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Foreign Film 110-Section 01

Term Paper

Shanghai and Hong Kong are two of the largest metropolises in China today. Their development has expanded rapidly within the last few decades, and with it has come a blending of Asian and Western traditions and culture. Many of the movies we have watched in class show brilliant examples of this culture fusion. In Lou Ye's *Suzhou River*, Shanghai's inner-city resembles many outskirts and "dirty" districts of major Western cities. The night-clubs, dark bars, fast women, and illegal doings in the film are a reflection of what may be found in the dark, thug/gangster/mafia movies of Hollywood. The plot of a man chasing after a mysterious woman can be seen as a reflection from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Another reflection can be drawn from the Hitchcock movie that is also seen in *Suzhou River*: the look-a-like women. In both films, there was a confusion of identities later on in the movies, with the main women appearing later under a different identity.

Western values can also be found in "*Chungking Express*." It is not common throughout all cultures to see the aspiration of moving to glorious America, especially California, where any dream can come true. One may find

the most obvious reflection of the West in the film to be the pop song "California Dreaming." Like many young women in America, the snack bar lady has these aspirations to go to California. Also not uncommon is the image of sexual appeal among certain styles of dress. There is the ideal view of a "man in uniform" being attractive, and "Chungking Express" certainly centers around the stories of two young, handsome police officers. Next, there is the bustle of the city: nightclubs, bars, fast-food stops, and again, illegal doings, are a third combination of Asian and Western culture that can be found in the film.

Narrowing down to more specific themes within the movies, the blending of Western and Eastern values and traditions can be found. Love can always be seen as an inherently dominant theme in both East and West. There are always the estranged, yet romantic, lovers who can never really be with each other. In Suzhou River, there is the mermaid girl, Meimei and her lover the video artist; and Mardar, the courier, and Moudan, the daughter of a vodka smuggler.

Meimei and the video artist seem to be a mysterious couple, both disappearing to do their own agendas. The video artist is never seen, his identity is almost absent. His lover, Meimei, keeps her identity a mystery with her mermaid persona and disappearances. Eventually the couple's fate is sealed when Meimei realized how heavy the duties of love is when Mardar mistakes her for

Moudan. The latter couple can be seen as the "star crossed lovers" in the Western traditional sense. The daughter of a criminal and a simple messenger, the two get caught up in crime themselves, eventually choosing to end their lives for different reasons. This can be compared to the West's "Romeo and Juliet," in which two star-crossed lovers can never be together due to the ills of fate. The couple certainly faces the same ending as Romeo and Juliet, as they both die tragically.

Continuing with the image of love, it can often be said that it can drive one's emotions to become irrational. The concept that love will make you crazy appears in some of the films we have seen. In "Chungking Express", there are two couples shown within two separate plot-lines. Both couples display aspects of craziness due to love. The first, Officer He Zhiwu, gets dumped by his girlfriend on April Fool's Day. This causes him to exhibit odd behavior such as buying a can of pineapple that expires on May 1, one month later, everyday. To him, this symbolizes him giving his ex-girlfriend one more chance to take him back. After the one-month mark, he will give up on love. Of course, this in itself is crazy, yet she never takes him back and he wanders around town drunkenly, trying to find love within the mysterious blonde-wigged lady. She herself has been having relations with a drug-lord, who she eventually kills. Finally within