

East Goes West - Chinese Filmmakers in the United States

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“Outside and Beyond ‘the National’: A Case Study of Ang Lee’s Cinema in Hollywood”

This paper takes perhaps the most successful filmmaker of Chinese origin, Ang Lee, out of his previous context of discussion and investigates the ways that his transnational/global filmmaking intersects with Chinese cultural identities and influences. This further problematizes the concept of national cinema and notions of ‘the national’ as being defined within the boundaries of a nation state. In the era of globalization, the fixed notions of national are problematic in thinking through cross-cultural communication (which is not unidirectional if it is to be successful). The importance for this paper of the Hollywood cross-over director of Chinese origin is that they illustrate how authorship can provide new interpretative and explanatory perspectives for reading the national in transnational context. As the USA is itself an immigrant country which has embraced the complexities of various cultures, Hollywood, since its classic period, has developed the ideology of making films that cross cultural boundaries even for the audiences within the USA. However, today this nature of cross-cultural communication is still shaping other national cinemas in the era of globalization. The analysis of the authorial signatures of auteur director Ang Lee as signifiers of national style in transnational/Hollywood cinema help us interpret more productively the interface between global and local, national and transnational. Ang Lee’s films take place in cross-cultural, transnational settings and deal with the themes of Chinese/Taiwanese diaspora, homosexuality, and cultural identity. ‘The national’ not only crosses national boundaries but also cross cultural boundaries and consolidates national and local identities in uncanny ways.