the "Hong Kong Chinese" who accepted the handover and the immigrants who completely abandoned their "Chinese" identity. On this basis, the article proposes film-making suggestions to bridge the rift between mainland China and Hong Kong: rooting in a common cultural context and reducing the export of ideological prejudice.

Keywords: *Days of Being Wild*; ideological identity; Hong Kong - Mainland Relations.

1. Introduction

Days of Being Wild is an art film directed by Wong Kar Wai and released in 1990. The film tells the story of several confused people in Hong Kong in the 1960s. The film succeeds in portraying characters who appear to be dashing, but who are unable to find a purpose in life, and provides a summation of the confused young people of the period. The "footless bird" imagery has also been studied and become a classic film icon. Ideology is a collection of ideas, which can also be understood as a perception of things. It is the sum of ideas, perspectives, concepts, thoughts, values, and other elements. The ideological critique in cinema is taken from John Ford's *Young Lincoln*, a classic ideological criticism published by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1970. It emphasizes the undermining of and opposition to the "complicity" of cinema with the "dominant ideology" and the denial of the "authenticity" of the film, subverting cinema and "reality" or "dominant ideology" by looking at the dynamic relationship between text and politics and society [1].

Current research on the *Days of Being Wild* has been abundantly researched in film studies. However, research gaps concerning the practical significance of its unique ideological attributes remain to be filled. At a time of dramatic changes in international relations, the Hong Kong region is in delicate tension with mainland China due to the complexity of its history. On the one hand, the implementation of the National Security Law has strengthened Beijing's direct control over Hong Kong; on the other hand, hate speech on social media and activities such as Occupy Central reflects the rebellious sentiments of some Hong Kong people.

Therefore, this article follows the ideological analysis method of John Ford's *Young Lincoln*, analyzing and interpreting the creative context, characters, and iconic imagery of this film, finally arriving at the director's unconscious ideological identification with Hong Kong. By interpreting the ideology underlying this characterization and the imagery of the "footless bird", this article analyses the prevailing ideological identity in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s, the period immediately preceding Hong Kong's return to China. By analyzing ideological identity in this film on the eve of dramatic social change, this article provides a reference for solving the current problem of Hong Kong's relationship with mainland China.

In the second chapter, this article analyses the context in which the film was created, namely the social background of Hong Kong before its return to China in the 1980s and 1990s. The film is also set in the context of the 1960s when the Cultural Revolution broke out in mainland China and the leftist response to it in Hong Kong had an impact. In the third chapter, this article analyses the different mental states of the characters in the film, classifying them as "floating" and "trapped", deconstructing the image of characters who adopt different attitudes towards force majeure, and using this to distinguish the sense of identity of Hong Kong people in the face of a new ideology. In Chapter 4, the article synthesizes the analysis in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, summarising the ideology and identity of Hong Kong people before the handover in a holistic manner.

2. Background Analysis

The background of this film has to be analyzed in two parts. The first is Hong Kong in the 1960s, where the story takes place. Influenced by the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, there was a more violent conflict between the leftists and the government in Hong Kong society at that time, and several incidents such as the Hong Kong 1967 leftist riots occurred, which had a greater impact on Hong Kong's ideological identity. The second is Hong Kong in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the film was shot and released. Directly influenced by the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, Hong Kong's thinking about its relationship and identity with mainland China reached an unprecedented peak, and in this slow but long process, Hong Kong's ideological identity changed dramatically.

2.1 Aftermath of the Cultural Revolution

Days of being wild were conceived by Wong Kar-wai as a story called Love in 1996. It was a story of a female leftist and a policeman who fall in love during the 1967 leftist riots in Hong Kong. The film's structure was then drastically scaled down to the current public version due to its potentially overly ambitious subject matter and lack of time and budget. However, the period in which the film was written is still reflected in the finished film, expressing an implicit ideological identity.

In 1966, the Cultural Revolution broke out in mainland China, which had a profound impact on leftist movements all over the world, including in Macau and Hong Kong. On 3 December 1966, the Motim 1-2-3 in Macau saw a series of riots and strikes, which were won by the Macau leftists. Hong Kong leftists went to Macau to congratulate them and to learn from their experience of struggle and decided to wage an even fiercer struggle than the Macau leftists [2].

The riot consisted of marches, protests, demonstrations, rallies, strikes, etc., which later turned into arson and bomb attacks, causing numerous casualties among the military, police, and civilians. The riot failed and peace was restored to Hong Kong. However, as a result of the tragic impact of the riot, Hong Kong people's attitude towards the left in Hong Kong, and with it, mainland China and socialism ideology, turned generally negative. After the Riot subsided, the identity of "Hong Kong people" became popular in Hong Kong as a counterpoint to the leftist identity of "Chinese people" [3]. The Riot forced Hong Kong people to take political sides in a hurry, and a large number of people became resistant to socialist ideology.

2.2 Hong Kong Before Handover to China

Days of being wild began filming on 21 March 1990 and was released in Hong Kong on 15 December 1990. This was a period when Hong Kong's ideology was once again changing dramatically due to the impending return to China and the influence of the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989.

In 1984, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was issued, confirming the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China at 00:00 hours on 1 July 1997 and the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Before that, in 1982,

a survey showed that 70% of Hong Kong people wanted Hong Kong to remain as it was, 15% wanted it to become a "trust territory", and only 4% wanted China to take it back [4].

The outbreak of the Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989 had a profound impact on Hong Kong society, with millions of people taking to the streets in solidarity and full participation. Hong Kong people's identity then shifted from being "Hong Kong people" to "both Hong Kong and Chinese people" [5]. However, the Protests subsequently turned into violent clashes in which a large number of people involved were injured or killed. This created fear among the people of Hong Kong of the Chinese government and socialist ideology and directly triggered another wave of migration. The combination of a sense of identity as a Chinese and a fear of the Chinese government has gradually turned Hong Kong people's perception of socialist ideology into confusion, and the question of where to go and where to belong has become an extremely important social issue [6]. It was against this backdrop that Wong Kar-wai created Days of being wild.

3. Character Analysis

There are many impressive characters in Wong Kar-wai's Days of Being Wild, with several different characters in love portrayed particularly well. This essay will explain how Wong Kar-wai represents the characters through the framing design, and specifically, analyze how the characters of Xuzai, Su Lizhen, and Mimi, who was representative of the people of Hong Kong in the context of that era, are portrayed through the framing. This article divides the characters into two categories based on their mental state in the relationship: "Floating" characters who have no goals and don't care about anything, and "Trapped" characters who are bound by love.

3.1 "Floating" Characters

As the main character of the film, Xuzai's personality and actions largely determine the emotional atmosphere of the whole film. The "footless bird" imagery, which is mentioned several times in the film, is a self-referential metaphor of Xuzai [7]. His life has no clear goal or direction, and he is unable to accept the kindness of women like Su Lizhen and Mimi and is unable to settle down. Therefore, his mental state is constantly "floating", which means unable to move forward or backward.

After the scene of Xuzai's first date with Mimi, Xuzai lies on his bed and starts a monologue about the "footless bird", before getting up and dancing the cha-cha to the music. This is a key characterization of Xuzai's character, and the monologue's lines are combined with the actors' performances and camera movements to reveal Xuzai's mental state. Xuzai's dance is similar in that he moves forward and backward in his room to the music with seeming ease, but always within a very small space, without really moving in any direction. In the film, Xuzai begins dancing in front of a mirror, then moves to the balcony and the left of the frame, with the camera pan to the left; spatially this looks like the camera is moving into a new space with Xuzai, but the camera is still filming the mirror after the pan. Although it appears that Xuzai is moving to the left, his true position is not to the left, but even back to the right [8]. This is a visual portrayal of Xuzai's character: Xuzai creates the illusion that he is moving forward, while he is stagnating or even moving backward. This corresponds to the image of the "footless bird" in the monologue, who is unable to find his way forward and spends his life in a flight of uncertainty and confusion, with nothing to gain [9].

Xuzai's "floating" attitude is also reflected in his strong tendency towards self-destruction. Near the end of the film, Xuzai clashes with the local Filipino mob over his passport but is able to escape on a train with the help of Chaozai. In the film, Xuzai once again delivers his trademark "footless bird" line, and Chaozai interrupts him very directly and unromantically judges Xuzai by saying that his words can only fool girls. Xuzai grew up in an environment of material abundance and spiritual deprivation, and the resulting pain and confusion are not sufficiently empathetic to someone like Chaozai, who has experienced real suffering in life.

Xuzai attributed all his misfortunes to his adoptive mother's concealment and his birth mother's abandonment. However, his nihilistic tendencies became more pronounced when he went to the

Philippines to look for his birth mother and was met with a closed door. The women he liked and the women who liked him were both abandoned by him. His biological and adoptive mothers both no longer accepted him either. Everything he had relied on in the past was ended by his own hand, and he left his mother's house as a complete "footless bird", a lost man who had lost his belonging.

3.2 "Trapped" Characters

The two main female characters in the film, Su Lizhen, and Mimi, are both romantically involved with the male protagonist, Xuzai. They are also both attracted to and hurt by Xuzai's "floating" attitude and are caught in a "trapped" situation. They go through similar emotional experiences and reach a consensus on Xuzai, but ultimately choose very different paths and have various attitudes toward Xuzai.

In the scene after the film title appeared, Su Lizhen has a tentative discussion with Xuzai in his room about their future, disagreeing about whether they will get married or not. Su Lizhen doesn't get the answer she wants from the earlier discussion, so she asks the question directly while getting dressed. Then Xuzai bluntly says no, Su Lizhen says she would not come back, and they break up. Here is a clear 'trapped' framing of the film, as the audience can see that Su Lizhen is visually trapped as she is 'squeezed' between the window frame and the curtain on her left and right sides.

In the scene when Mimi finds Su Lizhen, Mimi confronts Su Lizhen after Xuzai has traveled to the Philippines to find her birth mother. After they argue about their relationship with Xuzai, Mimi leans against the barbed wire and cries. The framing here is very similar to the framing of Xuzai looking out of the blinds in scene 1, both with the character's back to the camera, facing a "captivity". The only difference is that Mimi is not able to pull open the window of the shutters as Xuzai does, but instead has to face the barbed wire and cry. This means that Mimi is also "trapped" by her relationship, but she is not able to find her outlet as easily as Xuzai, emphasizing her helplessness.

In terms of Su Lizhen, she stands at the bottom of the stairs looking back at a crying Mimi and reminding her that it will soon be closing. In the framing of this shot, Su Lizhen has the same barbed wire fence in front of her as in front of Mimi. The difference is that the barbed wire in front of Su Lizhen does not take up the entire rear view, but leaves space for it. It is still a "trapped" framing, but because of the space left, Su Lizhen is not as helpless as Mimi. She has more options: she can leave the "trapped" framing, the "trapped" environment at any time. This also means that Su Lizhen, knowing what happened to Mimi, recognizes Xuzai's true nature and is no longer psychologically "trapped" and has more freedom. The subsequent story also shows the different psychological states of the two female characters: Mimi, who is trapped in the framing, still can not let go of her relationship with Xuzai and goes to the Philippines to pursue it; Su Lizhen, who is finally free from the "trapped" framing, calls Chaozai, the policeman, and no longer resists a new relationship.

4. Ideology Analysis

The combination of a sense of identity as a Chinese and a fear of the Chinese government has gradually turned Hong Kong people's perception of socialist ideology into confusion, and the question of where to go and where to belong has become an extremely important social issue.

In this context, Xuzai's attitude towards women and his restless lifestyle, as well as his "aversion to the old", are essentially a way of finding oneself by gaining the approval of others [10]. As a spiritual symbol and representative of the Hong Kong people of his time, his plight represents the state of Hong Kong people who are under the hegemony of the British and Chinese discourses and have lost their subjectivity to a certain extent. For a long time, the British had the power of speech, and the forced importation of ideology left Hong Kong people in a state of "lost language" and a state of "lost roots" in Hong Kong culture [11]. The plight of Xuzai represents a certain degree of loss of subjectivity for Hong Kong people, who were placed between the powerful British colonial government and the Chinese government.

This is amplified by the setting of the two Xuzai mothers' identities. Xuzai's adoptive mother is a mainlander who speaks a Shanghai dialect, while Xuzai is a Cantonese-speaking Hong Konger who is always confused about his origins, but his birth mother is nowhere to be found. The existence of his "birth mother" is a reflection of the identity anxiety of Hong Kong people during this period. In the film, Xuzai's adoptive mother, a symbol of the mainland, speaks Shanghainese throughout but is able to communicate with the Cantonese-speaking Xuzai, a symbol of Hong Kong, without a hitch. This represents Wang Jiawei's awareness of the demands and possibilities of communication between Hong Kong and mainland China.

The confusion is also reflected in Wong Kar-wai's lack of clarity about the way forward for Hong Kong. The two main female characters in the film have both been romantically involved with and abandoned by Xuzai, the symbol of Hong Kong, but ultimately embody different attitudes and life orientations, showing two different futures for Hong Kong.

Su Lizhen is emotionally drained after her break-up with Xuzai but eventually comes out of the relationship. Su Lizhen is not quick to accept the break-up and even returns to Xuzai's home to seek a reunion, just as Hong Kong people feel when they are initially shocked and overwhelmed by the news of the handover. The fact that Su Lizhen eventually dials Chaozai's phone number indicates that she has decided to start a new life. This is the same mentality as many Hong Kong people who did not choose to leave during the wave of emigration, i.e. they eventually moved on with their lives regardless of the drastic changes in society.

Mimi became even more persistent after her break-up with Xuzai and even ended up traveling alone to the Philippines in search of him. After the breakup, Mimi's relentless search for Xuzai's adoptive mother and Su Lizhen is similar to the series of activities that some Hong Kong people who did not agree with the return of Hong Kong to China proposed to the British government after the Sino-British Joint Declaration, such as extending the issuance of passports. Mimi's visit to the Philippines in search of Xuzai after receiving Waizai's sponsorship also coincides with the arrival of the largest wave of immigrants in Hong Kong's history, and Xuzai's death symbolizes the end of Hong Kong's golden age.

5. Conclusion

This article summarises the ideological identity of *Days of Being Wild* through the analysis of the film's background and characters. Overall, the characters in this film, and the people of Hong Kong at the time, were in a state of relative confusion and disorientation in terms of their ideological identity. They are uneasy about their future as "Chinese citizens" who are about to lose their identity, and they are afraid of the socialist ideology. At the same time, they were unable to find a more appropriate solution and were powerless to deal with the established reality of Hong Kong's return. The issue of ideological identity is thus divided into two different attitudes: one is to let go of their obsession and accept the fate of the reunification, shifting their identity to "Hong Kong Chinese"; the other is to reject the reality of the reunification and emigrate to other countries, abandoning their "Chinese" identity altogether.

In response to this situation, bridging the divide between mainland China and Hong Kong, reducing the prejudices and fears of both sides towards each other, and enhancing the building of a sense of identity as a community of destiny have become key measures. In the creation of films, it is important to "de-mystify" as much as possible, to reduce the stereotypical representations of "paper-drunk Hong Kong" and "arbitrary Beijing", and to make use of the common cultural background to deepen identity. This article effectively complements the lack of understanding of the importance of *Days of Being Wild* in the field of ideological studies and offers creative advice on the ideological dimension for film creators working to repair the relationship between mainland China and Hong Kong.

However, this article does not introduce psychoanalytic theory to psychoanalyze the two mothers who appear in the film, but only visual representations and ideological analyses on a cinematographic

level, leaving room for further depth. In future research, psychoanalytic and psychological theories will be more extensively involved in the study, expanding the findings.

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