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Ip Man: Cinematic Representation, Identity and Difference

Ip Man (Wilson Yip, 2009) and its sequel released in 2010 have potentially created a trend of reproducing or re-interpreting the biography of Mr. Ip Man who used to be Bruce Lee's teacher of martial arts. In addition to Wilson Yip's film series, two more films on Ip Man are coming soon. The films directed by Herman Yau and Kar Wai Wong respectively may further enhance the trend. The recent reinvestment of the genre is also seen as a change of the prototypical mode of making Chinese martial arts film in an era of transnational co-production. Focusing on *Ip Man* and its sequel, this paper posits that the blockbuster success of the film series is not only of commercial but also cultural significance. It aims to reveal how a movement away from a culture constitutes difference through the hero's negotiation of conflicting identities—national, class, racial and cultural—and how the film has employed the figure of diaspora to reread the structures of identity and subjectivity for the local and national audiences after the changeover of sovereign right. *Ip Man* problematizes the generic portrayal of a 'national' hero in Chinese martial arts films. Conventionally, a Chinese hero has not usually been described as a family man in the cinema. However, Ip, who fights against foreigners to defend a national identity in the film, is lovingly home-bound and close and tender to his wife. The way in which *Ip Man II* chooses to focus on Ip's adaptation of life in Hong Kong reveals a process of identity formation that is made possible by a play of power and exclusion. What is the cultural significance of the film for representing Ip's negotiation of identities? This paper does not only look at the constitution of meaning that is dependent on generic characteristics but also the identity that is constructed in or through *différance*. The perception of Ip's immigrant identity may reflect different trajectories of post-changeover identity formation from both the filmmaker's and the audience's points of view. This paper will also look at the way in which modern architecture and set design may foreground the features of particular social and cultural environments that contribute to enhancing the complexities of identity formation.