

# RE-ENCODING TEOCHEW PEOPLE IN CINEMA: REGIONAL TRADITIONS AND MODERN NARRATIVE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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(Received 02<sup>nd</sup> May 2026; revised 28<sup>th</sup> July 2026; accepted 13<sup>th</sup> August 2026)

**Abstract.** This study examines the historical transformation of Teochew people's cinematic representation across more than a century of Chinese-language cinema, with particular attention to the relationship between regional traditions, cultural identity, and changing narrative strategies. Grounded in Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, the study analyzes explicit and implicit cultural codes embedded in film texts to explore how Teochew identity has been constructed, negotiated, and re-encoded within different historical and sociocultural contexts. The analysis traces four major stages of representation: the Teochew as spokespersons of tradition from the 1910s to the 1950s; overseas resisters during the 1960s and 1970s; the cultural "Other" positioned beyond modern civilization in the 1980s and 1990s; and narrators of local stories from the early twenty-first century to the present. Findings demonstrate that Teochew cinematic images have shifted from externally constructed representations characterized by tradition, migration, resistance, marginality, and cultural stereotyping toward increasingly self-conscious forms of local cultural expression. Contemporary Teochew-themed films, particularly those created by local filmmakers, increasingly foreground regional landscapes, dialects, folk beliefs, family relationships, and everyday experiences while critically reflecting on cultural conservatism and social transformation. This development signifies a transition from passive representation toward active cultural self-representation and identity construction. The study concludes that revitalizing Teochew cinema requires deeper engagement with multilayered cultural codes, diversified narrative forms, and effective communication of regional cultural values. Such efforts can strengthen shared cultural identity while expanding the significance of regional cinema within contemporary Chinese-language film discourse.

**Keywords:** *Teochew people, Chinese cinema, dialect film, encoding theory*

## Introduction

In 2020, the Teochew-language film *Back to Love* was released. By 2023, more than 30,000 viewers had marked it as "watched" on Douban (a Chinese site similar to IMDb), with an impressive rating of 7.4 and notable box-office success. The film revived public interest in Teochew-language cinema. Yet, despite the century-long development of Chinese-language cinema (Chen et al., 2022), scholarly research on the marginalized community of Teochew people remains scarce. This absence underscores the necessity of tracing the transformations in the cinematic representation of Teochew people throughout the past hundred years, and, by extension, exploring the broader trajectory of this ethnic group's social development and cultural change. Li (2024) and McFarland (2021) point out that the Chaoshan region, located in southeastern Guangdong Province, constitutes a dialect area where the Teochew variant of the Minnan language family is widely spoken. The region is distinguished by unique geographical, cultural, and folkloric characteristics, which shape a strong sense of regional identity. This community is generally referred to as Teochew people (Li, 2024;

McFarland, 2021). Given the region's relatively small and enclosed geography, agricultural development has long been constrained by land scarcity and dense population. At the same time, its extensive coastline and proximity to Taiwan have facilitated outward migration and transregional trade since antiquity. On the other hand, the region's distance from China's political and cultural centers allowed its traditions to be preserved, cultivating a semi-enclosed yet semi-open cultural environment. These conditions fostered the distinctive cultural identity of the Teochew people.

The complexity of Teochew identity necessitates defining it across two dimensions: explicit association and implicit association. Explicit association refers to films that directly highlight the Chaoshan region (such as Shantou, Jieyang, Shanwei) through titles, synopses, dialogue, or subtitles, or films that primarily employ the Teochew dialect, while distinguishing it from other Minnan variants. Implicit association, however, includes cases where the directors, screenwriters, or other core creators originate from Chaoshan; or where filming locations embody Chaoshan geography and cultural traits; or where central characters are explicitly identified as Teochew. These films are more difficult to categorize and often require external references for clarification. Finally, given the broad temporal span of these films, this study draws upon the works of Chahdi (2024), Giaccardi et al. (2024), and Kagan et al. (2024). From the perspective of film historiography, it employs Hall (1973) encoding/decoding theory as an analytical framework to interpret the shifting representations of Teochew people in Chinese cinema. The cinematic representation of the Teochew people came in different milestones.

### ***The historiography of Teochew people in Cinemas and Movies***

#### ***The 1910s–1950s: Spokespersons of Tradition***

The cinematic representation of the Teochew people emerged relatively early, experiencing a period of fluctuating development under the influence of drastic political and economic transformations in modern China. Notably, *The Difficult Couple* in 1913, the first Chinese short narrative film, was directed by Zheng Zhengqiu, a filmmaker of Teochew ancestry. Although the film has been lost, extant archival sources provide insight into its plot. Despite minor variations in interpretation, it is generally acknowledged that the story centered on an arranged marriage in the Teochew region (Han, 2015). In essence, the film extended the once-popular form of “civilized drama,” although in a more condensed manner compared with cinematic productions. Representation theory (Hall, 1997) posits that images are not objective reflections of reality but rather “meaning-making” constructs mediated through systems of signs. The onscreen depiction of regional identities therefore results from the interplay of creators' intentions, ideological positions, and historical contexts. Zheng Zhengqiu, a Teochew filmmaker residing in Shanghai, used comedic satire to critique the outdated practice of arranged marriage, thereby pursuing a social-educational mission. During this period, the Teochew community was portrayed as clan-centered, culturally conservative, and socially insular, an image employed as a synecdoche for traditional Chinese society at large. From the 1910s to the 1940s, although influential Teochew filmmakers such as Cai Chusheng and Chen Bo'er were active, cinematic works explicitly centered on Teochew identities did not yet appear. This period laid the groundwork for later development, but the widespread dissemination of Teochew images would only arrive with the advent of Chinese sound cinema. The release of *The Jazz Singer* of 1927 in

Hollywood marked the breakthrough of sound film, and by the 1930s, the transition from silent to sound cinema had become pivotal in China. Early success was achieved with Cantonese opera films, particularly *The White-golden Dragon* in 1935 (Cheng, 2012). Although often criticized as “laughable” or “foolish” due to its adaptation approach, the power of dialect performance resonated deeply with audiences, gaining wide popularity among Chinese communities at home and abroad (Ng, 2015). Clearly, sound cinema facilitated the rise of dialect films and significantly lowered the barrier to audience engagement.

Despite pressures from the state’s Mandarin-only policies, Teochew-language cinema nevertheless emerged with *The Story of Wang Jinlong* in 1955, followed by the widely celebrated *The Story of Sixth Madam Su* in 1960 (Yang, 2017). Unlike *The White-golden Dragon* in 1935, a “Cantonese opera in Western suits” adapted from a Hollywood narrative, these Teochew opera films retained more traditional characteristics. Typically staged in historical costumes and adapted from well-known operatic repertoires, they embodied cultural continuity. Among them, *The Story of Sixth Madam Su* in 1960 exemplified centuries-old Teochew operatic heritage. While narrating tales of gifted scholars and virtuous women set in ancient China, these works nevertheless achieved broad contemporary appeal. The popularity of Teochew opera films during this period stemmed partly from the cultural needs of Teochew migrants. Having moved from familiar rural kinship-based societies into unfamiliar urban contexts, they sought connection with their native culture. Contemporary audiences captured this sentiment in the phrase “a native accent is worth a thousand pieces of gold” (Wu, 2013). A second reason lay in the close cooperation among Teochew diasporic communities in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, Hong Kong film studios, and opera troupes from mainland China. The centuries-old presence of Teochew opera in Southeast Asia, where numerous troupes had long been active, provided a solid foundation for its overseas dissemination (Zhang, 2019). Restricted mobility and uneven regional development ultimately drove this unique cultural phenomenon. Hall’s articulation theory argues that ideological conflicts between different social groups and institutions in communication must be mediated by finding common ground amid differences (Hall, 1980). The character of Sixth Madam Su exemplifies this theoretical framework. While traditional, she also embodies modern sensibilities: resisting feudal injustices, courageously defying fate, and remaining steadfast in love—all qualities that resonated with contemporary Chinese communities. Moreover, the film adaptation of *The Story of Sixth Madam Su* in 1960 deliberately simplified the narrative, softening its conflicts to emphasize comedic elements (Chen, 2019a). Unlike traditional tragedies such as those of *Meng Jiangnü* or the *Butterfly Lovers*, Su’s story reflected the optimistic and secular aesthetic preferences of Teochew audiences. At the same time, the enduring popularity of Teochew opera cinema revealed that both domestic and overseas Teochew communities remained largely conservative during this period.

Following the success of *The Story of Sixth Madam Su* in 1960, productions such as *Gao Qin Fu* in 1961, *The Mirror and the Lichee* in 1961, and *Without Fear and Wong Mou Sang’s Wine* in 1962 were released, all adapted from traditional Teochew opera. Notably, despite Wu Chufan’s 1952 campaign *The Split of Cantonese Opera Stars* (Ling Sing Fen Jia) to reform opera films, the production of opera cinema remained prolific. In the 1950s alone, Hong Kong produced over 500 opera films (Ng, 2015; Kwok, 2003). This blurred the boundary between opera and cinema, and the integration of sound film with opera greatly enhanced its entertainment value, sustaining its popularity across

Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and mainland China until Teochew opera cinema declined in the late 1960s. The Cultural Revolution in China further disrupted production. Only in 1984 did Teochew opera cinema reemerge with works such as Zhang Chun Lang Xue Fa in 1984, Yan Hua Nu He Zhuang Yuan Lang in 1995, and the recently completed Dong Wu Jun Zhu in 2023 (Chen, 2019b). Nevertheless, its output frequency and cultural impact have never regained their former prominence.

### ***The 1960s–1970s: Overseas Resisters***

By the 1960s, Teochew figures had begun to appear in cinematic genres beyond Teochew opera films. For instance, in the Cantonese feature film *Your Infinite Kindness* in 1965, a Teochew woman, Choi Bik Yuk, resides in Kuala Lumpur. She pretends to speak only the Teochew dialect and not Cantonese in order to reject the advances of the male protagonist, Szeto Ho Yin. Nevertheless, in this film the Teochew character remains peripheral, functioning primarily as a source of comedic misunderstanding rooted in linguistic difference. In the 1970s, Hong Kong emerged as the dominant center of Chinese-language cinema. The industry shifted its focus from historical martial arts films to modern kung fu cinema. Works such as *The Chinese Boxer* in 1970, *Fists of Glory* in 1971, *King Boxer* in 1972, and *Fist of Fury* in 1972 exemplify this trend, where narratives infused with nationalism guaranteed box-office success (Ball, 2023; Li, 2001). Against this backdrop, the stories of early Teochew migration to Southeast Asia were brought to the screen, most notably in *The Hero From Chiu Chow* in 1973. Produced during a wave of Hong Kong film companies traveling to Taiwan for co-productions, the film grossed nearly three million Hong Kong dollars, a considerable success at the time. Its popularity spurred imitative works such as *Chiu Chow Guy* in 1973 and *Blood Revenge* in 1974. However, these later films bore little substantive connection to Teochew culture and were characterized by poor production quality, and thus fall outside the scope of this discussion. The analysis here focuses on *The Hero From Chiu Chow* in 1973.

The film narrates the story of Teochew laborers in Southeast Asia who suffer severe exploitation under capitalist oppression, with the protagonist Kuan Kong Chiu resorting to martial arts to uphold justice. This narrative encapsulates the broader historical trajectory of Teochew migration. Although Chinese migration to Southeast Asia can be traced back to the Ming dynasty, it accelerated significantly after the Opium Wars, continuing until the 1940s. It is widely regarded as one of the three most significant population movements in modern Chinese history (Gao et al., 2024). Between 1876 and 1898 alone, approximately 2.85 million migrants departed from Xiamen and Shantou, and from 1918 to 1931, another 3.8 million emigrated through Shantou and Hong Kong (Zhuang, 2011). Notably, the film avoids reference to specific Southeast Asian nations or cities, foregrounding instead the regional identity of Teochew. The narrative begins with Kuan Kong Chiu practicing martial arts by the seashore of Teochew while discussing with his lover, Sit Fun, the necessity of venturing overseas out of economic desperation. As the plot develops, with escalating conflicts and the deaths of friends and relatives, the story reaches its darkest moment before the final confrontation. At this juncture, Kuan instructs Sit Fun: “If I ever pass away, don’t cry or make a fuss. Just wash your face with a handful of seawater, hold our child close, and head straight back to Teochew.” This prophecy becomes reality when Kuan sacrifices his life, and Sit Fun, clutching their child, once again stands by the Teochew shoreline, gazing at the sunset.

In cross-cultural communication, high-context cultural metaphors often risk distortion. Yet, in cinema, metaphors function as both “mirror” and “window,” simultaneously reflecting, transcending, and returning to lived reality (Baker, 2022; Calabi et al., 2022). As a typical revenge narrative of the period, *The Hero From Chiu Chow* presents its protagonist, portrayed by Tam Do Lim, as a morally upright, uncompromising figure, an idealized hero emblematic of collective Chinese resistance. His embodiment of the “angry man” archetype symbolized the long-suppressed indignation of the Chinese nation. Indeed, the film’s alternative English title, *The Hero of the Waterfront*, reinforces this characterization of the Teochew community: coastal dwellers, impoverished yet adventurous, resilient, courageous, resistant to authority, and profoundly attached to their homeland. By omitting specific Southeast Asian geographical markers and emphasizing Teochew identity, the film reframes the conflict as a binary struggle between Chinese migrants and oppressors. This narrative strategy enables the film to be encoded as an allegory of nationalism and class struggle. Compared with earlier depictions, the Teochew image in this film appears strikingly new and markedly positive. It reflects not only the reimagining of Teochew identity but also the rise of nationalist sentiments within the wider Chinese diaspora during this era.

### ***The 1980s–1990s: The Teochew as the “Other” beyond modern civilization***

By the late 1980s, Hong Kong cinema began shifting its focus to narratives about Teochew communities within Hong Kong. Films such as *Rich and Famous* in 1987, *To Be Number One* in 1991, *Lee Rock* in 1991, and *Lee Rock II* in 1991 fall into this category. Among these, *To Be Number One* is often regarded as the pioneering work of the Hong Kong “gangster-hero” genre, which went on to influence a wide range of subsequent productions, including its 2017 remake, *Chasing the Dragon*. Employing a semi-documentary style, the film intersperses fictional storytelling with archival-style sequences that depict both Teochew migration and Hong Kong’s historical development. The narrative follows Ah Hao, a Teochew migrant newly arrived in Hong Kong. Ambitious and ruthless, he rises to power through violent gang conflicts, ultimately becoming a notorious drug lord and one of Hong Kong’s so-called “Four Great Families.” Following the establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), however, he is arrested and spends the remainder of his life in prison.

As with most gangster-hero films, the narrative charts the protagonist’s ascent from obscurity to extraordinary wealth and influence through crime, inviting audiences to revel in the spectacle of power accumulation, even as the protagonist ultimately faces legal retribution. *To Be Number One* conforms to this structure, but with a notable cultural twist: in its early sequences, Ah Hao and his fellow Teochew characters are portrayed as rural outsiders newly arrived in Hong Kong, marked by heavy accents, coarse language, and shabby clothing. This depiction starkly contrasts with his later image as an overweight, commanding figure who exerts near-total control. It is worth noting that, in comparison, Hong Kong cinema of this era often depicted characters from mainland China in even more exaggeratedly negative terms through naming practices, costuming, and behavioral caricatures (Chen et al., 2022). Thus, although the film retains certain stereotypes, its portrayal of Teochew characters is more a function of narrative necessity than cultural denigration. This reflects the long-standing integration of Teochew communities into Hong Kong society. Large-scale Teochew migration to Hong Kong began as early as 1841, and by the 1980s, Teochew constituted

a significant portion of the local population (Wu, 2013). Consequently, Hong Kong cinema of this period consistently dramatized Teochew stories in a legendary or romanticized manner, while still attributing their rise to traits of aggression and destructiveness, it simultaneously incorporated them as part of the Hong Kong collective.

Alongside these urban narratives emerged another category of films set and shot in Teochew itself, notably *Homecoming* in 1984 and *Eight Taels of Gold* in 1989. Both works center on the return of overseas Teochew migrants to their hometowns, and both unfold with a slow, contemplative rhythm markedly distinct from mainstream Hong Kong cinema. Directed by Allen Fong, a key figure in the Hong Kong New Wave, *Homecoming* in 1984 won six awards at the Hong Kong Film Awards and was among the first wave of Hong Kong productions shot in mainland China after the launch of Reform and Opening. The film tells the story of Shan Shan, who returns to her Teochew hometown after 20 years abroad, following her grandmother's death. There she reconnects with her childhood friends, Ah Zhen and Xiao Song, who are now married with a daughter, and the three become entangled in a complex emotional triangle. As a quintessential art film, *Homecoming* portrays Teochew villagers as simple, warmhearted, and industrious, absorbed in agricultural labor while simultaneously curious yet unfamiliar with the outside world. At another level, this idealized Teochew village serves as a site of healing for Shan Shan, who struggles with a broken family and estrangement. By contrast, *Eight Taels of Gold* in 1989, directed by Mabel Cheung and written by Alex Law as the final installment of their "Migration Trilogy," situates its narrative almost entirely in Teochew. Unlike the first two films in the trilogy, which are set overseas, this work chronicles the return of Monkey, a taxi driver in the United States, who revisits his hometown after obtaining a green card. There he meets Wu Zui Po, a woman preparing to emigrate to the United States for marriage, and the two develop a romance that ultimately fails. Although the plot parallels *Homecoming* in 1984 in several respects, Cheung and Law's representation of Teochew life is more overtly exoticizing. Their depiction of 1980s Teochew includes political slogans painted on walls, persistent superstitions, and villagers portrayed as opportunistic and mercenary. These elements function as satire or comic relief, positioning Teochew as a symbol of backwardness in contrast to the modernity of American metropolises.

Taken together, whether the Teochew are represented as violent outsiders intruding upon Hong Kong society, or as rustic villagers inhabiting a romanticized countryside, both forms of representation construct Teochew identity as "the Other" (Chahdi, 2024). This phenomenon resonates with Stuart Hall's theory of "the Other," in which colonial discourse structures the modern world through a binary of civilization versus barbarism (Murji, 2022). On one level, such representations reflect Hong Kong's centralist perspective as an economically and culturally advanced region vis-à-vis other Chinese societies. On another, they intersect with the "search for roots" discourse that gained momentum following the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and during the ensuing 15-year transition period. As *Eight Taels of Gold* illustrates, where the protagonist Monkey refers to Hong Kong as "the world's largest Chinatown", the colonial experience deprived Hong Kong people of identity, tradition, pride, and self-representation. Consequently, the postcolonial subject often faced dilemmas of identity (Lee and Law, 2014). The ambivalence toward Teochew identity, oscillating between demonization and idealization, exemplifies precisely this postcolonial tension.

### ***From the early 21st century to the present: Narrators of local stories***

By the mid- to late 1990s, Hong Kong cinema had entered a period of decline, even as a growing sense of local identity took hold among Hong Kong people. Consequently, representations of Teochew identity in film gradually diminished. In contrast, cinema in mainland China from the 1990s onward began expanding its margins through dialect films and the exploration of regional cultures (Yang, 2025; Jin, 2022). Yet, owing to the significant linguistic distance between the Teochew dialect and Mandarin, as well as the relative scarcity of influential regional narratives, the development of Teochew-themed films remained largely absent. A shift occurred in the 2010s. On the one hand, China's total box office revenues multiplied several times between 2010 and 2019, creating fertile ground for the emergence of Teochew cinema (Kang et al., 2022). Guangdong Province, the country's largest film market for years (Zhang et al., 2025), has a Teochew population comprising over one-fifth of its residents, representing a substantial audience base. On the other hand, the rise of films rooted in regional cultures, such as the so-called "Jiangnan cinema" represented by *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* in 2019 and the "Guizhou cinema" exemplified by *Kaili Blues* in 2015, demonstrates a broader trend of rediscovering local subject matter (Liu, 2024; You, 2022). Within this context, Teochew-themed films produced in mainland China began to emerge in increasing numbers. The first was *Love and Swatow* in 2013, widely considered the earliest mainland production centered on Teochew stories. Unlike the Hong Kong films discussed previously, this work was shot on location in Teochew, employed the Teochew dialect throughout, and was released on streaming platforms as a public-interest project. Subsequent works have appeared every few years, including *Hero Song* in 2019, *Heaven's Beat* in 2021, and *Borrowed Time* in 2023. Particularly notable is director Lan Hongchun, a Teochew native, whose *Proud of Me* in 2018 achieved modest market success, followed by *Back to Love* in 2020, which became a breakout hit. Produced on a small budget, the latter film grossed over 20 million RMB, an unprecedented achievement for Teochew-themed cinema in mainland China. Accordingly, this study focuses on *Back to Love* as a case example.

Categorically, *Back to Love* in 2020 can be situated within the comedy genre. Yet, unlike the dominant comedic model in contemporary China, typified by the stage-play aesthetics of the Mahua FunAge productions, it opts for narratives that are simple, realistic, and grounded. Its cast is composed largely of non-professional actors, and the dialogue is plain and colloquial. Stylistically, the film integrates elements of Hong Kong's nonsensical ("mo lei tau") comedies and Taiwan New Cinema, resulting in a commercially viable yet culturally distinctive work. The story follows Ze Kai, who, after working for years in Shenzhen, plans to marry his girlfriend Jing Shan. When the couple returns to Ze Kai's hometown of Shantou to inform his family, his mother vehemently objects, sparking intergenerational conflict that eventually resolves in reconciliation. The film centers on the relationship between Ze Kai and his mother, who embody two generations of Teochew identity. Ze Kai represents the younger generation: urban, successful, and confident, openly embracing his Teochew heritage. His mother, by contrast, epitomizes the older generation: diligent and traditional, simultaneously running a business while caring for the family, embodying the archetype of the strong matriarch. Compared to earlier Hong Kong portrayals, *Back to Love* in 2020 offers a more nuanced and multidimensional representation of Teochew characters. Ze Kai is shown as dutiful yet hesitant, struggling to reveal his romantic relationship, while his mother is depicted as sharp-tongued and xenophobic, persistently seeking to intervene

in her son's private life. Through these characters, the film also foregrounds Teochew landscapes and folk cultural practices. From Ze Kai's perspective, viewers encounter the Nanao Islands, century-old arcaded buildings, and Mazu temples, symbols of Teochew's maritime and diasporic culture. Meanwhile, the mother's preparations for the "Moon Worship" ritual, detailing every step from burning joss paper to making hongtao guo (red peach cakes) and performing the ceremony, emphasize the vitality of folk religion in shaping Teochew spirituality (Li, 2024). While recent productions such as *The Legend of Mazu* in 2021 and *Faces in the Crowd* in 2023 have incorporated rituals like "Yingge Dance," "Laore," and Mazu worship, they tend to present these practices primarily as visual spectacle rather than cultural substance. In contrast, *Back to Love* in 2020 weaves folk beliefs into the narrative fabric, presenting them as integral to character development and as bearers of spiritual solace for Teochew communities.

Beyond affirming Teochew identity, the film also engages in critical reflection on cultural conservatism. The Teochew region is widely perceived as deeply shaped by patriarchal clan structures, which exert influence on interpersonal relationships (Chen, 2022). Lan Hongchun's work critiques these constraints by embedding them into the central conflict of the story. For example, when Ze Kai's mother discovers that Jing Shan is a divorced outsider, her ingrained traditional views drive a rupture between mother and son. Ultimately, however, she undergoes transformation, traveling to Shenzhen to help her son salvage his faltering relationship. The director thus dramatizes the dilemma between preserving exclusionary traditions and embracing openness, encoding this conflict in personal transformation. This narrative strategy not only enhances the film's comedic appeal but also elevates it to a work of cultural critique and reflection. As Stuart Hall argues, raw events must first be transformed into meaningful stories before they can circulate as communicable information. Without meaning, there is no consumption; only information encoded in meaningful discourse can elicit complex perceptual, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses (Flusberg et al., 2024). The Teochew-themed films produced by local creators in this period can therefore be read as acts of active cultural representation and identity construction. These works resist the dominance of external discourses, disrupting fixed, reductive, or distorted readings of Teochew identity. In the encoding process, they simultaneously draw on the strengths of earlier Hong Kong and Taiwan films while embedding local complexities and diversities, thereby challenging singular and simplified decoding frameworks. As a result, they have resonated deeply with Teochew audiences, and increasingly with audiences beyond the region.

## Conclusion

Throughout the century-long trajectory of Chinese-language cinema, the Teochew people have been represented through a wide range of divergent images that respond to the needs of different historical periods, geographical regions, and audiences. Over time, these representations have gradually evolved toward a stage in which the Teochew community actively participates in shaping its own cinematic identity. It must be acknowledged, however, that films about the Teochew people remain relatively marginal, with works dispersed across time and space, lacking consistent continuity and lineage. The value of revisiting and organizing these cinematic representations lies, on the one hand, in helping to interpret the complex history of Teochew migration and in substantiating the community's cultural, religious, and intellectual distinctiveness. On

the other hand, at a time when global cultural production increasingly emphasizes locality and ethnicity, such inquiry offers new perspectives for uncovering the meanings and values of regional cinema, and it further provides direction for producing films that are more attuned to the demands of the present era.

## Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

## Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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