ABSTRACT

When historical issues or historical personalities are touched on in movies, it is not uncommon for directors to take a different approach on history, so much so that history seems to have taken an altered course in the movie itself. This, perhaps, originates from the director’s personal point of view but it can also be due to other bigger societal reasons.

Screened in 1993, *Lord of East China Sea I and II* (*Suiyue Fengyun Zhi Shanghai Huangdi* and *Shanghai Huangdi Zhi Xiongba Tianxia*) reflect the life of Du Yuesheng, a triad leader in Shanghai during the 1930s. Fascinatingly, this triad leader was transformed into a hero in the movies mentioned above. Hence, I wish to analyse how this interesting transformation is done and the reasons behind it, proposing it to be due to the horizon of expectations of the Hong Kong audience in the early 1990s and the effect of the impending return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

This dissertation will first examine how the transformation is done by comparing and contrasting the historical facts and the movies while analysing the cinematography and mise-en-scene engaged in the
movies. The following chapter will advance further to discuss the reasons behind such a transformation using the concept of the “horizon of expectations”, suggesting the transformation a result of Hong Kong’s unique social condition, a continuity of Hong Kong early days swordplay film’s characters and the influence of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo Yanyi)* and *Outlaws of the Marsh (Shuihuzhuan)*.

Towards the end, this dissertation will also deal with the elevated aspect of the horizon of expectations which is deemed as the effect of the return of Hong Kong here. As the date of return nears, Hong Kong citizens created an imaginary city full of social unrest, resulting in their panic and anxiety. Drawing parallels to the imaginary city of the Hong Kong citizens using the old Shanghai bridges the movies to the audiences. On the other hand, transforming Du Yuesheng into a hero and allowing him to overcome all the barriers embedded in the Shanghai society then, would not only alleviate the Hong Kong audiences’ anxiety but also give them a glimpse of hope.