When China Encounters Asia Again: Rethinking Ethnic Excess in Some Recent Films from the PRC

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Abstract

The essay deals with ethnic excess through the dynamism of self-other relationships in China’s films about ethnic minorities. As the notion of social harmony becomes the defining discourse of Chinese policy in the 21st century, its repercussions can be found in the cinematic treatments of the ethnic other. A different handling of the ethnic or foreign other in some recent productions could be related to China’s consciousness of its new social relations. Those films reveal a strategy of othering in which recognition and alienation of oneself in the other is always in play. The focus, however, is on Zhang Yimou’s *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles*, which depicts a Japanese visitor being offered the greatest hospitality from his Chinese hosts during his trip to Yunnan. On the surface, the film resonates with China’s harmonizing foreign policy, but it implicitly gives voice to the alterity within nationhood by functioning as the internal re-marking of the disturbing excess in China’s capitalization project.

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