

Intergenerational Conflict in The Shadow's Edge: A Sociological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the representation of intergenerational conflict in *The Shadow's Edge* through a sociological approach by employing Karl Mannheim's theory of generations as the primary theoretical framework. Intergenerational conflict is understood as a consequence of differences in socio historical experiences, value systems, and perspectives between older and younger generations. The study employs a qualitative method with content analysis as the main analytical technique. The primary data consist of the film *The Shadow's Edge*, while secondary data are obtained through repeated

observation of scenes that represent intergenerational conflict. The findings indicate that intergenerational conflict in the film is reflected through differences in working methods, professional ethics, and interpretations of technology between Wong Tak Chung as the representation of the older generation and He Qiuguo as the representation of the younger generation. The film further emphasizes that absolute reliance on technology has its limitations, while the empirical experience of the older generation remains relevant. Ultimately, *The Shadow's Edge* portrays the reconciliation of intergenerational conflict through collaboration and the integration of perspectives, highlighting the importance of cross generational cooperation in addressing contemporary social challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The capacity for social interaction is what has allowed communities and societies to form and persevere throughout time, with the likes of sects, tribes, groups and organizations resulting from a sustained process of social interaction. Throughout social interaction, there exists the potential for opposing points of view which can create social conflicts. One of the most relevant forms of social conflicts is intergenerational conflicts. Each generation is subjected to the teachings, attributes, and influences of the age in which they develop which ultimately results in competing beliefs and systems of values amongst the generations. Mannheim (1952) asserts that the first few years of a person's life form the basis of their world view and heavily socialize the individual's perspective for the rest of their lives. As a result, individuals of the same age and social cohort may arrive at the same solutions for problems of the same era with the same level of reasoning but will lack harmony with the generations that are dissimilar to theirs.

Differing attitudes toward social change can cause people to band together, but generally require the existence of some mutually accepted condition. Change encompasses the lived experiences of human beings, and is something that all human beings have to contend with. This is consistent with Amran (2015), who maintains that all societies, no matter how 'backward' or 'developed', are inevitably subject to transformations, because societies are culturally and socially dynamic. Changes may be in the social sphere, educational, economic, political, scientific, technological, or agricultural. In the context of succession within generations, what is bequeathed is generally not taken to be a transfer of physical assets from one generation to the other, but rather elements that are intangible and make connections to the past and present, with values and memories that are given meaning and characterized as collective.

The social conflict reinforcement in media representation stems from the media-induced reality and the social order of intergroup conflict. Here media is not simply a

channel of communication but rather an arena for the construction of meaning because of its ideological and political monopolies. From a perspective drawing from Marx, social conflict is a dimension of social construction, and media monopolizes these conflicts through representation of group identity and social order of conflicts. This gives rise to identity status struggles and representation struggles. In the contemporary, especially because of social media, conflict has more momentum because of the rapid dissemination of antagonistic representation, the mobilization of a fractured community, and the construction of antagonistic meaning for the wealthy and powerful as well as the oppressed and marginalized. Thus, media goes beyond perception of social conflict to the justification and acceleration of social conflict through the framing of Li and the destruction and monopolization of discourse, meaning, and public interaction, which shows that social media has changed social movements and collective action, and given new power to the oppressed and marginalized. It has also influenced the nature of contemporary social and political conflicts (Nabeel & Sundararaman, 2022; Riaz, 2021).

Intergenerational conflict exists not only in everyday social life, but also in various art forms and culture, especially in cinema. Film, as a visual and audio art form, is able to represent social realities through narratives and symbols. Beyond entertainment, film is able to mirror and critique society. Various social issues, including intergenerational conflict, can be captured in film, especially during times of social change.

The Shadow's Edge is one film that represents intergenerational conflict. This film demonstrates the conflict of older and younger generations within the context of the profession of law enforcement. This conflict is embodied in the differences of methods of work, professional and personal ethics, and the attitudes and approaches to the use of technology. Wong Tak Chung, the character from the older generation, is filmed as a character who is able to rely on experience and intuition from the field, while the character of He Qiuguo, who belongs to the younger generation, has the traits of reliance on technology and analysis of data. The conflict in the film represents the splintering of values and ways of thinking in the workplace of today.

Many past studies investigate intergenerational conflict in distinct areas of society. For example, Sukardi and Husnawati (2025) analyzed intergenerational conflict in family structures in the digital era, centering on the role of parent and child empathetic communication. Different research examined generational conflict in the contexts of education and interpersonal communication, examining the dissimilarities of cognitive structures and conflict resolution. Nonetheless, research in this area typically describes intergenerational conflict as an empirical social phenomenon that takes place in society.

Up until now, far fewer studies have considered intergenerational conflict through the lens of film as a method of social representation, especially in relation to the context of occupations within institutions. In addition, the application of Karl Mannheim's theory

of generations has not been extensively used for the analysis of intergenerational conflict in film. Thus, there exists a space in research that seeks to analyze how intergenerational conflict is portrayed through the design of narratives, the construction of characters, and the organization of plots in the film as a popular cultural medium. In line with this research gap, the purpose of this study is to examine how intergenerational conflict is manifest in *The Shadow's Edge*. Using sociology as the discipline of study, this research will utilize Karl Mannheim's theory of generations as the foremost tool of analysis. This research will have the potential to impact cultural sociology and film studies and has the potential to provide new insights into understanding intergenerational conflict within the frameworks and parameters of social change in the current situation of modern society.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopts a qualitative research approach that aims to provide an explanation of intergenerational conflict in *The Shadow's Edge*. More specifically, the study adopts qualitative content analysis with an interpretative approach, enabling the researcher to analyze the meanings associated with the filmic representation (Miles, 1994; Mills, 2018; Mohajan, 2018). Within this context, the primary data of the research is *The Shadow's Edge* film, which is the main object of the study.

Data are gathered through repeated viewings of the film as part of the data gathering technique to ensure data comprehensive observation and familiarization. This aids in describing key scenes that demonstrate intergenerational dynamics.

This study employs a sociological approach that analyzes behavior and actions within the framework of social structures and cultural and institutional settings. This approach is suitable for this study as it seeks to analyze how intergenerational conflict is articulated and represented in the work context. The elements and interactions of the film are examined in this study through content analysis, enabling a systematic way of revealing the social and cultural structures along with the conflicts of differing values and the interactions of different generations.

Data gathering occurs through various stages that involve detailed viewing of the film, selection of pertinent scenes, and meticulous recording of dialogues and interactions. This information is framed and analyzed according to the varying professional ethics, attitudes towards technology, and work practices of the different generations.

This study employs diverse validation methods to ensure the study's trustworthiness, such as data triangulation through repeated viewing, peer debriefing, to minimize subjective bias, and thick description, to extend a contextual interpretation of the data. The analysis is led by Karl Mannheim's theory of generations, which offers a way to think about how differing socio-historical experiences contribute to varying

generational consciousness and conflict. With this procedure in mind, the study aims to uncover the ways in which intergenerational conflict is constructed narratively and represented socially, as well as the latent representations of the construction of social intergenerational conflict in a manner that suggests the film's relevance to the study of generational relations in present-day society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section details findings from the qualitative content analysis of *The Shadow's Edge*, exploring scenes that identify the presence of intergenerational conflict in a professional institutional environment.



Figure 1. Institutional Recall and the Emergence of Intergenerational Conflict

The first finding indicates that intergenerational conflict, in this instance, is constructed by the recall of Wong Tak Chung to the Macau police. The institution's use of a former investigator suggests an acknowledgment of the inadequacies of newer, technologically advanced systems. Wong's skepticism of the digital control room is juxtaposed with the assurance of younger officers, He Qiuguo included. This situation exposes the initial gap between experiential knowledge and the newer reliance on technology, indicating a form of generational differentiation within professional epistemology. Generational differentiation within professional epistemology is displayed in the different ways that younger and more eminent researchers construct their professional knowledge systems and ethical frameworks. While younger and more eminent researchers have a shared epistemological realism rooted in the construction of objective, credible, and precise knowledge, they differ in the professional knowledge systems and ethical frameworks that they construct, with younger researchers placing a greater emphasis on professionalism, networking, and applied research over traditional, fundamental research, as well as collegial academic values and norms Prpić (2005).



Figure 2. Contrasting Investigative Approaches Between Generations

The second observation identifies different strategies in the examination of surveillance footage. Wong Tak Chung relies on the manual observation of behavior patterns. In contrast, He Qiuguo employs digital analytics and data mapping. There is a clear contrast of two different strategies of knowledge and, in this instance, the function of algorithmic technologies as epistemic systems and the necessity of contextual human judgment for the purpose of meaningful interpretation of data Lindberg (2025). The disagreement touches on different theories of professional accuracy, reliability, and the validity of the profession.



Figure 3. Divergent Professional Ethics and Risk Perception

The third observation recognizes a divergence of professional ethics as well as a divergence of perception of risk. Wong's choice of direct undercover infiltration is completely repudiated by He Qiuguo as he emphasizes the importance of procedural safety and efficiency with the aid of technological surveillance. This result indicates that professional ethics is subject to intergenerational conflict, as the burden of responsibility changes from one generation to the next. Inherent to the ethics of surveillance and the methodology used is an interpretation of the relationship of risk, control, and professional responsibility derived from human direct engagement and the mediation of technology Dall'Agnola (2023).



Figure 4. Technological Failure and the Limits of Digital Dependence

The fourth finding embodies the limits of technological systems. With the Fu Longsheng hacking syndicate undermining police surveillance systems, operational failures occur among younger officers reliant on digital systems. Wong Tak Chung, however, understands human behavior and anticipates the suspect's movements. This finding suggests technological systems are not always dependable and are susceptible to failures and hacks.



Figure 5. Intergenerational Collaboration as Conflict Resolution

The fifth finding regards collaboration as a means to resolve intergenerational conflict. The collaboration of Wong Tak Chung and He Qiuguo merges the former's experiential knowledge and the latter's technological skills for the successful apprehension of the suspect. This finding implies that the integration of generational perspectives to solve a problem is more effective and dominant than the absence of one or the other. This concept is best illustrated through structured collaboration that relies on and is governed by positive emotions and a synergistic intervention, leading to a better outcome (Rojas 2022).

This study reveals that intergenerational conflict in *The Shadow's Edge* is more substantive than superficial disagreement, as it involves structural differences in knowledge systems, work-related values, and socio-historical contexts. Consistent with Mannheim's generation theory, these differences reflect the reality of different generations and the way people view the world, authority, and the nature of their work. The differences between Wong Tak Chung and He Qiuguo demonstrate the extent to which generation consciousness determines the behavior of institutions and the decisions they make.

In comparison with previous studies, the current findings provide some validation as well as the extension of earlier studies. For example, studies such as Sukardi and Husnawati (2025) focus on intergenerational conflicts in the family context and emphasize the need for emotional and empathic understanding of parents for their children. Much of the research in the educational and interpersonal contexts identifies differences in cognitive styles as well as communication strategies as the primary sources of generational conflict. However, the majority of these studies focus on intragenerational conflict as a social interaction that takes place in the day-to-day routines of everyday life.

This study identifies generational conflict in the context of a professional institution and focuses on its representation in film in the context of culture. This approach demonstrates that generational conflict is a structural phenomenon that extends beyond interpersonal relationships and is embedded in professional ethics and technological structures. While many studies of intergenerational conflict focus on the conflict as a problem that requires a resolution, the current study presents the conflict as a positive phenomenon that facilitates the flexibility of institutions.

Findings challenge some previous research implicitly suggesting that each instance of technological development is a sign of progress. The collapse of digital systems in the film illustrates the limits of technological determinism and provides necessary counterbalance to the understandings of the determinists in the film. This is consistent with the sociological critiques regarding the multiple forms of knowledge and the failure of a linear substitution of older forms with newer ones.

The film's collaborative problem solving illustrates generational integration and Mannheim's idea of flexible social order. Intergenerational distinctions are not the film's focus. Rather, interdependence is presented as an important mechanism of problem solving. The idea emphasizes the constructive potential of intergenerational tension as the result of flexible acknowledgment and positive recognition of the distorting negative friction arising from undisciplined intergenerational communication.

This research extends the literature by integrating symptoms of contemporary intergenerational conflict and the worlds of sociology and film. By examining the social

order through the lens of film as a cultural text, this research illustrates the negotiation of social order and the intergenerational conflict in modern institutions. By situating contemporary intergenerational conflict in the cultural and sociological spaces, this research illustrates the negotiation of social order and the significance of contemporary friction for a dynamic social order in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing *The Shadow's Edge* using sociological film analysis reveals that the modern phenomenon of intergenerational conflict depicts the disparity of socio-historical experiences and value systems and generational worldviews. The film illustrates the clash of traditional work patterns and rigid, experience-based methods of the policing profession, and work methods that are systems-based and belong to the policing profession. This clash, represented by Wong Tak Chung and He Qiuguo, is not only of methods, but of work ethics, work morals, and professional responsibility.

Using Karl Mannheim's theory of generations, the film's portrayal of intergenerational conflict can be analyzed through the lens of generation location, or the place of each generation in its own historical time. The character Fu Longsheng crystallizes the generational methods and impels the intersection of each. In the film's portrayal of conflict resolution, the fusion of the older and younger generations' experiences and methods approaches the fulfillment of the demands of contemporary society. *The Shadow's Edge* is a critical portrayal of intergenerational conflict and value systems in contemporary society, in addition to being a source of entertainment.

Given this study's focus on the sociological analysis of the representation of intergenerational conflict in film, future studies on the topic are encouraged to examine differing films or other components of popular culture through other social and cultural frameworks for broader, more comparative perspectives. Applying varying frameworks, particularly from the speaking disciplines, will likely deepen the understanding of intergenerational relations. Future studies may also examine audience reception to analyze the social and ideological consequences of the representation of intergenerational conflict in film

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