Fictional Portrayals of Young People in Chinese and American Juvenile Delinquency Films: A Comparative Study

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This study discusses the differences between Chinese youth film and American teen film through a perspective on cultural foundation. The author argue that Confucianism is an alternative that greatly affects the depiction of young characters and the causal relationship of morality and fate of the characters in Chinese films. In Confucian philosophy, 'kingdoms' (*guo*) and 'family' (*jia*) are equally considered inviolable. 'Family' occupies a central position in Confucian culture. Filial piety is a virtue of respect for one's parents and ancestors. This study attempts to provide a picture of juvenile delinquency depicted in both contemporary Chinese and American youth films. This study argues that 'juvenile delinquency' indicates any failure in, or omission of, 'family' and 'kingdoms'. The objective of such a comparison is not to advocate for either Chinese or American youth cinema in portraying juvenile delinquency, but to promote a better understanding of the strengths and impacts of youth cinema and youth culture. It is argued that the depictions of juvenile delinquency expose the social discontent of youths in Chinese youth films.

Keywords: Confucianism, youth genre, juvenile delinquency, China, the United States

Global engagement has driven changes in Chinese youth cultures since the reform period. Some Chinese Scholars (e.g., Zhang Weiwei) have stated that Chinese people are extravagant in their admiration of the United States. Zhou (2007) argues that "within Chinese society, growing up in a context of modernization and Westernization, youth [since the last decade of the twentieth century] have demonstrated even more startling changes in their values and worldview" (p. 10). Zhou has also published some articles on the "youth problem" portrayed in films. The term "youth problem" comes from the perspective of mainstream society. "Disconnected youth departing from established values tend to be regarded as causing problems for parents, neighbours, and officials" (Shary & Seibel, 2007, p. 86). In recent years juvenile delinquency leads to life-and-death consequences as depicted in Chinese youth films. It can be seen as an indicator of development of Chinese youth culture.

      Moreover, some American scholars' critiques on representations of young people in cinema have also paid much attention to changes in terms of juvenile delinquency. For instance, Timothy Shary (2005) argues that "Hollywood has changed its methods of generating sympathy for the plight of delinquents while nonetheless remaining consistent in showcasing the rousing thrills of delinquency itself" (Pomerance & Gateward, 2005, p. 21). Over the course of Hollywood history, film studios have reveled in a crafty fascination

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with juvenile delinquency, which has been traditionally founded on a certain masculine mythology. Juvenile delinquency films are also touching society in its most elementary aspect. Shary and Seibel believe that "the American origin of the juvenile delinquency movies influenced their historical reception... American values were associated with ideas of cultural and social decline" (2007, p. 159).

Following such a trend, the debate over juvenile delinquency among young people is a substantial concern in this study. This study specifically examines the way of portraying young people that focuses not only on features and characteristics of young protagonists, but also on the nature of portrayals of juvenile delinquency, such as narrative style and film form, as well as social indicators. This implies that the differences in both youth cinemas should be treated in terms of essence, instead of degree (e.g., degree of badness).

Thus, this study focuses on differences in essence, context, and representation of juvenile delinquency in both Chinese and American youth cinemas. An overview of the contemporary Chinese youth cinema is provided, including a brief cultural foundation, industrial trends, and market acceptability. Comparisons are made between the Chinese youth cinema and American youth cinema in terms of juvenile delinquency, and its social implications.

Study Objective

The purpose of this study is to present a profile of Chinese youth cinema, comparing and contrasting it with American youth cinema. This can provide representative perceptions of juvenile delinquency in the youth genre, so that the national differences in filmmaking and outcomes may be better understood and interpreted. The objective of such a comparison is not to advocate for either Chinese or American youth cinema in portraying juvenile delinquency, but to promote a better understanding of the strengths and impacts of youth cinema and youth culture.

Methodology

The employment of content analysis in this study aims to analyse the content of selected films that use qualitative procedures for assessing the significance of particular ideas or meanings in the films. After viewing each film, some questions in the viewers' minds will arise—how the film portrays a personal identity or sense of a particular character, what represents the relationship between different characters, which plot addresses moral values as an issue, or who is the victim in the film. The fact, however, is that film content provides various potential ways of answering those questions. The advisable way to describe and analyze film content is that we should employ less subjective preferences and selectiveness. The purpose of content analysis in this study also includes reflecting on cultural patterns of groups, institutions, and societies. Anders *et al.* (1998) state that content analysis is one method for the systematic analysis of communications content; it is by no means the only method for studying media content (p. 91). Hence, the particular attention to the employment of content analysis in this study is geared towards making the specialized vocabulary of content analysis more accessible and providing concrete examples of the analytic process.

Cultural Foundation

The Chinese youth film industry has drawn upon talent from the world of the youth/teen genre. In the contemporary era, the youth genre has outlived its educational, inspirational,

realistic purposes. The influx of American youth films has given an added stimulus to the Chinese film industry. The appearance of the sexual conquests of the characters in American Pie in many ways presented a radical change for Chinese youth film. It is an excellent example of the teen sex-quest story that impacted on Chinese youth audiences. In the 2000s, the Chinese film series *Pubescence* (Mainland China) demonstrates not conventional young Chinese characters but libidinous young protagonists. These films all followed the sex-quest plotline, and collectively revealed taboos of teen sex, such as portraying the male protagonist masturbating with underwear on. However, an extraordinary fact should be paid much attention while we admit the influx of American, and Western, culture. The content of Chinese youth film is influenced by Chinese culture itself, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and the Chinese classics. Dominant among those influences, the Confucian philosophical traditions emphasize respectful, benevolent and hierarchical relations, harmonious social relations, and moral strength.

Chinese culture, especially Confucian culture, tends to give a considerable amount of reverence for life as an absolute ethic. Significantly, Confucianism is an alternative that greatly affects the depiction of young characters and the causal relationship of morality and fate of the characters. Why, then, use Chinese Confucianism in youth films to offer an ethical system that shapes the familial and young characters' personal values? Why not use other ethical and philosophical system? Confucianism is the great Chinese tradition that has gathered around the teachings of Confucius[1] for over 2,500 years (Littlejohn, 2011, p. xix). As a result, it infuses all phases of Chinese life. It is reflected in China's poetry and history, its government and social life, and the ethics that have shaped society (Hoobler & Hoobler, 2009, p. 8). The fact is that Confucianism influenced not only China, but also some other countries and regions such as Japan, and elements of Confucianism can be found in the cultures of those countries. Dorothy Hoobler and Thomas Hoobler (2009) state that the same is true of Vietnam, North and South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (p. 9).

According to Sheila Cornelius and Ian Haydn Smith (2002), Confucius' teachings became an essential part of the imperial examination system by which men entered the governing class (p. 4). Shigeki Kaizuka (2002) also argued that Confucius made his way round the various kingdoms of eastern China, spreading his own particular theory of government (p. 13). In Confucian philosophy, 'kingdoms' (*guo*) and 'family' (*jia*) are equally considered inviolable. 'Family' occupies a central position in Confucian culture. Filial piety is a virtue of respect for one's parents and ancestors. It is defined as lifelong service to parents. In terms of this obligation to father/past generations, Cornelius and Smith (2002) argue that:

> ... the family was a microcosm of society and operated under the same hierarchical system, with the most important relationship within the family being that between father and son (p. 69).

This reflects their understanding of two relationships of the well-known Confucian 'Five Relationships'[2]: (a) *jun wei chen gang* (ruler guides subject), and (b) *fu wei zi gang* (father guides son). Interestingly, the legacy of Confucian ethics for centuries has remained the role of a son's (or a daughter's) obligation[3] to the domestic sphere and to their secondary position to their parents. On the other hand, for Confucianism, material satisfaction between 'father' (*fu*) and 'son' (*zi*) has no priority for either side. Spiritual and moral satisfaction is more important for the father as a father and for the son as a son. It is argued that the basic characteristics of Confucian ethics are hierarchy and inequality, and

that the typical manifestations of hierarchical and unequal relationships are integral to that ethical relationship (Zhao, 2007, p. 5). An understanding of the ethical relationship between a 'father' and his 'son' (or, in general, his children) 'lies at centre' (p. 5) of Confucian ethics, and may thus provide a better understanding of Confucian ethical theory.

In Chinese culture, the relationship between the father and child (*ren*) is viewed as a significant relationship in everyone's social life. While this study focuses on the issues related to representations of juvenile delinquency, within that the quality of the father-child relationships is more important than the masculinity of the father. The conventional belief is that since 'filial piety' is a cardinal value in Confucianism, a salient feature of the father-son relationship is unquestioned obedience of the son to the authority of the father (Tu, 1985, p. 115). However, Lamb (2010) argues that the rising level of education among younger fathers in China explains some generational changes, especially in urban centers like Shanghai and Hong Kong (p. 351). He believes that Chinese filial piety and Confucianism have thus changed, and apparently also have not had a uniform effect on all fathers, past or present.

Youth Cinemas in China and America

Confucius once stated that food and sex are basic human desires (*yinshi nannü, ren zhi dayu*). In traditional Chinese culture, sexual desire is either cryptically represented or considered dirty and abusive. It actually embodies a broader concept of intemperance. Qing dynasty poet Wang Yongbin provides an insight into sex drive: of all evils, carnality is the foremost (*wan'e yin weishou*). This section specifically examines the youth cinemas in China and America through this perspective, and illustrates the relationship between sex and youth genre.

Young people conform to sex role standards when the relationships with their fathers are close. According to Pleck (2010), a similar conclusion was suggested by research on other aspects of psychosocial adjustment and on achievement: paternal warmth or closeness appeared beneficial, whereas paternal masculinity appeared to be irrelevant (Lamb, 2010, p. 98). Although it is not possible to deny the 'change' to Confucianism, the important feature of 'father' has not changed. Tu (1985) argued that the father's ego ideal, his wishes for himself as well as what he has created, as standards of emulation for his family, is an integral part of the legacy that the son receives (p. 119). For example, the Chinese philosopher Mencius' statement of '*fu zi you qin*' (father and son ought to have a close relation) is employed to analyze the motivation of the young son's behaviour after committing a crime in the film Walking on the Wild Side (Han Jie, 2006). The young male protagonist's father works in a mining area far away from his home, so he lives with his mom at home but his mom only scolds him without proper teaching. The classic Chinese literary text '*Three-Character Scripture*'[4] states that to feed without teaching (*yang bu jiao*), is the father's fault (*fu zhi guo*), or in other words, a child is better unborn than untaught. It embraces the importance of fathers in the Chinese family. But in the film, the absence of the father figure leads to the loneliness of an adolescent.

Young people in American youth films find themselves involved in sexual activities, whether intercourse, foreplay, or the basic negotiation of sexual preference; "The majority of these narratives could be characterized as comedies, although they tend to take seriously the stakes of sex" (Shary, 2005, p. 63). These young protagonists in Chinese youth films are also involved in sexual activities, but the majority of the narratives display tragic, unfortunate, sorrowful predestination and negative representations. Confucian culture is significant in these films for a variety of reasons, not least of which is explaining such a

difference. Confucius addressed his students by saying that "As sexual desire diminishes with age, there may be less conflict between the desire for sex and the desire to do good (at the very least, the older crowd may not waste so much time thinking about sex)" (Bell, 2010, p. 153). This is not to imply that the desire for sex needed to be entirely extinguished, but it indicates that adolescents may have difficulty controlling and subordinating to moral principles.

American Youth Cinema

Shary described American youth cinema after 1994 as 'the return of teen sex' (2005, p. 104). He argued that the narrative emphasis on sexual conquest has become 'prominent' since the later 1990s. A considerable number of films are covered in his study, such as *Kids* (Larry Clark. 1995), *Cruel Intentions* (Roger Kumble, 1999), *American Pie* (series), *Real Women Have Curves* (Patricia Cardoso, 2002), *What a Girl Wants* (Dennie Gordon, 2003), and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* (Sara Sugarman, 2004). Teen films produced after 2005 continue this trend, for example Love at *First Hiccup* (Barbara Topsøe-Rothenborg, 2009), *Fired Up* (Will Gluck, 2009), and *16 Wishes* (Peter DeLuise, 2010).

Shary (2005) believes that the surest sign of change since the 1980s was that teens on screen began having sex again, and even liking it, as they learned to explore their sexual practices and endeavored to actually educate themselves about the subject (p. 89). However, he also argues that the narrative emphasis on sexual conquests was not prominent in those youth films (produced after 1994) as much as it had been in the early to mid-1980s (p. 104). Shary (2002) pointed out that portrayals of teen sex in '90s youth films are not quite as pessimistic or condescending, although it is usually shown to be distinctly more problematic than it was in the '80s (p. 235). Although the majority of youth sex in cinema remains problematic, youth films such as American Pie and its sequel (e.g., *American Pie 2: Secret Disguise* in 2001, and *American Pie Presents Book of Love* in 2009) represent 'a return of the romp or even an inauguration of more balanced, meaningful depictions of carnal education remains to be seen' (2002, p. 238).

100 Girls (Michael Davis, 2000) tells a story about a college freshman who is trapped in an elevator after leaving a party at a women's dormitory with an unknown, unseen woman when the power goes out. He and this unknown woman have sex in the dark. When he wakes up in the morning—still in the elevator—he finds himself alone with a pair of her panties. He then tries to identify his mystery dream girl from a whole dormitory of young women. A film like *100 Girls* offers another clear perception of teen sex: without seeing the face of a girl, the boy may have sex with her. Libb Thims (2007) tried to explain it from the perspective of 'thermodynamic system', he states that:

> ... the relation between heat and order also explains the stereotypical inverse connection between the highly ordered neurological nature of geeks and nerds, to use common terms, and their lower levels of physical hotness, on average, as well as the less ordered neurological nature of supermodels and beauties and their higher levels of physical hotness, on average (p. 501).

Thus, we find that Cynthia (played by Jaime Pressly)—the 'hottest of the 100'— states in her notes:

> "*I'm not stupid. I know I got things easy. Guys will pretty much do anything
> for me because of the way I look. It's a case. You see, nothing is a challenge
> for me. Everything's made easy. And if I ever actually do, do something on my
> own, then everyone assumes I got there because of the way I look. It sucks.*"

Yet instead of examining the nature of love's dynamics, *100 Girls* attempts to highlight the male protagonist's motivated behaviour after sex in the elevator. This film approaches youth sexual practice from a very facetious point of view, depicting it as a licit love affair, and devoid of any real sexual responsibility.

Chinese Youth Cinema

When we look at the representations of sex, Confucianism is frequently described as sex-negative, but that is incorrect. Fang Fu Ruan (1991), the Chinese physician and medical historian, has argued that Confucius himself never spoke slightingly of the sexual impulse (p. 19). Ruan (1991) also noted that "when teenagers and youths become conscious of sex, they will look toward young and beautiful women" (p. 20). Madsen and Strong (2003) examined the early Confucian masters' classics (e.g., *The Works of Mencius*) in terms of human sexuality as well as sex, and they argued that "it is not something that we need to despair and repress" (p. 149). However, "to purify the heart and diminish the desires" was highlighted in *Later Chronicles of the Han Dynasty*[5]. In the current decade, some Chinese scholars point out that there is a renaissance of Confucianism in contemporary Chinese communities. Erika Yu discusses Confucian social and political aspirations in terms of quality and democracy as well as the Confucian conceptions and values. Yu also pays much attention to the application of Confucianism to the group that is 'coming-of-age' in modern Chinese communities and even in Western countries. Yu (2011) argues that the Confucian religion with its emphasis on filial piety present itself as a moderating force in the contemporary world of clashing civilizations (p. 89). She also believes that in the Confucian context, we may want to revive a series of terms in relationship to humanity and ritual propriety in public discourse (p. 134).

Even though some teenage characters in Chinese youth films audaciously have sex, and masturbate, the narrative emphasis on sexual conquest is different from those of American teenage characters. We find that boys' horny desires take place in the youth films produced in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. But this 'sexual desire' (*xing yu*) always leads to some tragic, unfortunate, sorrowful narrative and negative representations. We find few narratives that could be characterized as comedies. There are some 2000s films that show scenes of having sex and masturbation, although primarily as non-comedy films, for example *Shanghai Dreams* (China) (2005) depicting a rape scene, and *2 Young* (Hong Kong) (2005), which illustrates teenage parents who have sex at an early age as well as their unfortunate experiences after the girl becomes pregnant.

According to Jerry Liu (1984), Leung Po-Chi's No Big Deal (1980) and Yim Ho's *The Happening* (1980) represented the 'comeback' of 'youth films'. He (1984) argued that, "by the time of *Lonely Fifteen* (1982) and *Happy Sixteen* (1982), the genre was definitely in" (Liu, 1984, p. 57). The 'comeback' he referred to indicated a trendy revival of the youth genre of the 1960s in Hong Kong. The box-office success of *Encore* (Clifford Choi Gai-Gwong, 1980), consolidated the trend. In an interview[6], Clifford Choi Gai-Gwong (1980) said the difficulty in the making of *Encore*, was to create a way to display the extraordinariness and characteristic depiction of common themes, and he admitted he was inspired by Robert Benton's *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979)[7]. *Kramer vs. Kramer*, according to Roger Ebert (1979), is

"about a situation rich in opportunities for choosing up sides" (p. 393). *Encore* illustrates dissension between sons and fathers, competition in arenas as diverse as sports and love, and loyalty among true friends. These two films indeed share something in common: what matters in a story like this isn't who is right or wrong, but if the people involved are "able to behave according to their own better nature" (Ebert, 1979, p. 393). *Encore* not only reveals the fabrication of a world of young people, but also exposes the process of interpreting youth. And, naturally, the theme about one's 'own better nature' in some sense is represented 'extraordinarily'.

The earlier films as mentioned above depicted some simple joys and frustrations of youth as a rite of passage. However, in 1982, there existed a heated debate on youth films in Hong Kong. Some directors and producers supported youth films, but some were opposed. According to Cheuk Pak Tong (2008), there were two seminars about 'youth films': (*a*) '*Film and Youth*', released on Radio 1, Radio Television Hong Kong on the 1st and 2nd May 1982; and (*b*) '*A Panorama of Youth Films*', held at the Hong Kong Art Centre on 16 May 1982; which attracted a great deal of attention from the media (p. 208).

Basically, the two opposite groups argued over the representation of youth, social issues portrayed on screen, and impact on young audiences. Those who supported youth films believed such films "reflected various current social issues, for example, [youth] prostitution" (Cheuk, 2008, p. 202). They also stated that "youth films exposed certain realistic problems in Hong Kong, particularly juvenile delinquency, to the audience, arousing public attention" (p. 202). Clifford Choi Gai-Gwong and Johnny Mak were the representatives of the supportive side. In the debate, Johnny Mak, the film writer, producer and director, defended Lonely Fifteen. He argued that this film embodied "no obscene or violent elements" (p. 202), but expose some existing problems in society. He was the executive producer of this film, and his student David Lai was the director. It was the first feature film Johnny Mak contributed to after he quit the local television industry.

Lonely Fifteen (David Lai, 1982) is a film adapted from the German film *Christiane F. – We Children from Bahnhof Zoo* ("Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo", Uli Edel, 1981) (Zhang, 1983, p. 792). It depicts rebellious teenage girls during their high school years. This film is established by a series of still images, which illustrate the changes from a little girl in preschool to a problematic teenager in high school, along with some sound (e.g., dialogue, song, environmental sound) matching the presentation of each image. The opening scene clearly suggests the undocile nature of these teenage girls: one girl rubs her right ear and walks out of the principal's office; another girl walks in and the principal pulls her by the ear and scolds her—before the girl leaves the office her (illicit in the school) pager rings and the principal questions her why she brought the pager to school; as the girl claims it is to update her about her mother's illness, the principal then asks her to reply using the office telephone—unfortunately the girl's falsity is unmasked as the telephone has a recoding device; the principal replays the phone call, and there is only a time and date recorded on the track. Other plot lines illustrate disaffection and rebellion: stealing goods from supermarket, beating passers-by, drug taking, prostitution, etc. In this film, youth are depicted as marginalized people who are uneducated, unemployed, and abandoned by families. According to Cheung (2009), the film shows that "in a violent society, young people use violence as a means of survival" (p. 49).

A Comparison on Cinematic Portraits of Juvenile Delinquency

In the following paragraphs, the comparison between Chinese youth films and American youth films are made in terms of representations of young characters existing in the subgenre

of youth films—juvenile delinquency, since the most conspicuous differences usually remain aligned with the otherness of the cultural matrix.

      The depictions of juvenile delinquency expose the social discontent of youths in Chinese youth films. Perhaps they are all just looking for a safe port for their feeling. As discussed earlier about rebellious teenage girls depicted in 1980s Hong Kong youth films, youth felt that they had no way out. Cheuk (2008) strongly believed that youth films expose certain realistic problems in Hong Kong, particular juvenile delinquency, to the audience, arousing public attention (p. 202). In an article about worldwide juvenile delinquency films, Lau (2010) suggests Chinese delinquents are certainly not depicted as criminals with high intelligence.

      American juvenile delinquency films have moved away from the generational conflicts that had helped define the teenager as a cultural category. These films offer more complex explorations of juvenile violence. Also, the style of American juvenile delinquency films shows its uniqueness, as these recent films "employ a documentary realism that forces viewers to see violent or delinquent youth through their own eyes in ways never imagined by purveyors of commercially oriented 'teenpics' or reform-minded social problem films" (Finley, 2007, p. 80). *Elephant* (Gus Van Sant, 2003) is a perfect example. The following paragraph will discuss this film.

Boys' Badness and Causes in Film

Chinese youth cinema and American teen cinema are similar, as the industries that so rely upon and influence youth have chosen to ignore the very vital issues of teens' delinquency and their causes. It seems that Hollywood and the rest of America would rather avoid the topic of boys' badness altogether than take the chance of being responsible for changing it (Pomerance & Gateward, 2005, p. 37). Similarly, Yeh and Davis (2005) argue that, in the history of the modern Chinese dramatic tradition, family ethical drama rose to handle the dilemmas of Confucian family ethics in the modern world (p. 240). They claimed juvenile delinquency was one of the forms representing crises of the family in Chinese drama. Ekotto and Koh (2009) have discovered that rebellion such as juvenile delinquency in Chinese productions "is more a matter of style than content" (p. 212). They specifically examine the Sixth-Generation filmmakers' works, such as Jia Zhangke and Zhang Yuan. Yeh and Davis (2005) believe that these Chinese films portray "a new understanding of parents and children, together with their mutual obligations" (p. 240).

      Shary (2002) argues that the greatest change in any youth subgenre will almost certainly come from depictions of delinquency, which have seen considerable change and diversification in the past generation (p. 263). He points out that all the while youth would continue to become more conscious of their reasons for rebelling and, perhaps, become more effective at it.

      A great number of scholars have discussed the representations of juvenile delinquency in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955). Sidoli and Bovensiepen (1995) considered this film depicted psychological clichés of the weak, mother-bound youngster (p. 123). Reynolds (1996) argued it represents "rampant anti-momism" (p. 6). The young protagonist with a troubled past comes to a new town, finding friends and enemies at the same time. This rebellious young man seeks refuge in a gang of juvenile delinquents where he has to submit to a test of courage to become initiated.

      This depiction of this rebel embraces teen tensions in sincere tones. Shary argues the influence of this film is difficult to underestimate. He also believes that James Dean's performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* is certainly the most influential of any juvenile

delinquency depiction in American cinema (Pomerance & Gateward, 2005, p. 27). He (2005) claims that "[*James Dean*'s] performance as Jim Stark, which embodied that image—that made the film such an indelible symbol of youth trying to discover themselves and declare their identity within the prosperous torments of the post-war world" (p. 21). Shary also fairly states that, unlike the issues of teen films in the 1950s, delinquency became increasingly difficult to address from the mid-1990s onward, primarily due to the real-life violence of numerous school shootings by students. He suggests the industry could not exaggerate the tragedy of the 1990s murders.

School Violence in Film

Since the beginning of the 2000s, some teen films continued to portray school violence. *Elephant* portrays a day in the lives of a group of average teenage high school students. This film at first follows every student character and connects their daily routines with each other. In fact, there is only a short time before the campus shootings occur, following the lives of the teen characters both in and out of the school, as they are unaware of what is about to unfold. The murderers, or the juvenile delinquents, are two students who study in the same school. This film reveals the actual reason for their behaviours: they are always bullied at the school. One of the killers warns a student, before killing him, not to bully a kid like himself. Interestingly, the portrayal of this ringleader indicates that he is an accomplished but frustrated pianist and sketch artist. He and the other killer have a short love affair before the massacre, both citing the fact that they had never been kissed.

However, according to Shary (2005), "*Elephant* gave U.S. audiences little insight and little interest in the Columbine killings themselves" (p. 90). *Bully* (Larry Clark, 2001) and *Zero Day* (Ben Coccio, 2003) also take up the pressing issue of young men's anger and campus shootings. However, in another paper, Shary (2005) points out further films with arguably juvenile delinquent characters drew virtually no interest (Pomerance & Gateward, 2005, p. 36).

There is a general ebbing of extremist delinquency depictions in the 2000s, especially after the September 11 attacks. Although still controversial, juvenile violence on film is less a Hollywood phenomenon than in past years and is less likely to offer comforting answers for viewers of any age group (Finley, 2007, p. 80). Critics negatively received the independent film *The United States of Leland* (Matthew Ryan Hoge, 2003). Roger Ebert (2004) commented it was as cruel and senseless as the killings in Elephant, and declared this film "a moral muddle". The 2005 coming of age drama film *Twelve and Holding* (Michael Cuesta) also received negative feedback. Keith Uhlich (2006) criticised its screen writer and film director as having "just got off the boat from Eden and found themselves in the cities of the plain". Juvenile delinquency films favourably commented on by the audience are like gold dust round the cinema, and are very rare and sought-after. *Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2003), which explores incidents of drugs, sex, and petty crime, is one of the juvenile delinquency films receiving positive reviews. The success of this film can be attributed to two young actresses' performances. One of them was nominated for the Academy Award and the other for the Golden Globes.

Chinese scholars and officials generally point to the following factors as causing the recent rise in delinquency: growing unemployment among youth; the disruption of the urban opportunity structure; growing divorce rates; increasing permissiveness of parents; and the inability of officials to control the influx and influence of harmful foreign TV, films, pornography, and customs (Regoli et al., 2011, p. 481). As delinquency continued to increase

during the 1990s, the Chinese government passed the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Law in 1999. In real life, most juveniles are treated at the community level, typically within the child's neighborhood, where the juveniles will be turned over to their parents, teachers, or a neighborhood committee (*ju wei hui*) for help in better understanding correct moral values and behaviour.

In practice, Hong Kong society prefers disintegrative shaming rather than reiterative shaming. According to Jon Vagg's (Regoli et al., 2011, p. 170) survey of youths from Hong Kong, disintegrative shaming, in which delinquents were swiftly punished and stigmatized, was very effective as a method of social control. Disintegrative shaming, according to John Braithwaite (1999), divides the community by creating a class of outcasts (p. 55). And, the outcome of disintegrative shaming will often be that the outcasts will reintegrate themselves. Hence, the portrayals of juvenile delinquency in either Chinese cinema or Hong Kong cinema embody their participation in a life of rejection, stigmatization, and dramatized wrongdoing.

The cinematic images of Chinese juvenile delinquency include not only male, but also female, protagonists. Billy Tang's *Sexy and Dangerous* (Hong Kong), Kant Leung's *Sexy and Dangerous 2* (Hong Kong), and Guan Xiaojie's film series *Pubescence* (China) show Chinese young girls' defiant, rebellious behaviours.

In reviewing 2000s Chinese youth cinema, the 'delinquent youth' subgenre portrays many faces of juvenile delinquency. Rebellion, dropping out of school, defiance, and teenage alienation are all phenomena portrayed in these films. Society was presented with such films as *Walking on the Wide Side*, and *High Noon* (Hong Kong).

Xi Ping, in *Walking on the Wide Side*, became a teenage fugitive representing the ambiguity and alienation of youths who were unaware of the gap between them and their 'uncaring and materialistic' parents. Painfully narrated, delinquency was portrayed as violent and threatening to community stability. The films depict images ranging from gangs and cigarettes, drugs in school and rapes, to drag strips; these films painted a picture of adolescence very alien to the viewer's own existence. The leading delinquent character in *Walking on the Wild Side* acts impulsively and attacks the target of his rage (a student). He obtains no support or guidance from his family but all the changes occur after he absconds from his hometown. It vividly demonstrates Braithwaite's viewpoint of his reintegrative shaming theory: "shaming in the community is ... a more mediated, subtle process then it is within the family" (Braithwaite, 1999, p. 76).

This film attempts to truly visualize young rebels' overwhelming ignorance. This film set in a coal mining area of China's Shanxi province and, thus, the environment in which the three young rebels' story develops seems to be 'crude' (*pi rang*). Accordingly, the lifestyle of the young gang is presented as a futureless setting in the impoverished town, but their young hearts fly restless without any behaviour boundaries.

Reviewing of *Walking on the Wild Side* in terms of the film's narrative, various binary oppositions come out which develop the arguments concerning ideology and identify the central message. A list of the oppositions which structure the narrative in this film is presented below (see table 1). The binary oppositions represent the different types of contradictions that those young rebels undergo physically and mentally. Loneliness depicted in this film is exactly social pain. The author believes that the rebellious behaviour is rooted in their loneliness, because the film shows the lack of proper friendship relations during adolescence, and/or the physical absence of meaningful people around a person and, all of these exist in society.

Table 1: Binary oppositions in the film *Walking on the Wild Side* (2006)

Loneliness versus social life
Adolescence versus adulthood
Brutal world of teenagers versus consciousness
Richness versus grassroots
Home life versus fighting in street
Life versus death

Another Chinese juvenile delinquency film *Chongqing Blue* (Wang Xiaoshuai, 2010) tells a story of a sea captain, who returns from a six-month journey to be told that his son has been gunned down by the police. In his quest to understand what happened, he realizes he knew very little about his own son. He starts a journey back to Chongqing, a city where he once lived. Ironically, the portrayal of the delinquent son in this film serves as a tool to lead to the father character's awareness of the impact of his repeated absence on the life of his child.

The sex video depicted in *High Noon*, which ultimately kills a schoolgirl, generally connects sexual pleasure and tragic vision, through the students' irresponsible, hypocritical behaviour depicted in this film; it also proclaims the status of moral values among youths in reality, as the author's earlier study shows that "62.30% of Hong Kong adolescents and young adults (below age 40) consider shooting/transferring sexual videos on their own mobile devices as satisfying their sexual pleasure, although only 24.59% of the total interviewees actually do so" (Wang et al., 2013, p. 285).

This film perfectly demonstrates that the link between mental abuse and juvenile delinquency has been well established. According to Leitz and Theiot (2013), "such media influences and cultural messages may be particularly problematic for adolescents, it is suggested that adolescents are more susceptible than adults to the influence of the media, peers, and fantasy" (p. 99). *High Noon* represents the special attention that should be given to exploring the important topics of psychosocial and developmental programs linked with teen stalking, the relationship between adolescent and adult stalking, the implications for social work, and the legal response to juvenile delinquency.

Simultaneously, society itself faces the real issue of Chinese juvenile delinquency, as "Chinese authorities report that juvenile delinquency has been on the increase for several years, with violence being a major component of juvenile crime; this rise in delinquency has been linked to China's ongoing social and economic upheaval that began in 1979 when the country first adopted its reform policies and embraced the outside world" (Siegel & Welsh, 2012, p. 623). In Hong Kong, although "supervision orders are the most commonly used aftercare program to help juvenile offenders make a successful transition from the correctional institution to their community" (Siegel & Welsh, 2012, p. 649), the activities of the young people in *High Noon* produced an image of adolescents still misbehaving as embodied in a group.

Conclusion

A study such as this can only offer an overview and evaluation of past practices. This study submits that youth film is becoming a more active and popular genre. It provides a profile of Chinese youth cinema, comparing and contrasting it with American youth cinema. And, this study discusses representative perceptions of juvenile delinquency in the youth genre, so that the national differences in filmmaking and outcomes may be better understood and interpreted.

Notes

[1] Confucius (551–479 BC) was a Chinese teacher, editor, politician, and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn period (Chun-qiu) of Chinese history. Confucius's principles had a basis in common Chinese tradition and belief. He championed strong family loyalty, ancestor worship, respect for elders by their children, and of husbands by their wives. Confucianism is a system of thought based on the teachings of Confucius, who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E. If only one word were to be used to summarize the Chinese way of life for the last 2,000 years, the word would be Confucian.

[2] Later Confucians posited five basic human relationships: father and son; elder brother and younger brother; husband and wife; ruler and government minister (or subjects); friend and friend (or friends). Any other human relationship could be seen as some variation of one of the five. According to Lee Dian Rainey, our roles are based on how we relate to one another — as a father or as a younger brother. In each case, our behaviour and our duty will be different, depending on what our role is in the relationship. "*Confucius and Confucianism: The Essentials*", John Wiley & Sons, (2010), p.28.

[3] When Mengzi talks about filial piety, usually the emphasis was not particularly directed at the father-and-son relationship but of the child-parent. Scholars in the Han dynasty had developed this fundamental principle of elevating the role of both the father in a family and the ruler in a state and transferred the expectation of filial piety to the ruler in place of the father, thus, exchanging the functions of father and ruler. "*Father And Son in Confucianism And Christianity: A Comparative Study of Xunzi and Paul*", Sussex Academic Press, (2007), p.6. Many scholars have reached a similar conclusion regarding the importance of the child-parent relationship in contemporary China. Chinese scholar Yu Dan, in her *Sentiment of the Analects of Confucius* published in 2008, pointed out that the current definition of father-and-son relationship does not reflect the ruler-and-subject, but 'filial piety' still functions as 'civic virtue' (*gong gong mei de*) in the society.

[4] It's a collection on early childhood education, including Chants, Tang Poems, Three-Character Scripture, 300 Characters, Di Zi Gui and Pamphlet of Chinese Surnames. Through an interesting and simple way to express Chinese classical culture and frequently used Chinese characters so that to improve children' language skills and enrich children' culture knowledge.

[5] *Later Chronicles of the Han Dynasty* is an official Chinese historical text covering the history of the Han Dynasty from 6 to 189. Fan Ye and other authors compiled it in the 5th century during the Liu Song Dynasty, using a number of earlier histories and documents as sources. The book is part of the early four historiographies of the Twenty-Four Histories canon, together with the Records of the Grand Historian, Book of Han, and Records of the Three Kingdoms. Parts 1 and 2 of Volume 79 were the biographies of Confucian scholars. Forty-six Confucian scholars were included.

[6] Interviewed by the Film Biweekly (Volume 44) in 1980.

[7] *Kramer vs. Kramer* is a 1979 American drama film adapted by Robert Benton from the novel by Avery Corman, and directed by Benton. The film tells the story of a married couple's divorce and its impact on everyone involved, including the couple's young son. It received five Academy Awards in 1979 in the categories of Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Adapted Screenplay.

[8] The neighborhood committee is the lowest administrative unit in urban China and keeps updated records of all residents in their geographically defined neighborhood. Neighborhood committee members are familiar with members of the community, and refusal rates were kept low by using them to facilitate introductions to heads of households scheduled for interviews. The neighborhood committee also has knowledge about basic features of the population in the neighborhood, and the neighborhood committee is responsible for distributing the minimum living allowance to eligible households.

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