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THE ROAD TO MANDALAY: GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE TRANSLATIONAL IDENTITY OF BURMESE CHINESE IN MIDI Z'S FILMS

Abstract:

The concept of “Chinese-ness” has been questioned and renounced for endorsing a hegemonic, Han-centric construction of overseas Chinese identity, overlooking the already multiple, localized experiences facing diasporic subjects nowadays. In this new light, the many distinct experiences of Chinese settlers and their descendants in Southeastern Asian countries need to be re-examined. For instance, the development of global capitalism in this region has complicated the formation of ethnic Chinese identity over the past decades. On the one hand, ethnic Chinese settling in these countries may have been pushed by the unequal social, political, and economic treatments to re-migrate to neighboring countries for better opportunities. On the other hand, the acceleration of globalization, together with the on-going process of democratization and modernization in Southeastern Asia, has made these settlements an increasingly appealing homeland to the descendants of ethnic Chinese, who have gradually assimilated into the host community. This paper thus wants to explore the creolization and translatability of young Burmese Chinese’s identities as shown in the Burma-born Taiwanese director Midi Z’s trilogy of “returning home” entitled *Return to Burma* (2011), *Poor Folk* (2012), and *Ice Poison* (2014) and his 2016 *The Road to Mandalay*. In Midi’s series of films on leaving and returning home, this paper will trace young Burmese Chinese’s transnational migration triggered by global capitalism and address the conflict and negotiation of identity resulting from such migration.

Keywords:

Burmese Chinese, global capitalism, Midi Z, translational identity