Crossing Borders in Taiwan New Cinema: Historiography, Popularity, Postcoloniality

Submitted by Wan-Jui Wang to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies, September 2013

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Abstract

Focusing on Taiwan New Cinema from its inception in 1982 to the present, this thesis examines the key features of historical representation, dramatic genre and postcolonial discourse. Taiwan New Cinema configures the different political formations of Taiwanese culture, and deals with the historical, social and cultural relations between Taiwanese culture and other cultures such as Mainland Chinese, American and Japanese. I argue that Taiwan New Cinema has become a vital cultural space wherein questions of national borders and identities are being renegotiated. This thesis will investigate Taiwan New Cinema and its historical and cultural phenomena from three directions. First, it aims to develop an understanding of constructed national identities by examining how Taiwanese history has been written within the Taiwan New Cinema movement and by considering Taiwan cinema in the light of the concept of national cinema. Part 1 proposes that Taiwan New Cinema is the site of a dynamic contestation in the representation of Chinese exile, shifting from a monumental style aimed at encouraging a sense of collective identity to a more self-reflexive and critical approach. Second, this dissertation attempts to reevaluate domestic genres by mapping the spaces culturally occupied by selected new wave film texts produced to challenge, in various ways, the dominant realist aesthetics. Part 2 argues that Taiwan New Cinema tackles the issue of American neocolonialism by exploring the significance of popular genre in Taiwan, especially the effects of the Cold War on Taiwan society. Third, this dissertation is concerned with the way in which postcolonial discourse is inscribed in Taiwan New Cinema. Since the 1990s, there have been transnational trends in deploying Taiwan New Cinema as a site of cultural translation for addressing
postcolonial subjects or responses to Japanese contemporary culture. Part 3 reveals a
diverse landscape in film narrative, subject matter and cinematic style in relation to an
attempt to reimagine the colonial past.
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Introduction

We rarely question the definition of Taiwan New Cinema (hereafter TNC) insofar as its national narrative is based on an ambiguous defined territory and concept of nation.

In this thesis I would argue that TNC is a vital cultural space where the relationship between borders and identity has been renegotiated. Prior to tackling the films themselves, it is necessary to examine some theoretical issues that are central to the argument, particularly intercultural analysis. While all chapters explore the crossing of borders in Taiwan new wave films, the thesis maintains diverse perspectives and themes by examining films that cross borders in histories, genres and cultures in the context of the growing critical literature on the evaluation of the conception and practice of national cinema in Taiwan over the last three decades. It will explore the ways the traditional markers of national boundary have been transformed through political and economic realignments with the emergence of new cinematic strategies and a new generation of filmmakers for whom national cinema no longer means what it did before. Focused on border-crossing consciousness, this thesis argues that the possibility of geographical collaboration and intercultural exchange between Taiwan
and China, between Taiwan and America, and between Taiwan and Japan are three major concerns in TNC. The works of TNC cannot be attributed to a single cultural origin. In other words, they are wholly products of cultural synthesis. This introduction will strive to explore notions of national/transnational cinema and relevance to the argument by applying them to a case study that starts off in ‘border-crossing.’

The term ‘border-crossing’ is useful for our discussion here as it helps us to think about ways in which more than one culture can be equally and respectfully represented in TNC. What happens when film narratives cross national borders? How do these border crossings affect genre conventions and cinematic practice? Why do these films succeed in mixing genre and cultures? This thesis will address these questions by looking at how various cultures within Taiwan, including Chinese, American and Japanese, interact in TNC, demonstrating many possibilities for being and belonging in time. Border crossing also comprises modes of production and reception, as well as new landscapes of everyday experience, temporalities of dislocation, and cultural memories. I argue that TNC inscribes the experience of border crossing and indexes the fluidity of exilic and postcolonial identity in the films in which they are traced and transformed.
Literature Review

A number of Chinese-language academic books that appeared in the past thirty years revisit the new cinematic aesthetics since the advent of the TNC in the early 1980s. These books include Peggy Hsiung-ping Chiao, eds., *Taiwan New Cinema/Taiwan Xin Dianying* (1988); Ru-Shou Robert Chen’s *Historical and Cultural Experience of Taiwan New Cinema/Taiwan xindianying de lishi wenhua jingyan* (1994); Mi-Zou and Liang Xinhua, eds., *The death of Taiwan New cinema/Xindianying zhi si* (1991); Feii Lu’s *Taiwan Cinema: Politics, Economics, Aesthetics/Taiwan Dianyin: zhengzhi, jingji, meixue*, Wenchi Lin, Shiao-ying Shen and Chen-ya Lee, eds., *Passionate Detachment: Critical Essays on Hou Hsiao-hsien* (2000); Wen Tien-Hsiang’s *The Study of Tsai Ming-liang/guang ying ding ge: cai ming liang de xinling changyu* (2002); Wong Edmond’s *The Films of Edward Yang/Yang de chang dianying yanjiu* (1995); Jinn-Pei Chang’s *The Cinema of Ang Lee/shi nian yi jiao dianying meng* (2002). Many of these books focus on the complexity of aesthetic features in TNC: Taiwanese film producer Peggy Hsiung-ping Chiao edited a book *Taiwan New Cinema*, which included many film reviews became a crucial reference book on the subject. Lu’s book is primarily a
social and economic institutional history, grounding discussion of Taiwan cinema in analysis of policy initiatives, social change, and economic transformation. Chen’s book is based on his PhD dissertation at University of Southern California. He argues that Taiwan cinema has been a potpourri of diverse cultural, linguistic and other elements. Based on auteur theory, Lin, Shen and Lee co-edited book is the first anthology of Hou Hsiao-hsien. Working on a similar approach, Wong, Wen and Chang focus on different directors and highlight their cinematic achievement and their respective interactions with other world cinema traditions. Taiwanese scholars certainly maps the historical and cultural contexts of film practices in postwar Taiwan, however, English language scholarship pays more attention to aesthetic approach, and contributes some important articles on cinema technique.

TNC is often overlooked in discussions of aesthetic innovation, national history and cultural identity. Focused on aesthetic innovation and authorship, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis’ Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island (2005) focuses on the extraordinarily rich work of four Taiwanese filmmakers, namely Ang Lee, Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Tsai Ming-liang, attempting to build up a landscape of Taiwan’s changing film culture. Even though their illuminate their work
by analyzing constructions of a cinematic authorship, Yeh and Davis seem to abandon
the examination of cinema and national identity. June Yip’s *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* (2004) is the first
English-language monograph that looks at the literary and cinematic constructions of
historical events and how they shape the idea of nationhood and national identity in
Taiwan. By exploring the intercultural constructions of a Taiwanese nation in Taiwan
literature and TNC, Yip highlights “a perceptible shift from conceptions of nation and
cultural identity based on unitary coherence and authenticity toward alternative models
that emphasize multiplicity and fluidity—models that perhaps better reflect the
multicultural, transnational consciousness of today’s Taiwan, which with its history of
multiple colonizations and its globally mobile population, is very much at the forefront
of cultural hybridity” (2004: 11). In order to challenge the national cinema model,
Chris Berry argues that the national “is no longer confined to the form of the territorial
country-state but multiple, proliferating, contested and overlapping” (Berry 2006: 149).
Analysing Hou’s Taiwan Trilogy¹, Berry revised the concept of Taiwanese national
cinema, suggesting that the national should be redefined in the contemporary era and

may be captured the complexities of the transnational era.

Like Yip and Berry, Guo-Juin Hong uses the term transnational to describe the history of Taiwan cinema. In his book *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen*, he argues that Taiwan Cinema “is best understood by treating the ‘nation’ as a nexus of internal and external contentions and by seeing the national and the transnational as a dialectics” (2011: 4). Hong addresses not only the historiographical approach of the national as a dialectics with the transnational, but also the history of Taiwan cinema’s transformation. As both scholars just speak about history of Taiwan cinema, this thesis will build on the contribution of Yip and Hong by emphasizing the role of filmmakers who give voice to popular history from below. Instead of treating TNC as a collection of works on Taiwan film history, I will emphasize in this thesis the questions of its national cinema and what that border-crossing connection has to tell us about a multiple, relationship between cinema and nation since the 1980s Taiwan. In this thesis, we must question the extent to which TNC goes beyond the national cinema model, and its relations to the concepts of border crossing and the formation of national identity.
TNC and Taiwanese Identity

As we trace the history of Taiwan cinema, it is clear that Taiwanese collective identity was dramatically transformed three times within one century, from fifty years of colonization by the Japanese (1895-1945), the rule of the Kuomintang (KMT, or Nationalist) regime till the end of the martial law (1949-1987), and finally, the subsequent period of democratization. Hence Guo-Juin Hong argues: “the embedded histories of colonial and postcolonial Taiwan have informed post-1945 cinematic genres and styles, and those dispersed histories have made up the matrix of the formation of what ‘nation’ has meant at different times for Taiwan” (1998: 47). In the 1970s, for instance, the government-funded propaganda films attempted to promote Chinese national identity. However, new cinema’s filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Wan Jen have demonstrated how films can represent different cultural groups whilst problematizing the notion of difference. In terms of political and historical approaches, we should bear in mind that Taiwan cinema before the 1980s was often engaged with the function of nation building.

It is now more than thirty years since the TNC movement was launched. Recognized for its distinctive cinematic style, it was partly a reaction against the
popular Hong Kong products that has dominated the Taiwanese box office since 1970s (Wu 2006: 364). The Taiwanese film industry was under serious challenges since 1970s, such as the entry of Hong Kong films, well known for their entertainment quality, into the Taiwanese market. In order to compete with these films, a state-fund studio, the Central Motion Picture Company (hereafter CMPC) began an initiative to support several fresh, young directors. *In Our Time/Guang yin de gushi*, release in 1982 and co-directed by four young filmmakers (namely Edward Yang, Tao Te-Chen, Ko I-Chen and Chang Yi), marked the beginning of the TNC movement.

Whilst considering the origin of a movement, we should not ignore its historical background and discourse. According to Douglas Kellner, TNC “carries out a rebellion against previous genre cinema (its own and Hollywood) and attempts to produce a socially critical and aesthetically innovative cycle of films appropriate to explore contemporary Taiwan society” (1998: 101). In other words, TNC should be considered in relation to the “old” or “traditional” Taiwan cinema. As Hong comments, “The notion of ‘newness’—implying a severance from the past and promising hope—is extremely tempting and, for that reason, in great need of historicizing” (2011: 185). TNC thus indicated that this movement was a collective action with a counter
hegemonic purpose. As these films cross various borders from the historical to the geographical and the cultural, it is clear that the Taiwan new wave is characterized by cross-cultural practice. The movement has produced an impressive succession of films comprising a distinctive national cinema, one increasingly visible in the global arena.

To return to the context of TNC, the relationship between national cinema and national identity is worth exploring the cultural diversity and transnational issues displayed in films. Before the emergence of TNC in the 1980s, Taiwan cinema suffered from political agendas such as a China-centered ideology, anti-communism and Chinese cultural traditionalism. In order to respond to the legitimacy of state power, CMPC produced propaganda films, which played a role in fostering Chinese national identity in Taiwanese people. Moreover, other genre films such as historical epics and costume drama (including wuxia) as well as the romantic films of Qiong Yao, arguably also served a similar ideological function. However, since the earlier 1980s, due to a dramatic decline of the local and overseas box-office for Taiwan films, CMPC began to employ a new generation of filmmakers to make low budget films based on their original ideas in order to save the business. According to film critic Chiao

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2 On October 25, 1971, the Republic of China (Taiwan) was ‘expelled from the United Nations. The following year, Japan served diplomatic relations with Taipei. As a result, two of the state-controlled studios, CMPC and CMPS (China Motion Picture Studio) were responsible for making patriotic films (Liao 2002: 431).
Hsiung-ping, the movement of TNC “refers to a group of filmmakers in their thirties and forties who began making films different from those of their predecessors, films quite unlike contemporary Taiwanese mainstream cinema in both form and content” (1990: 9). Filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Ko Yi-cheng and Chang Yi produced an excellent series of low budget films that explore social tensions and problems in compelling ways, carrying out a rebellion against previous genre cinema.

In contrast to the costume, propaganda, and kung-fu films of the earlier decades, TNC is known for its realistic, and sympathetic portrayals of ordinary life. The directors of TNC, as Chris Berry and Feii Lu suggest, “did not pursue the dramatic structures based on conflict that characterized the established mainstream Taiwan cinema, but abandoned the models of stage drama or entertainment to pursue observational realism and modernist expressionism” (Berry and Lu 2005: 5). TNC’s cinematic style is slow, the camera is often static, and the narratives are uneventful in comparison with previous genre films such as kung fu and wuxia. The films tried to meaningfully engage with issues of Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese political history. More importantly, TNC ideologically questioned the nation-state formation under the
KMT regime, and released a repressed memory of Japanese colonization and Cold War experience. These films thus focused on Taiwanese history, cultural diversity and sense of identity at a time when martial law was being lifted and laws against freedom of expression were being relaxed.

TNC also recognized the diversity of the Taiwanese population, particularly linguistically. Hakka, Hoklo, and other local dialects were used in film, in addition to Mandarin Chinese. Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* is one of a relatively developed example of this tendency. With this linguistic diversity, as Chris Berry notes, “Hou marks out Taiwan as a space crisscrossed by a specific and intricate network of nuanced and subtle differences” (Berry 1994: 57). It can be argued that these films marked the history of Taiwan cinema from government sponsored propaganda, promoting a nationalist Chinese government, to films concerned with discussing Taiwan, its social issues, shared history, and therefore its identity.

In addition to analyzing the meaning and significance of these films’ representation of cultural diversity, I would argue that TNC has been seen as a key force in defining the embattled and floating identity of its nation. Even though Wu I-Fen argues that “New Cinema’s concerns with national history and national identity
have led it to be recognized by Taiwanese film critics as a national cinema” (Wu 2006: 367), the complex dynamics between the national and the transnational underline many TNC films that deal with cultural diversity and difference in postcolonial Taiwan. In other words, new wave filmmakers addressed historical issues and cultural diversity in their works, leading to an era of “New Cinema.”

TNC begins with *In Our Time* (1982), followed by *The Sandwich Man/Er zi de da wan ou* (1983), an adaptation of three short novels from the early 60s by the popular writer Huang Chun-ming co-directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Zeng Zhuang-xiang, and Wan Jen. These films sought to tell stories about aspects of everyday life either in urban or rural Taiwan, and examined many of the important issues facing Taiwan society at the time, such as national identity, urbanization, the struggle against colonialism, and conflict with political authority. As Douglas Kellner notes, *The Sandwich Man* “deal[s] with how Taiwan society has adapted itself to a modern capitalist, world economic system” (1998: 105). These filmmakers thus showed a concern for border crossing narrative and local history.

In 1988, some key members of the TNC movement caused a heated debate. Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chen Kuo-fu co-directed *All for Tomorrow*, a recruitment film funded
by the Ministry of Defense to promote the military school that bitterly disappointed local critics who proclaimed the death of the TNC’s movement for having compromised with the establishment. Although critics foretold the death of the new wave in 1990s, the success of Taiwan filmmakers in the film festival circuit did not decrease. New directors such as Ang Lee, Tsai Ming-Liang, Wu Nien-Jen and Chang Tso-chi emerged as the movement’s second wave. The urban landscapes and realistic visual style of these new directors reflected the dramatic political, economic and social changes that Taiwan was experiencing in the 1990s. With the lifting of the martial law in 1987 and subsequent KMT government reshuffle, the political control over film production began to loosen. More importantly, the films discussed here self-consciously address the question of Taiwanese identity while overtly crossing geographic, cultural, linguistic and aesthetic borders.

**The Problem of (Taiwan) National Cinema**

For the politico-historical perspective, Taiwan can be regarded as a colony from the seventeenth century until after World War II. The island was occupied by foreign powers, beginning with the Netherlands (1624-1662), which was followed by China
(Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911) and finally Japan, which ruled Taiwan from 1895 to 1945, during which much of Taiwan’s modern infrastructure was built. The expanding Japanese empire transformed the island into one of its strategic outposts in the South China Sea and reigned over Taiwan until Japan’s surrender in the Pacific War. At the end of World War II, the Allied powers agreed to let China occupy Taiwan on their behalf (Roy 2003: 56). The Taiwanese were at first appreciative to be rid of the Japanese, but the rule of Chiang Kai-shek’s KMT Party soon turned into repression. The 228 Incident was an anti-government uprising in Taiwan on February 27, 1947, which was violently suppressed by the KMT, and which resulted in the massacre of numerous civilians (Roy 2003: 71). In 1949, China’s long-running civil war ended when the Communists under Mao Ze-dong eventually defeated Chiang’s army. Chiang exiled to Taiwan with what was left of his regime and established martial law, which was not fully lifted until 1987 (Wachman 1994: 6-8). Taiwan today enjoys democracy, but tension still exists between the island’s local populations (bênsêngren), and mainlanders who came over from China (wàishêngren) with the KMT\(^3\). This tension reflects the problem of identity politics in postcolonial Taiwan, and thus “Taiwanese”

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\(^3\) bênsêngren literally means people from this province (Taiwan), including aboriginal peoples, Hoklo and Hakka, whereas wàishêngren means people coming from outside the province after 1945.
identity has become a matter for public debate.

Given the particularity of Taiwan’s history and political status, should TNC be studied as a national cinema? Or should national cinema studies exclude TNC on the grounds that Taiwan is not an independent sovereign nation? As Taiwan does not posse the attributes of a nation-state, it is not surprisingly that its cinema does not fit comfortably into the theoretical category of national cinema. Yet, TNC displays certain characteristics of a national cinema, which functions as part of a network of global economic and cultural institutions within a recognizable society. However, TNC as a complex context cannot simply be fixed as national cinema alone. TNC has played such a role: it supplies local employment, attracts overseas investment, contributes to Taiwan’s international reputation, and, more crucially, participates in the construction of a national identity. On the one hand, TNC has been, and still is, regarded as a component of Chinese national cinema. Yingjin Zhang (2004: 1) contends that the Chinese national cinema paradigm consists of three territories, namely The People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and The Republic of China (Taiwan). On the other hand, TNC has also been mapped into the transnational context by considering the globalization of the production, marketing and consumption of Chinese film in
transnational capitalism since the 1980s. As Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu suggests, one significant transnational characteristic is “the representation and questioning of ‘China’ and ‘Chineseness’ in filmic discourse itself, namely, the cross-examination of the national, cultural, political, ethnic, and gender identity of individuals and communities in the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora” (1997: 3). However, we must question to what extent TNC goes beyond the national cinema model, which I am going to elaborate in the following paragraphs.

In the past few decades, the issue of national cinema has received considerable critical attention. As Stephen Crofts has stated: “the idea of national cinema tended to focus only on film texts produced within the territory concerned while ideas of the nation-state were conceived primarily in essentialist, albeit if in sometimes anti-imperialist terms” (1998: 385). On the one hand, the concept of national cinema seems to comprise not only a series of cultural products embraced by nationalists but also an action against cultural imperialism such as the Hollywood industry. On the other hand, others argue that it is inappropriate to assume that national cinema is bound by the limits of the nation-state. Andrew Higson, for instance, poses a challenge to the concept of national cinema with the suggestion that “the complexities of the
international film industry and the transnational movements of finance capital, film-makers and films should put paid to that assumption” (2006: 23). In view of the debate surrounding the concept of national cinema, TNC as a complex context cannot simply be fixed as national cinema alone.

Even though the concept of national cinema is problematic, recent debates have pointed to a variety of frameworks. According to Crofts, the national cinema mode can embrace nine modes of production, namely United States cinema, Asian commercial successes, other entertainment cinemas in Europe and the Third World, totalitarian cinemas, art cinemas, international co-productions, Third Cinema, and sub-state cinemas (1998: 390), which offer a multiplicity of features of national cinema. In other words, Croft proposes “to write of states and nation-states cinemas rather than nations and national cinemas” (Ibid.:386). Although Craft does not mention Taiwan cinema, it is worth considering where Taiwan lies as an example in his chart of national cinemas. For instance, Sub-state cinemas, as Craft notes, “may be defined ethnically in terms of suppressed, indigenous, diasporic, or other populations asserting their civil rights and giving expression to a distinctive religion, language, or regional culture,” (Ibid.: 390) such as Catalan, Quebecois, Aboriginal, Chicano, and Welsh cinemas. According to
his chart, the primary possibility is to treat Taiwan as an example of ‘sub-state cinema,’ which makes sense to a certain extent as TNC since the 1980s brought the Taiwanese identity to a new cultural awareness. Stressing the recent problematization of national cinema, on the contrary, Chris Berry argues for “recasting national cinema as a multiplicity of projects, authored by different individuals, groups and institutions with various purposes” (2000: 161). In regard to Taiwan, this recasting means that TNC is not simply the same as all cinema produced within Taiwanese territories or by Taiwanese people. The concept, of which the term national cinema is multiple, allows TNC to be defined not according to a fixed geographical territory, but rather according to shared culture spread beyond borders.

**Border Crossing**

TNC played an important role in the imagination and representation of border-crossing and national identity. In her book, *Accented Cinema*, Hamid Naficy suggests, “border consciousness emerges from being situated at the border, where multiple determinants of race, class, gender, and membership in divergent, even antagonistic, historical and national identities intersect” (Naficy 2001: 31). Since border consciousness is
cross-cultural and intercultural, border filmmaking must be conceived as a mode of 
operation rather than as a definition. What makes border filmmaking an accented 
cinema with a “transnational” appeal is its emphasis upon the multiplicity of languages 
within any single language (Ibid.: 7); by choosing a strategy of representation rather 
than translation, border filmmakers ultimately undermine the distinction between local 
and global culture. Taiwanese culture in particular is essentially heterogeneous, a 
culture that articulates borders between widely disparate translations. The 
contemporary culture of Taiwan emerges from what can be considered a multilayered 
semiotic matrix: Chinese cuisine, McDonald’s, Japanese architecture and American 
pop culture. The heterogeneous cultures of Taiwan exist in the spaces that emerge 
between the desire for memories of Japanese colonial occupation, the Chinese Civil 
War, and the Cold War culture of the United States. As a result, much of TNC is a 
cinema of borders: cultural borders between Taiwan/Mainland China, Taiwan/America 
and Taipei/Japan. Border filmmaking, in a Taiwanese context, presents the cultures of 
China, Japan and the United States in their interaction with Taiwanese culture. 

While a variety of definitions of the term border crossing has been proposed, this 
thesis will mainly subscribe to the notion put forward by Avtar Brah in Cartographies
of Diaspora: Contesting Identities, which regards borders as a means for contesting identities:

Borders: arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the Other is the fear of the self; places where claims to ownership—clams to ‘mine’, ‘yours’ and ‘theirs’—are staked out, contested, defended, and fought over (Brah 1996: 198).

Employing this definition of border, the key categorizations can be divided into two main features: dividing lines and territories. By examining the Other in terms of postcolonial theory, Sara Ahmed also argues that the concept of border crossing has emerged “within the specific histories of individuals and groups in response to the new politics of the border, exposing the ways in which the geopolitical landscape impacts unequally on the movement and flow of people, objects, and images” (2000: 115).

Hence the term “border” in this thesis embodies a notion of a boundary line between a self and an Other, or one country and another.

The transnational is, by definition, a form of border crossing. One of the most significant current discussions in film studies is the concept of transnational Chinese
cinema, which has seen a number of scholars (Berry and Farquhar 2006; Marchetti 2006; Xu 2007; Higbee and Lim 2010) seeking to focus on the implications of border crossing as a result of global forces that link peoples or institutions across nations. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden point out how transnational cinema challenges the concept of national cinema:

Transnational cinema arises in the interstices between the local and the global. Because of the intimacy and communal dynamic in which films are usually experienced, cinema has a singular capacity to foster bonds of recognition between different groups […] These bonds of recognition, however, must not be confused with the false unity imposed by discourses that lump all sites of local identity together in opposition to some nebulously deindividualizing global force (2006: 4).

As they argue, the notion of transitional cinema mainly focuses on “in-between spaces of culture” (Ibid.: 4) rather than the ideology of cultural purity.

In academic film studies, transnational cinema has emerged as an important field for the exploration of variety of power relations between the local and the global. As a result of the globalization of the production, marketing, and consumption of Chinese film, the idea of transnational Chinese cinemas has also gained currency in scholarship (Lu 1997). Moreover, there is also another concept of Chinese-language cinema (Lu
and Yeh 2005) to describe Chinese-language films that are not only made and released in the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong, but also outside the so-called “greater China” such as Singapore and the Chinese diaspora. More recently, Gary G. Xu has coined the word “Sinascape” (2007) to reflect on the intersection between Chinese cinemas and global cultural production, while Shu-mei Shih (2007) has applied the term “Sinophone” to refer to cultural and cinematic representations of ethnic Chinese people around the globe. In all the above discussions, TNC is included as part of a larger, pan-Chinese conception of transnational cinemas.

As used in this thesis, I will take dividing lines and territories to refer to geo-political and cultural boundaries and consider them as actual and geographical—literally, a line of control and division. Instead of the approach of national cinema, it could be argued that a geographical and cultural approach is more appropriate for the examination of this complex concept, rather than putting the emphasis on the notion of a film industry within a single nation-state. As Chris Berry notes, “if Taiwan New Cinema’s clear focus on everyday life on the island constitutes a national vision, this is a very different concept from the singular and integrated national culture and identity of the classic model of modern nation-state” (2010:
This thesis thus maintains critical perspective by proposing TNC crosses borders in histories, genres and cultures in a global context.

TNC plays a significant role in World cinema, demanding to be studied for its historical representations, for the creation of alternative genres and for the construction and deconstruction of postcolonial identity. In the context of the dynamic of Mainland Chinese-Japanese-American triangular relations in postwar Taiwan, as Hong argues, “the national must thus be viewed as a contested site in order to fully appreciate its dynamic tension with the transnational” (2011: 5). To study the composition of intercultural TNC, I argue, we must first examine how TNC has been shaped in terms of historiography, popularity and postcoloniality. An impressive accomplishment of a number of Taiwan filmmakers have contributed to a cultural hybridity of a historically specific Taiwan in the global circulation of cinema. To study the composition of intercultural TNC, I argue, we must first examine how TNC has been shaped in terms of historiography, popularity and postcoloniality.

**Keywords**

The theme in this thesis will be examined from at least three angles: historiography,
popularity and postcoloniality. The thesis is divided into three parts with corresponding methodologies. This thesis argues that TNC can only be satisfactorily understood using analytical approaches quite different from those that have typically been applied to national cinemas. National cinema has been conceptualized in overly homogenous terms with difference constructed primarily through formal categories such as authorship and genre. Nevertheless, cultural difference is conventionally located on the boundaries of the national cinema by proposing that difference exists primarily between national cinemas while simultaneously suppressing or erasing internal cultural heterogeneity. Therefore, an examination of TNC has to pay attention to the complex cultural differences or colonial collective memory that lie so obviously at the heart of the country.

_Historiography_

“Historiography” will mainly employ theories of history and ethnicity in the analysis of the films discussed. In this thesis, first and foremost, I shall explore how Taiwan’s historiography and identities are represented in TNC, from two dimensions. First, the historical context of the films and their subject matter of the martial law. On May 19,
1949, the Governor of Taiwan and the Ministry of National Defense, Chen Cheng, announced the imposition of martial law in Taiwan, resulting in the arrest of thousands of citizens by the Nationalist army and secret policemen. Until the order was lifted on July 15, 1987, Taiwan was under martial law for more than 38 years. I shall examine the background of the martial law and its significance to Taiwan’s modern history, as well as the socio-political environment in the 1980s, which prompted the making of films that confronted the order. Second, textual analysis demonstrates how languages, narrative structure, and cinematic style are adopted in these films to recreate Taiwan’s collective but hidden memory. For Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang and Chang Tso-Chi, directors of TNC, who were born in the postwar period and reached adulthood under a period of socio-political liberalization, the restoration and reexamination of Taiwan’s “forgotten” historical experience became a critical theme (Lu 1997: 13). This will further illuminate why and how these films have achieved an iconic status in articulating Taiwan’s contested national identities and reflecting the development of culture and democratization on the island.

The key question is not whether film can portray historical events “accurately” or “authentically”; rather, film can be seen as offering ways of thinking about the past and
thus becomes one historical discourse among many. As Robert A. Rosenstone asserts, filmmakers can be regarded as historians whose works must be different from those that govern written history (2006: 8). The study of history on film not only draws attention to reconstruction of social relationships in and representation of certain historical events (Sorlin 1980) but also connects cinematic uses of the past with the desire to either escape from or engage with the present (Landy 1996). Scholarship on historiography will provide a foundation for understanding definitions of history (and its writing), and scholarship on multiculturalism will look at the dynamics of interaction between different ethnic groups sharing a social and political space.

Specifically, a form of historiographical writing will deal with issues of trauma, mythmaking and the place of the minority. Moreover, I will argue that it is the focus on a landscape of ethnic diversity in everyday life that distinguishes this exilic filmmaking from a form of historiographical writing that emphasizes the monumental and grand narratives. Rather, by privileging an autobiographical perspective and ordinary people in everyday life, these films demonstrate how TNC has attempted to inscribe a different kind of historiography.
**Popularity**

TNC has drawn inspiration the styles and aesthetics of a great variety of cultural forms that have followed one upon another in Taiwan over the centuries, forming a vast colonial legacy. In this respect, it also proves interesting to examine domestic melodrama, seeking out the elements of continuity between the narrative structure of popular genre and those intercultural narrations. The popularity of melodramatic narrative illustrated a growing sense of national community, as audience watched it was the “Taiwanese” thing to do. I will examine the contribution of popular culture and intercultural experiences in the narratives of TNC and postulate that these narratives in turn become popular memory of their own. I argue that due to its geographic location and historical experience, Taiwan is a society crossed by lines of voluntary elite-driven reforms and faced with foreign cultures that are expressed politically, socially and culturally. Consequently, any understanding of TNC must acknowledge its pluralist nature and not attempt to suppress those cultural forces that militate against particular versions of the nation.

In the pre-new wave era, the dominant postwar Taiwan film industry was exclusively government-financed and controlled, used by Chiang Kai-shek’s regime as
a propaganda vehicle or commercial diversion, churning out either patriotic films and
Healthy Realist films, or melodramatic romance, kung-fu, action, martial arts,
comedies and films of other popular genre. In terms of genre, as June Yip points out, TNC is “a serious and earnest dedication to cinema as a mode of cultural expression that is as significant and worthy of critical attention as is an established ‘art’ such as literature or painting” (2004: 57). TNC is “new” in that it carries out a rebellion against previous commercial cinema and attempts to produce an alternative cinematic language to explore the subaltern realities and problems of modernity. While the gap between urban and rural, familial relationships and values, and individual and collective memory are still common themes, and melodrama, comedies and romance are still common genres, the attitude toward those issues and their representation are obviously different from previous popular cinema. However, as Guo-Juin Hong argues, TNC “was not an organized movement with clear-cut objectives,” but “was at once an experiment in storytelling and an exploration of realistic subject mater” (2011: 114). Even though the new wave directors share an outlook towards cinema that separates them from many of their predecessors in the established film industry, it would be inaccurate to say that there is no aesthetic coherence between two generations.
The past decade has seen the rapid development and diffusion of popular genres in Taiwan cinema, such as Wei Te-Sheng’s *Cope No. 7/Haijiao qihao* (2008). In terms of genre, *Cope No. 7* centres mainly on melodrama and romance, and it became the second highest grossing film in the island’s history (behind James Cameron’s *Titanic*). Thus, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the impact of popular genres in TNC, such as political satire and melodrama. By paying particular attention to a few major films, I would contend that these filmmakers have gone beyond social realism and ventured into the realm of satire, and popular culture. TNC is not only probing Taiwanese society and history, but also its representation is treated more and more often with popular culture and narrative.

*Postcoloniality*

“Postcoloniality” will employ theories from postcolonial and transnational studies in the analysis of the films. On the road to cultural synthesis, TNC has faced its legacy of colonialism, as it finds itself today in a postcolonial anxiety precisely because of that past. Postcoloniality, as Luisa Rivi comments on European transnational cinema, “should be construed as both the historical marker of the end of colonialism and a
methodology aimed at deconstructing the universalizing Eurocentric discourse of
colonialism by tracing the effects and consequences of colonization and denouncing
the persistence of colonial practices—this time repositioned on different economic and
cultural grounds, but still yielding a neocolonial stance” (2007: 8). In attempting to
revise the understanding of the colonial past, TNC reveals a diverse landscape in film
genres, subject matter, and cinematic style. Scholarship on postcolonial studies will
provide a foundation for understanding how histories of colonialism continue to shape
identity formation in Taiwan, and scholarship on transnationalism will account for the
increasing migration of peoples and cultures across national borders. Therefore, the
many approaches within postcolonial, diasporic and transnational studies will be
adopted in my analysis of the films.

Over the past centuries, Taiwan had been occupied by the Dutch and the Japanese,
and was under Nationalist rule after the end of the Second World War. Even though it
shares similar problems of postcoloniality, Taiwan does not feature much in
postcolonial theory and discourse. In his critical assessment, *Becoming Japanese*, Leo
Ching explains why Taiwan, in particular, in relation to its occupation by Japan from
1895 to 1945, has always been written out of mainstream Western postcolonial
discourse. According to Ching,

The United States was clearly the heir to an earlier European imperialism, as illustrated in its inheritance of the legacies of these dying empires that continued to trouble international affairs: Korea and Vietnam in Asia, Israel in the Middle East, South Africa and Rhodesia in Africa, not to mention Latin America. […] In this new world order that came into being under the dyadic structure of the Cold War and the patronage of the United States, Japan was to achieve unprecedented economic prosperity and continues to circumvent and disavow the colonial question (2001: 41).

In his questioning of the limits of Western knowledge, Ching argues that the study of the Japanese colonial discourse is still absent in Euro-American academia, and has been taken up mainly by Area Studies or Asian and East Asian studies. In spite of the fact that Taiwan filmmakers’ masterpieces “have contributed to an ironic erasure of a historical specific Taiwan in the global circulation of cinema” in the last two decades (Hong 2011: 5), the colonial and postcolonial sentiments in East Asia have led Western scholars to ignore and marginalize Taiwanese postcolonial history.

TNC engages with the legacy of colonization at its site of origin. It specifically addresses travellers, working class and diasporic communities who move in the opposite direction, from the peripheries to the metropolis, towards an encounter that
the ex-colonizer fears and feels as a reversed invasion. Several more recent Taiwan
films by Hou Hsiao-hsien and Wu Nien-jen, as Ping-hui Liao argues, “portray in vivid
detail the ambivalent nature of Taiwanese postcoloniality” (2007: xv). Wu’s film, such
as *A Borrowed Life/Dou-san* (1994) particularly deals with the effects of Japanese
colonialism, as well as that particular form of colonization represented by the
Nationalist regime, to which Taiwan had been subjected until 2000\(^4\). In *A Borrowed
Life*, Wu Nien-jen consciously represents the older generation Taiwanese as ‘enslaved’
by the Japanese ex-master’s language, and his autobiographical film attempts to
examine the process of this problematic representation in terms of a particular type of
colonial nostalgia: a nostalgia for the period of Japanese colonial rule as a consequence
of frustrations over the Nationalist rule. In other words, for older generation Taiwanese,
colonial nostalgia is reanimated to counter the historical trauma of Nationalist rule.

Transnational films such as Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon/Wohu
canglong* (2000), which is classified as a Taiwan/U.S./Hong Kong/China
co-production, “effectively illustrate that with the increasing volume of international
exchange, global migration and transnational collaboration it is becoming ever more

\(^4\) In 2000, after half a century of Nationalist (KMT) rule, the first democratic change of ruling parties in
Taiwan occurred with the president election of Chen Shui-bian and his Taiwan-centric Democratic
Progressive Party (DPP), making a significant step towards Taiwanization.
difficult to trance cultural products to a single point of origin” (Yip 2004: 243). It is no coincidence that, with funding increasingly coming from foreign sources, Taiwanese directors have become imminently more aware of Taiwan’s current status in the international arena, and therefore, characters in Edward Yang’s *Yi Yi* (2000) and Hou’s *Café Lumière/Kōhī Jikō* (2003), for instance, have moments of transcendence and begin to understand what it means to be Taiwanese while visiting foreign countries. While every character in *Café Lumière* is Japanese, the voice is Hou’s himself, expressing his gratitude for and fascination with the Japanese film culture that has informed his aesthetics and has helped shape his cinematic achievement. I will explore those aspects of globalization and displacement that are connected with postcoloniality in East Asian cinemas.

**Outline of Chapters**

The first section in this thesis focuses on the representation of Chinese ethnic groups in films since the movement of TNC in which local voices from below the contesting dominant ideology surfaced (Chapters 1-2). The second section proposes that the production of TNC includes a variety of representations of American neocolonialism,
particularly with regards to the relationship between realism and melodrama (Chapter 3-4). The third section deals with films made in the global age that consist of border-crossing narratives, exploring issues of hybridity and mimicry that tend to focus on the representation of everyday life against colonial memory and American imperialism (Chapter 5-6).

In Part one, I will discuss the aesthetics of exilic filmmaking in three TNC films. Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985), Chang Tso-chi’s *The Best of Times/Meili shiguang* (2001) and Edward Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day/Gulingjie shaonian sharen shijian* (1991) are all set in Taiwan and deal with relationships between different Chinese ethnic groups in Taiwan. For these filmmakers, their dominant aesthetics advocated realism and represented a desire to portray Taiwanese history through the lens of the everyday. This generation of directors, all born in or after 1947, inclined towards the treatment of the issue of the generation gap between the elders who fled mainland China and their descendants who are ignorant of their history and who struggle to find an identity in an island which has been undergoing dramatic changes. They not only used film as a way of examining contemporary ethnic diversity and conflict, but also focused on aspects of everyday life. Born in the same
year in 1947, both Hou and Yang relocated to Taiwan at the age of two and have no memory of Mainland China. Nevertheless, their childhoods provided very different living experiences from each other. Hou grew up in a local village in southern Taiwan and acquired more Taiwanese traits, such as the ability to speak the dominant Taiwanese dialect (Hoklo) fluently. Meanwhile, Edward Yang grew up in a 

*waishengren* community in Taipei. Even though they share a background as first generation *waishengren*, their cinematic representation of the exilic experience is drastically different. Chang Tso-Chi, on the other hand, was born in Jiayi, southern Taiwan, in 1961, and is a second-generation *waishengren* filmmaker whose parents are from Guangdong. His films tend to portray, more so than the films by Hou and Yang, the interaction between young people from different ethnic groups.

Chapter 1, *Everyday Exile*, considers two films, *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *The Best of Times*, which explore the landscape of ethnic diversity. Stylistically, both films embody a form of neo-realism in TNC. I will particularly underline the ways in which both films are frequently organized by a series of ordinary events that are developed into everyday narrative patterns. Though Hou belongs to the first generation of TNC and Chang can be considered to be from the second, this chapter will argue
that their works similarly interrogate the problematic of everyday life and explore the
tension among ethnic groups in postwar Taiwan.

Chapter 2, *Traumatic Body*, examines the film *A Brighter Summer day* as a
representation of historical trauma in Taiwan. The film touches upon the political taboo
of the “white terror” period (1949-1987), thus opening up public discussion of the
topic in Taiwan. This chapter examines how the film portrays the period, which will
contribute to our understanding of Yang’s realist aesthetics in representing individuals
captured in a violent historical incident. This chapter argues that, by drawing attention to
the representation of collective trauma, Yang’s film creates a new cinematic form of
“imagined community” among different ethnic groups.

Part two will argue that Taiwanese-characterized melodrama such as *The Taste of
Apples/Pingguo de ziwei* (dir. Wan Jen, 1983), *Buddha Bless
American/Taipingtianguo* (dir. Wu Nien-jen, 1996) and *Pushing Hands/Tuishou* (dir.
Ang Lee, 1991), while serving as a reflection on the tension between East and West
displayed in the domestic domain, addresses the dynamics of culture. In this section,
moreover, the concept of local domestic genre is examined and its relationship to Cold
War discourse is interrogated. It proposes that the production of TNC includes a
variety of representations of American neocolonialism, shifting from a popular genre aimed at defining characteristics of mainstream film production towards a more critical and local perspective. In other words, the section attempts to re-evaluate popular genre by mapping the spaces culturally occupied by new wave film texts produced to challenge, in various ways, the dominant realist aesthetics. I will also discuss TNC’s style in more detail in this part, and examine a language and cultural awareness of American neocolonialism in TNC as a major theme. Finally, this part will analyze the ways in which these feature films mobilise particular codes that have come to connote an ambiguous past metonymically remembered in the present.

Chapter 3, Political Satire, discusses two films set during the Cold War period when Taiwan was under the protection of the United States, namely The Taste of Apple and Buddha Bless America. Both films show a cultural resistance emanating from native consciousness against the legacy of American imperialism in Taiwan. Rethinking neocolonialism in Taiwan, this chapter would argue that these two filmmakers not only offer a critical angle on neocolonial awareness, but also engage with issues of linguistic diversity, racial hierarchy, and cultural translation. This chapter further establishes the satirical links between both films through context and
sequence analysis. More significantly, by using satire as a mode of comedy, both films open a window to the political struggle in Cold War Taiwan, and lead the critique of cultural neocolonialism in Taiwan.

Chapter 4, *Between Family Melodrama and Accented Cinema*, looks at *Pushing Hands*, which offers a sensitive portrait of a traditional Chinese father negotiating diasporic identity when faced with challenges in an English-speaking world. This chapter demonstrates that the Chinese diaspora is located in a transcultural context. By paying attention to fluidity and diversity of cultural identity among the Chinese diaspora, I will argue that this melodrama shows not only transnational tensions and conflicts derived from misunderstandings and cultural stereotypes, but also the ambiguities of cultural identities.

Part 3 is concerned with the way in which postcolonial discourse is inscribed in TNC. The films selected for analysis in this section, including *A Borrowed Life/Duo sang* (dir. Wu Nien-jen, 1994), *Yi Yi* (dir. Edward Yang 2000) and *Café Lumière* (dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien 2003), are not only set in Taiwan but also in Japan and the United States, and deal with the postcolonial relationships between Taiwan and other countries which had had a colonial or imperial relation with Taiwan. Postcolonial discourse is a
contemporary sensibility, which in general terms,foregrounds elements of difference, hybridity and pluralism. It involves a deconstruction of ‘grand narratives’ of historiography, modernization, and celebration of difference and ‘small’ narratives. The selected films in this part, more significantly, involve a process of reassembling and remembering the colonial past. Specifically, the chapters will deal with issues of colonial nostalgia, diaspora politics and mimicry.

Chapter 5, *Postcolonial Nostalgia*, poses a challenge to official historical discourse by evoking colonial nostalgia through narratives of individual lives. *A Borrowed Life* does not express a collective movement with a counter-hegemonic purpose; rather, longing for the colonial past is reflected through an autobiographical voice. This chapter aims to develop an understanding of constructed nostalgia by examining how colonial discourse has been articulated in TNC and how filmmakers such as Wu Nien-jen deal with power dynamics between nostalgia and memory.

Chapter 6, *Postcolonial Imaginary and Transnational Connections*, presents a reading of *Café Lumière* and *Yi Yi* that shows how both works articulate a transnational East Asian cinematic cityscape. In this chapter, I am calling into focus the mapping of East Asia as marked internally by the discourse of its regional construction. This
chapter addresses the impact of globalization on contemporary Taiwan cinema,
examining how both filmmakers imagine their postcolonial society as interconnected
with, mutually dependent on, or put under pressure by the global world system.
Chapter One

Taiwan New Cinema

This chapter highlights the auteur-driven TNC movement since the early 1980s, while captured the film world’s attention with its distinctive use of autobiographical content, long-take aesthetics and elliptical narratives. “Taiwan New Cinema” is the term usually applied to a loose grouping of films that were made in Taiwan between 1982 and 1987. In 1982, the film In Our Time began what would be known rejuvenation of Taiwan Cinema: the new wave. After 1985, when many TNC films failed at the box office, criticism against TNC started to appear in newspapers. Facing the unfriendly film critics and a conservative censorship, the TNC filmmakers finally issued the Taiwan Cinema Manifesto/taiwan dianyingxuanyan in 1987, criticizing the government and the mainstream media, and call for the space outside the commercial cinema for ‘another cinema’ (Chiao 1998: 111-118). This manifesto caused opposites between the government and TNC filmmakers, and ironically led to the disunions of the Taiwan film industry. Some considered the issuing of the manifesto the official end of TNC (Mi and Liang 1991: 3). In the 1990s, however, the new wave gradually gave
way to what could be informally called the Second New Wave, which are slightly less
historical and more amenable to the populace, although just as committed to portraying
the Taiwanese material, economic and social problems.

This thesis focuses mainly on the aesthetic movement of TNC, including the first
and the second generation. Although grouped together, these films resist clear
delineation and are in fact marked by their stylistic and thematic diversity. Nonetheless,
Chiao Hsiung-ping (1990: 9-10) has identified three common elements that unite them.
Firstly, all the directors were born after the Second World War, and grew up under the
KMT regime. Secondly, due to funding criteria and opportunities, TNC was based on
an artisanal mode of production, which facilitated close collaborations and a high
degree of localization. And thirdly, TNC shared a concern with contemporary Taiwan
reality on the one hand and a search for cultural identity on the other.

Internationally, the first and second generation of TNC directors was heralded as
the most promising development in Taiwan Cinema since Taiwanese localization, and
a handful of its directors—especially Hou Hsiao-hsien (1947-), Edward Yang
(1947-2007), Ang Lee (1954), Tsai Ming-liang (1957)—have won international
reputations. Aware of the rapid socioeconomic transformation changing Taiwan’s
political, cultural and social landscape in the 1980s, as Yingjin Zhang suggests, Taiwan Cinema “took a historical turn, producing films that explored the cultural roots of Taiwan and re-examined the experiences of growing up in a rapidly modernizing society” (2004: 240). Zhang’s argument tended to suggest that this new phase in the history of Taiwan cinema had been brought into being solely through the endeavours of a small number of talented and dedicated young directors. Therefore, many critics focused on the generation of the new directors, discussing them as young talent, “they told their stories without melodramatic techniques” (Yip 2004: 54), and examined the films almost exclusively in terms of their director’s personal experiences. Thus, in Taiwan the TNC was initially discussed predominantly as an “auteur cinema”.

As subsequent studies have shown, however, an auteur’s approach gives only a partial understanding of how and why particular cinema movements come into being and flourish at particular times. The work of, for instance, Wan Jen (1950-), Wu Nien-Jen (1952-), Chang Tso-chi (1961) explores how a whole range of historical, cultural, social, political, economic and institutional factors also helped shape the Taiwan Cinema. And a number of these studies also contextualize some of the new films within wider historical, cultural and political transitions. Drawing on this
literature, this chapter will explore some of the more important factors that helped bring about the birth of and shape a new national cinema in Taiwan, discuss the significance of its films and outline the reasons for the cinema’s demise.

The Concept of Taiwanese New Cinema

As we trace the history of Taiwan cinema, it is clear that Taiwanese collective identity has dramatically been transformed three times within one century, from fifty years of colonization by the Japanese (1895-1945), the rule of the Kuomintang (KMT, or Nationalist) regime till the end of the martial law (1949-1987), and finally, the subsequent period of democratization. Hence Guo-Juin Hong argues: “the embedded histories of colonial and postcolonial Taiwan have informed post-1945 cinematic genres and styles, and those dispersed histories have made up the matrix of the formation of what ‘nation’ has meant at different times for Taiwan” (1998: 47). In the 1970s, for instance, the government-funded propaganda films attempted to promote Chinese national identity. However, new cinema’s filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Wan Jen have demonstrated how films can represent different cultural groups whilst problematizing the notion of difference. In terms of
political and historical approaches, we should bear in mind that Taiwan cinema before the 1980s was often engaged with the function of nation building.

The films that I discuss in this thesis reflect the historical and social imaginative of Taiwan since the early 1980s, as well as the complex nature of Taiwan cinema more generally. The term “Taiwan New Cinema” is an imperfect concept in the sense that it can be rich, misunderstanding, and even exclusionary. Chiao Hsiung-ping, in a 1990 article titled “The Emergence of the New Cinema of Taiwan” argues that the term ‘new cinema’ refers to a group of filmmakers in the context of cinema production patterns. She writes: “It refers to a group of filmmakers in their thirties and forties who began making films different from those of their predecessors, films quite unlike contemporary Taiwanese mainstream cinema in both form and content” (Chiao 1990: 9). Chiao argues that we should pay more attention to the cinematic language of new cinema because the term ‘new cinema’ is little more than a marketing term “gain attention among Taiwanese critics and young audience in the early 1980s” (9). As Chiao suggests, categorical terms such as ‘new cinema’ and ‘second wave’ are vague and can be misleading. However, these terms do serve a significant purpose, in that they can be used to clarify various movements and activities chronologically. As
mention before, some scholars suggest that the movement of TNC took place between 1982 and 1987. Nevertheless, we should pay more attention on the legacy of TNC in the 1990s and even for the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Although the TNC directors were undoubtedly highly extraordinary, there were a number of historically specific factors, which set up some essential pre-conditions for the emergence of the new cinema. Of particular importance was the way in which the CMPC handled the fledgling Taiwan new wave in the years immediately since the end of the 1970. On the one hand, many of these fledgling directors, such as Edward Yang, Wan Jen, Ke Yizhcheng, and Zeng Zhuangxiang, boasted U.S. film training (Davis 2003: 719). On the other hand, young directors already in the local film industry, such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Chen Kun-hou, and Wang Tong were also invited to work with CMPC in order to produce “fresh, younger entertainment” (Yeh and Davis 2005: 58).

Most of young directors are around the same age, and were born after World War II. The Allied victory in the Pacific in 1945, ended fifty years of colonial rule under Japan and Taiwan’s sovereignty was taken over by the Chiang Kai-Shek’s Chinese nationalist Kuomintang party (KMT). When the Chinese Civil War ended in 1949, KMT had lost control of Mainland China to the Communist. This post-colonial era of
the KMT’s military dictatorship, and its four decades of martial law (1949-1987) were characterized by social unrest and political turmoil. Young directors had experience almost the same social changes and economic developments through the 1960s to the 1970s, and these highly relevant to the issues that the TNC dealt with in the 1980s.

Under the military dictatorship of the KMT regime, the young directors grew up in an unstable political situation, with anti-communist ideology imposed upon them through education.

Generally speaking, TNC refers to the series of Taiwan contemporary films produced in the midst of innovation in the local film circulation since the early 1980s. In the end of the 1970s, as John Lent points out, Taiwanese government regulations “remained stifling, production plummeted, overseas markets caved in and thematic and stylistic aspects of film were monotonously imitative” (Lent 1990: 62).

This extraordinary movement was mustered by a young generation of Taiwanese filmmakers and directors, and what was “new” about these films and filmmakers was that they usually conducted ordinary life and or social phenomena, replacing the past focus on filmmaking for commercial interests with these new concerns. Since 1982, because many young filmmakers, director and scriptwriters starts to engage in the
writing of scripts and the production of film, and also because the young generation of
directors use literary methods to create the form and language of their films,
consequently, Taiwan cinema began to evince a style drastically different from that
seen in the past.

Whilst considering the origin of a movement, we should not ignore its historical
background and discourse. According to Douglas Kellner, TNC “carries out a rebellion
against previous genre cinema (its own and Hollywood) and attempts to produce a
socially critical and aesthetically innovative cycle of films appropriate to explore
contemporary Taiwan society” (1998: 101). In other words, TNC should be considered
in relation to the “old” or “traditional” Taiwan cinema. As Hong comments, “The
notion of ‘newness’—implying a severance from the past and promising hope—is
extremely tempting and, for that reason, in great need of historicizing” (2011: 185).
TNC thus indicated that this movement was a collective action with a counter
hegemonic purpose. As these films cross various borders from the historical to the
geographical and the cultural, it is clear that the Taiwan new wave is characterized by
cross-cultural practice. The movement has produced an impressive succession of films
comprising a distinctive national cinema, one increasingly visible in the global arena.
To return to the context of TNC, the relationship between national cinema and national identity is worth exploring the cultural diversity and transnational issues displayed in films. Before the 1980s, Taiwan cinema suffered from political agendas such as a China-centered ideology, anti-communism and Chinese cultural traditionalism. In order to respond to the legitimacy of state power, CMPC produced propaganda films, which played a role in fostering Chinese national identity in Taiwanese people. Moreover, other genre films such as historical epics and costume drama (including wuxia) as well as romantic films of Qiong Yao, arguably also serve similar ideological function. However, since the earlier 1980s, due to a dramatic decline of the local and overseas box-office for Taiwan films, CMPC began to employ a new generation of filmmakers to make low budget films based on their original ideas in order to save the business. Filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Ko Yi-cheng and Chang Yi produced an excellent series of low budget films that explore social tensions and problems in compelling ways, carrying out a rebellion against previous genre cinema.

5 On October 25, 1971, the Republic of China (Taiwan) was ‘expelled from the United Nations. The following year, Japan served diplomatic relations with Taipei. As a result, two of the state-controlled studios, CMPC and CMPS (China Motion Picture Studio) were responsible for making patriotic films (Liao 2002: 431).
New Wave (1982-1987)

It is now more than thirty years since the TNC movement was launched. Recognized for its distinctive cinematic style, it was partly a reaction against the popular Hong Kong products that dominated the Taiwanese box office since 1970s (Wu 2006: 364). By the early 1980s, the Taiwanese film industry was under serious challenges, such as the entry of Hong Kong films, well known for their entertainment quality, into the Taiwanese market. In order to compete with Hong Kong films, a state-fund studio, the Central Motion Picture Company (hereafter CMPC) began an initiative to support several fresh, young directors. In Our Time/Guang yin de gushi, release in 1982 and co-directed by four young filmmakers (namely Edward Yang, Tao Te-Chen, Ko I-Chen and Chang Yi), marked the beginning of the TNC movement.

TNC was recognizable for its distinctive film style that operated as a reaction against the popular Hong Kong product that dominated Taiwan cinemas at the time. Beginning in the late 1970s, the film industry in Hong Kong peaked and dramatically gained immense popularity in Taiwan, becoming the mainstay of the film market. As Chiao notes, Hong Kong cinema since the 1970s “has remained a commercially successful genre in Taiwan” (Chiao 1993: 9). For instance, the Kungfu comedies of
Jackie Chan have always been very popular and seemed closer to Taiwan’s young audience. Seeking new ways to compete against the Hong Kong films, CMPC hired four young directors and made In Our Times, which is composed of four district episodes, in 1982. According to Zhan Hongzhi, in terms of its completely new format and the revolutionary low-budget production process, In Our Time is indeed worthy of the title of the first Taiwan New Cinema (1988: 25-39). Release in August of 1982, the film is a review of social change in Taiwan, which was going through vigorous industrialization and cultural evolution. Some of the most important films were The Sandwich Man (1983), The Boys from Fenkuei (1983), That Day, on The Beach (1983), and Taipei Story (1985). These films concentrated on Taiwan’s history and sense of identity at a time when martial law was being lifted and laws against the freedom of expression were being relaxed. It is considered the starting point of the Taiwan New Cinema Movement. The movement, as James Udden points out, “marked the key transition from cinema as a largely commercial enterprise to more of a cultural endeavor, one that would be a beacon of dramatic changes in Taiwanese society as a whole” (Udden 2007: 152).

TNC begins with In Our Time (1982), followed by The Sandwich Man/Er zi de da
wan ou (1983), an adaptation of three short novels from the early 60s by the popular
writer Huang Chun-ming co-directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Zeng Zhuang-xiang, and
Wan Jen. These films sought to tell stories about aspects of everyday life either in
urban or rural Taiwan, and examined many of the important issues facing Taiwan
society at the time, such as national identity, urbanization, the struggle against
colonialism, and conflict with political authority. As Douglas Kellner notes, *The
Sandwich Man* “deal with how Taiwan society has adapted itself to a modern capitalist,
world economic system” (1998: 105). These filmmakers thus showed a concern for
border crossing narrative and local history.

The TNC was inaugurated in the early 1980s when the Taiwan film industry lost
its valuable overseas market in South Asia and faced the invasions of Hong Kong and
Hollywood films in the late 1970s. *In Our Time* embodies a natural, realistic style and
literary manifestation as its major features, and preliminarily demonstrated the
differences between the new and old schools of film production. A year later, the film
*Sandwich Man*, another CMPC omnibus film consisting of three episodes adapted by
Wu Nien-chen from Huang Chunming’s nativist short stories and respectively with
enthusiasm. According to Zhang, both *In Our Time* and *The Sandwich Man* “depart
from the heroic and melodramatic narratives characteristic of their predecessors and represent two focal areas of TNC (Zhang 2004: 244). In other words, these directors of new cinema abandoned overly simplified, dramatic or sentimental narrative, striving instead for an experience of cultural anxiety, an experience which held more closely to the everyday life.

TNC directors belong to the post-war generation, who use film conclude their own experience of growing up in Taiwan, in a way also reflecting social change through their personal stories. For instance, In Our Time, in its four episodes, details the experiences of growing up in postwar Taiwan, which proved to be a significant theme in TNC. As Zhang points out, the experience of growing up is “a trope whereby new directors explored the changing Taiwan society, and this exploration was executed in several ways” (Zhang 2004: 244). Besides dealing with social awareness and consciousness issues of an economic and political turn, new directors differed from most predecessors in other ways. The exploration could also take the form of an autobiographic filmmaking of migration and settlement, as In A Time to Live, A Time to Die, in which Hou Hsiao-hsien presents his Hakka family in Taiwan. As John Lent points out, they “told their stories without melodramatic techniques; shunned the
famous stars, occasionally using non-actors to depict the common people in their stories and composed for the regularized screen, disdaining cinemascope” (1990: 69).

These directors made significant progress in developing a new cinematic language as an alternative to the dominant mode of the genre films or popular cinema in the 1970s.

Ming Chi also saw the need for change in the film industry. As Daw-Ming Lee notes, TNC directors’ emergence must be credited to the CMPC’s Manager Ming Chi, as well as to Hsiao Yeh and Wu Nian-Jan, writers who became scriptwriters and film developers at the studio (Lee 2013: 29). Hoping to re-energize Taiwanese local culture to the rest of the world, Ming hired new talents such as scriptwriter Wu Nien-jen (writer of Edward Yang’s That Day on the Beach), Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang.

To capture reality on film, new wave directors turn to personal experience, stories ranging from contemporary social issues to their own coming of age stories set in the past.

One of the most significant figures in the new wave was Hou Hsiao-hsien. Hou’s cinematic style is generally spare, using long takes with minimal camera movement and focus on dramatic events in personal history. His film, *A City of Sadness* (1989), is an epic set in the late 1940s during the White Terror. The film centers round a family
affected by the clash between the local Taiwanese and the newly arrived Chinese Nationalist government after World War II. *A City of Sadness* was groundbreaking as it was the first film to deal openly with events that had traumatic events on thousands of Taiwanese people. This film was the first Chinese-language film to win the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival.

Against the previous genre cinemas, the first and the second generation of Taiwan New Cinema has formulated a new aesthetic, which increasingly drifts away from traditional narratives, representing cinematic innovation in the Taiwanese film industry. Compared to the commercial success of Qiong Yao-style melodrama in the 1970s, the box office of TNC has not always done well in the domestic market. In fact, TNC once failed at the box office and became quiescent in 1985, particularly in Edward Yang’s *Taipei Story*. After 1985, many critical voices against Taiwan New Cinema started to appear in the press, and such critics gradually formed and alliance with the traditional film industry (Lee 2013: 30).

In addition to film style, TNC also provides a new cinematic language as an alternative to the dominant mode such as film genres. The use of long takes, as Chiao argues, coupled with “the conscious manipulation of composition in space and depth,
the mixture of drama with documentary footage of daily reality, and the dialectical
usage of sound and visuals rendered the films more interesting cinematically” (1990:
11). Her suggestion paints a general aesthetic landscape of Taiwan New Cinema,
which seems to resemble a new form against the dominant film culture. Moreover, the
narratives of TNC were highly drawn from personal and coming-of-age experience,
and also directly related to the experience of transition from tradition to modernity. In
short, through autobiographical perspective, TNC creates a diverse Taiwanese history.

In the particular application of motif in film, we can examine the following
aspects in order to better understand the concept of TNC:

1. Everyday Life

In contrast to the costume, propaganda, and kung-fu films of the earlier decades, TNC
is known for its realistic, and sympathetic portrayals of ordinary life. The directors of
TNC, as Chris Berry and Feii Lu suggests, “did not pursue the dramatic structures
based on conflict that characterized the established mainstream Taiwan cinema, but
abandoned the models of stage drama or entertainment to pursue observational realism
and modernist expressionism” (Berry and Lu 2005: 5). Its cinematic style is slow, the
camera is often static, and the narratives are uneventful in comparison with previous
genre films such as kung fu and *wuxia*. The films tried to meaningfully engage in the
issues of Taiwanese identity and Taiwanese political history. More importantly, TNC
ideologically questioned the nation-state formation under the KMT regime, and
released a repressed memory of Japanese colonization and Cold War experience. These
films thus focused on Taiwanese history, cultural diversity and sense of identity at a
time when martial law was being lifted and laws against the freedom of expression
were being relaxed.

2. Cultural Diversity

In addition to analyzing the meaning and significance of these films’ representation of
cultural diversity, I would argue that TNC has been seen as a key force in defining the
embattled and floating identity of its nation. Even though Wu I-Fen argues that “New
Cinema’s concerns with national history and national identity have led it to be
recognized by Taiwanese film critics as a national cinema” (Wu 2006: 367), the
complex dynamics between the national and the transnational underline many TNC
films that deal with cultural diversity and difference in postcolonial Taiwan. In other
words, new wave filmmakers addressed historical issues and cultural diversity in their works, leading to an era of “New Cinema.”

3. Multiple Languages

The various layers between language, sound and scene are used to enrich the time and space of TNC. TNC also recognized the diversity of the Taiwanese population, particularly linguistically. Hakka, Hoklo, and other local dialects were used in film, in addition to Mandarin Chinese. Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s A Time to Live, A Time to Die is one of a relatively developed example of this tendency. With this linguistic diversity, As Chris Berry notes, “Hou marks out Taiwan as a space crisscrossed by a specific and intricate network of nuanced and subtle differences” (Berry 1994: 57). It can be argued that these films marked the history of Taiwan cinema from government sponsored propaganda, promoting a nationalist Chinese government, to films concerned with discussing Taiwan, its social issues, shared history, and therefore its identity.

The Second New Wave (1988-2007)

The movement of TNC ends in 1987, when fifty-four filmmakers and critics signed the
Taiwan Cinema Manifesto in Taipei. Although critics foretold the death of the new wave in 1990s, the success of Taiwan filmmakers in the film festival circuit did not decrease. New directors such as Ang Lee, Tsai Ming-Liang, Wu Nien-Jen and Chang Tso-chi emerged as the movement’s second wave. The urban landscapes and realistic visual style of these new directors reflected the dramatic political, economic and social changes that Taiwan was experiencing in the 1990s. With the lifting of the martial law in 1987 and subsequent KMT government reshuffle, the political control over film production began to loosen. More importantly, the films discussed here self-consciously address the question of Taiwanese identity while overtly crossing geographic, cultural, linguistic and aesthetic borders.

In the 1990s, the second wave directors emerged from the influential period of the TNC movement. The second new wave films were instantly recognized by the international film festivals. In this sense, the movement of TNC could be argued as part of a film festival ‘global art cinema’ (Galt and Schnoover 2013: 4). These films by then functioned as political dissent to criticize many of contemporary social issues, creating cultural documents as well as establishing a reputable Taiwanese identity. During the period, the second new wave films generated many international awards.
and the new wave directors gradually matured as cinematic masters. For instance, Malaysian-born-Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang, director of *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992) and *Vive L’Amour* (1994), earned him comparisons to Rainer Werner Fassbinder, while urban stories and family melodramas, which portrayed isolation and loneliness in modern Taipei.

Following Hou and Yang’s footsteps, many younger directors emerged around this time and have achieved their great triumph with continued success on the stage of world cinema. Ang Lee, Tsai Ming-liang and Chang Tso-chi are the most internationally recognizable directors, producing transnational films that appeal to audience in both Asia and the West. Taiwan New Cinema has won many major awards in the international film festival circuit, for instance, a best film award at the Venice International Film Festival in 1994 (Tsai Ming-liang’s *Vivi L’Amour*) and a best director award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1993 (Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet*). This generation arrives in the wake of Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang, who achieved international recognition with their neo-realist explorations of Taiwanese identity.

*The Wedding Banquet* (1993), the first film made Ang Lee known in the
international film circle, won the Golden Bear Award at the 1993 Berlin Film Festival.

He has risen up the upper echelons of Hollywood where he resides as director with a reputation for producing quality films across a number of different genres. Even though he is famous for the likes of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), *The Hulk* (2003) and the next film tipped for Oscar success *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), his early films dealing with the difference between cultures and generations within Taiwanese families remain as some his best work to date. The three films that have become known as the ‘father knows best’ trilogy, *Pushing Hands* (1992), *The Wedding Banquet*, and *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* (1994) are perfect examples of the transnational cinema that has emerged, predominantly from Asia, in the 1990s.

A part from Hou, a number of world-renowned filmmakers represent Taiwan on the screen in the 1990s, ranging from the late Edward Yang to the more controversial Tsai Ming-liang. These directors are often regarded to be auteur, embraced by film festivals worldwide. Hou Hsiao-hsien takes history very seriously and has a tendency to portray Taiwan as a state of melancholia, as in his works like *A City of Sadness* (1989) and *The Puppetmaster* (1991). Edward Yang, on the other hand, is more
lighthearted and history to him is less a burden. He is fond of employing city dwellers to depict contemporary life and lifestyle of Taiwanese, prominently presented in *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) and *Yi Yi* (2000).

Tsai Ming-liang, is one of the most celebrated directors from the Second New Wave. Tsai is of Chinese ethnic background, but was born in Malaysia. He moved to Taipei in 1977 when he was twenty-year-old. His film *Vive L’Amour* (1994), won the Golden Lion at Venice in 1994, has little dialogue to reflect its theme of urban alienation. It follows three people, who through different events find themselves in the same apartment in Taipei. Chang Tzo-chi, another significant figure, belongs to the second generation of TNC. Born in Jiayi, Taiwan in 1961, his third film *Darkness and Light* was awarded three top honors at the 1999 Tokyo Film Festival, including Best Film. He has made seven feature films, including *The Best of Times* (2002), *Butterfly/hudie* (2007) and *When Love Comes/Dang ai lai de shihou* (2010). For his artistic achievement, in 2011 Chang became the third director, following Hou Hsiao-hsien and Wang Tong, to receive the National Award for Arts, one of the highest honor in Taiwan.

However, most of these award-winning films were the director’s self-reflection
and were not popular at the local box office. In the 1990s, the Taiwanese film industry was challenged by the Hollywood invasion with the loosening of the print quota system under the World Trade Organization’s pressure. Since 1994, Hollywood entertainment culture swept onto Taiwan screen. By the end of the 1990s, Hollywood films were taking in an estimated 93 to 95 percent of all box office revenues in Taiwan, while Chinese-language films had shriveled to a mere 2.5 percent (Curtin 2007: 86).

Taiwanese box office, therefore, according to Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, is now a sharp division between commercial cinema, completely dominated by Hollywood, and art cinema, represented by renowned New Cinema auteurs such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang and Tsai Ming-liang (Yeh 2006: 165).

**Conclusion**

Since the 1980s, a revamped local film industry in Taiwan has produced a number of international acclaimed films, making the beginning of the TNC and putting Taiwan in the cultural map of the world. TNC is proving itself capable of a tenacious pluralism that has, to a certain extent, broken through the frustrating limitations of the studio system. By the mid-1990s, however, the Taiwanese film industry has collapsed and the
number of Taiwanese films produced declined dramatically. For instance, by 1997, Taiwanese production had dropped to fewer than 20 films a year, and continued to decline.

In addition to the Taiwanese local film industry, the cost of producing films rose so dramatically during the 1990s that national funding and film subsidy initiatives alone were frequently inadequate. As a result filmmakers had to start turning to other countries to find co-funding or to apply to the new pen-Asian agencies to help meet the shortfall. In order to meet the criteria of such funders, however, film projects are often required to demonstrate a broader Asian appeal. Therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult to view the films funded in such a manner as part of a specifically national cinema. These changes also have been exacerbated since the late 1980s by the emergence of media conglomerates, the growth of cable and satellite broadcasting the advent of digital technologies.

Consequently, just as a set of historically specific circumstances and conditions had brought the Taiwan New Cinema into being, another set of historically specific circumstances meant that much of what made the cinema distinctive disappeared. Far from being solely the product of a small number of creative geniuses, the Taiwan New
Cinema has to be understood as a national and historically specific phenomenon. And in a sense, the reason it was able to establish itself decisively on the international film festival, especially in Italy, France and Germany, is equally historically specific. During the 1970s, the auteurist approach to cinema had gained enormous sway within the field of film studies on both sides between Asia and Europe. Since the Taiwan Cinema Manifesto criticizing the government’s policy and informing the cinema’s artisanal mode of production meat that the readily lent themselves to being discussed as the work of creative geniuses, the Taiwan New Cinema was valued as a ‘auteur cinema.’
Part One: Historiography
Chapter Two

Everyday Exile:

Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and

Chang Tso-Chi’s *The Best of Times*

Filming Ethnic Diversity

Following its inception in 1982, TNC gradually established a series of distinctive cinematic features. Commenting on the birth of TNC, June Yip remarks that one of its crucial features is everyday storytelling, which rediscovers the experiences of ordinary people and presents the complexly textured realities of their everyday lives in relation to the objectives of both *hsiang-t’u* [xiangtu] literature and TNC (Yip 2004: 71). Over the four decades of martial rule under the Kuomintang (KMT) regime, both *hsiang-t’u* literature and TNC have explored popular memory and the history of everyday life in order to challenge the myth of a coherent Chinese nation unified with Mainland China. In particular, TNC provides an increasingly normalized platform for reconsidering the narrow perspective of the KMT’s official view of the island’s modern history by exploring a cinematic landscape of trans-ethnic identity as a concerted effort at
rewriting history. For example, *In Our Time* (1982), generally regarded as the first TNC film, not only established new approaches to filmmaking by four young directors (namely, Tao De-chen, Edward Yang, Ko Yi-cheng and Chang Yi) but also traced four decades of the island’s postwar economic and social modernization through narratives of everydayness.

This chapter aims to explore the landscape of ethnic diversity in Hou Hsiao-hsien’s *A Time To Live, A Time to Die* (1985) and Chang Tso-chi’s 2001 film, *The Best of Times* through the lens of everydayness. Stylistically, both films embody a form of neo-realism. Moreover, their narrative structures are developed from the interaction and dialogue among family members in an everyday setting. The first part of this chapter will thus delineate significant features of a style of stillness for representing everyday life. I will particularly underline the ways in which both films are frequently organized by a series of ordinary events that are developed into everyday narrative patterns. Though Hou belongs to the first generation of TNC and Chang can be considered to be from the second, I will argue that their works similarly interrogate the problematic of everyday life and explore the tensions among ethnic groups in postcolonial Taiwan.
The pre-TNC era cinema, dominated by KMT’s ideologies of anti-Communism during the Cold War period and of reclaiming the mainland, was eager to construct an imaginary China upon which the exilic regime’s nostalgia for the lost homeland can be projected, most notably in films belonging to the genre of “healthy realism” (Hong 2011: 67). By contrast, for TNC and post-TNC filmmakers, the focus of historical concern has changed from pan-Chinese imagination to Taiwanese consciousness, with an emphasis on memory and tales of everyday life, nativist resistance, and pre-industrialized rural innocence. Hou’s films from the 1980s, such as Summer at Grandpa’s/Dong Dong de jiaqi (1984), A Time to Live, A Time to Die (1985) and Dust in the Wind/Lianlian fengchen (1986), established TNC’s signature style with his the poetic portrayal of the rural landscape, local customs and everyday life, offering “a wrenching panoply of everyday Taiwanese life and its relationship to history” (Hitchcock 2009: 235).

By the 1990s everyday narratives was become the foremost thematic feature of most TNC films. Everyday perspectives, nonlinear narratives, long shots and long takes transformed Taiwan cinema and influenced second-generation TNC directors such as Tsai Ming-liang and Chang Tso-chi. Yet there are noticeable differences
between these directors’ approaches to the everyday. While Tsai’s everyday narratives create an alternative time-space that challenges the capitalist model of time-space compression and global homogenization (Hsu 2007: 133), other directors tend to place emphasis on the sensitive issues of Taiwan’s postcolonial condition, its political ambiguities and interventions in order to question historical realities. Turning the everyday into a series of local histories, the two films to be discussed in this chapter create a space for an examination of ethnic diversity and cultural politics.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien was born in Mei county, Guangdong province, in 1947 to a Hakka family who emigrated to southern Taiwan in 1949. *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* is Hou’s semi-autobiographical film that chronicles not only the growth of the protagonist, Ah-Ha, from childhood to young adulthood, but also Taiwan history of the 1950s and 1960s, the immediate period after the KMT’s defeat by the Chinese Communist Party in the civil war in 1949 and its retreat to Taiwan with a substantial number of refugees. The film is filled with memories of childhood and nostalgia, and portrays the subsequent formation of a distinctive Taiwanese consciousness among the younger generation of waishengren. Moreover, the film’s narration of a family in exile focuses on aspects of ordinary everyday life rather than dramatic events while
suggesting historical changes through the transformation of the family.

Chang Tso-chi’s film, The Best of Times, offers a different take on the everyday by interweaving the aesthetics of magical realism and narratives of notorious gangsters, anxious teenagers and irresponsible parents. The film follows two young men, Ah-Wei, who comes from an indigenous Hakka family,\(^6\) and Ah-Jie, who comes from a waishengren family. They are cousins and live together in a neighbourhood at the edge of city; they are also involved with a local underworld organization. The end of the film takes a rather surreal stylistic turn, which separates Chang’s film from that of Hou.

Unlike the accented filmmakers studied by Hamid Naficy who have travelled from the third world “to live and make films in the West” (2001: 10), TNC filmmakers such as Hou and Chang can be described as exilic only in the sense that they belong to the generation who had migrated from mainland China to Taiwan (albeit at the age of two in the case of Hou and Edward Yang) or as a descendent of this generation of

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\(^6\) The use of the term “indigenous” needs to be qualified here. As Clyde Kiang points out, “Today we encounter three rather distinctive features in the Hakka population: Hakkas are overwhelmingly rural and an increasingly signify numbers of them gradually have moved to large, urban centers; the main body of the indigenous Hakkas, while sharing something of a common heritage, relates to and participates in the Hakka community in an active fashion; the postwar wave of mainland Hakkas who have arrived in the years immediately following World War II usually are demarcated as those who fled China and settled in the Nationalist Chinese community on the island” (1992: 192). Thus, Ah-Wei in Chang’s film belongs to an indigenous Hakka family, whereas Ah-Ha and his family members in Hou’s film belong to mainland Hakkas who fled China and settled in Taiwan.
waishengren (in the case of Chang and Ang Lee, who were both born in Taiwan).

More importantly, the films of Hou and Chang share features of an accented cinematic style, such as the use of multiple languages, border writing, home seeking and autobiographical inscription (Naficy 2001: 33). Discussing Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Shu-mei Shih argues,

> The linguistic dissonance of the film registers the heterogeneity of Sinitic languages as well as their speakers living in different locales. What it engenders and validates, ultimately, is the heteroglossia of what I call the Sinophone: a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries. (Shih 2007: 4)

As a form of Sinophone articulation, both *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *The Best of Times* foreground the relationship between language and identity by their extensive use of two Taiwanese dialects (Hoklo and Hakka). *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* portrays the multiple languages of communication among the *waishengren* family members, and the linguistic shift from the older to the younger generation. In *The Best of Times* Ah-Wei comes from a family in which no Taiwanese/Hoklo is spoken, only the official standard Mandarin and his mother tongue, Hakka. Through their
representation of issues of settlement, cultural identity and ethnic diversity, both filmmakers construct exilic narratives that foreground familial relationships and individual experiences rather than historical events.

**The Everyday in Exilic Filmmaking**

For cultural theorists such as Walter Benjamin (1999), Henri Lefebvre (2002), and Michel de Certeau (1988), the everyday exemplifies the way individuals’ daily activities of production and reproduction are shaped by the conjunction of the capitalist logic of surplus value, industrialization, urbanization, and the increasing abstraction of the bourgeois-dominated social formation. In the immediate postwar period, the everyday seems a more than worthy subject of analysis. In the discipline of film studies, everyday narratives such as those in Chantal Akerman’s work have been described as “nothing happens” by Ivone Margulies, who sees this definition of the everyday as “often appended to films and literature in which the representation’s substratum of content seems at variance with the duration accorded it” (Margulies 1996: 22).

Akerman’s works, for instance, “[i]n Jeanne Dielman (1976), faulty timing replaces boredom with anxiety and efficiency with clumsiness; in Saute ma ville (1968), a
similar lack of control appears not as order’s flip side but as its correlate” (Margulies 1996: 1-2). In this context, narratives of the everyday not only privilege the representation of women and ethnic or other minority groups, but also tend towards a realist aesthetics of filmmaking. Taking Chantal Akerman’s Jeanne Dielman as an example, Ivone Margulies argues that it “disables romantic connotations by giving to the mundane its proper, and heavy, weight and by channeling the disturbing effect of minimal-hyperrealist style into a narrative with definite political resonances” (Margulies 1996: 23). Margulies underlines the ways in which filmmakers ranging from the neorealist directors in the postwar period in Europe to avant-garde artists from the United States foreground the everyday in their films:

The temporal equality accorded both significant and insignificant events; the programmatic foregrounding of materiality and visual concreteness (Robert Bresson, Straub and Huillet, Akerman); the use of amateur actors (De Sica, Zavattini, Jean Rouch, Rossellini); the reenactment of one’s own experience (Zavattini, Antonioni, Rouch); and the use of real, literal time to depict events (Warhol, Akerman). (Margulies 1996: 24)

Through these strategies that clearly function to highlight the everyday and material reality, directors can shape a transformative realism as well as an alternative notion of
everyday life. They capture a sense of the quotidian, such as working-class labour, private life, unstructured activity or thought, and concreteness of cinematic elements. This privileging of the everyday, more significantly, will also help us not only to rediscover the shifting landscape of minority identities, but also to understand the dialectic between time and space through the lens of cinema.

In the 1980s, TNC directors, especially Hou Hsiao-hsien, favoured the use of realist techniques in their films. They were highly opposed to excessive cutting and avoided shot/reverse-shot structures; they also used the long shot, the profile shot, and the pan. Furthermore, due to material and financial constraints, TNC directors avoided too many changes of camera angle, filming with detailed shot coverage, or using lots of sequential shots, all of which would have led to complicated editing structures. They also used non-professional actors in order to enhance the sense of reality and chose filming techniques that minimized interruptions of their performance. TNC directors, therefore, participated in a global (neo)realist tradition and promoted the idea of everyday life in their films.

TNC directors, as Chris Berry and Feii Lu suggest, “abandoned the simplistic black-and-white storytelling methods of the past in favor of a more subtle and complex
mode that was closer to real life experience” (Berry and Lu 2005: 6). In other words, for TNC directors, a cinema of everyday life challenges the primacy of political history by turning away from propaganda narratives and towards personal living experiences.

To a certain extent, TNC was a cinematic manifestation of the nativisation movement which began in Taiwan in the 1970s, and a number of early key films were adaptations of nativist (hsiang-t'u) literature, such as *The Sandwich Man/Erzi de da wanou* (1983), based on a short story by Huang Chun-ming, and *The Oxcart Dowry/Jiazhuang yi niuche* (dir. Chang Mei-chung, 1985) based on a short story by Wang Chen-ho. At the same time, it was a response to a Cold War propaganda industry headed by the KMT regime, and it “began to look back at the historical formation in search of a Taiwanese rather than a Chinese ‘lost self’” (Chen 2006: 139). For Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chang Tso-chie, both regarded as waishengren in Taiwan, the everyday provides a lens through which they could explore the crossing of ethnic boundaries in postwar Taiwan.

For Hou Hsiao-hsien, the use of everydayness is not only a significant narrative strategy but also a realist aesthetic. His focus on everyday life has produced a popular history of ordinary people who represent and embody ethnic diversity in Taiwan. For David Bordwell, Hou’s “modest technique suits an examination of the rhythms of
everyday life. Hou has always been interested in how people grow up, break away from family, move to the city, find a job and a mate, get money legally or illegally, and have fun” (2005: 189). As Corrado Neri comments, a film such as *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* is made up of “very long takes, elliptical narrative, and aesthetics of stasis and elaborate geometric compositions” (2002: 162). In conventional filmmaking, characters are usually located in the centre of a shot, and the camera moves or the editing cuts in order to grant the characters centrality for the identification of the audience. However, favouring a depiction of events in real time, Hou often sets his camera in a static position and allows his characters to walk into and out of the frame. Furthermore, the use of static long take in the film aims to accord temporal equality to both important and random events. In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hou also uses a large amount of non-professional actors, such as Hsin Shu-fen and Yiu Ann-shuin, thus adhering to the realist tradition.

Taiwan scholar Ti Wei suggests that Hou has created a strong tradition of realism in TNC and has influenced many younger directors, among whom Chang Tso-chi “may be widely seen as the most prominent example of the heir of Hou’s film aesthetics” (2008: 275). Due to his preference for non-professional actors, Chang
would spend a long time with the actors in order to achieve a realist performance. As Chang reveals,

We usually spend seven months in preparation, since I strongly believe that the actors need to really get to know each other. During these seven months, the actors live a lifestyle similar to the characters in the film. For instance, all the actors eat together like one big family. The mom will take her daughter to go grocery shopping and later cook for the big family of twelve. After anywhere between seven and ten months of living like that, they start to fall into natural habits and it becomes a part of their everyday lives. During this process, I often even revise the script as I learn more about the actors in real life. I think this brings a much more realistic dimension to the screenplay (Chang, 2005: 415).

After this long process, a sense of everyday life is able to permeate onto the screen. As Lu Feii points out, “Chang has gone further than any other Taiwan director in working with non-professional actors, filming in the documentary style, and telling stories in a fragmented and undramatic manner that uses complex metaphor” (Lu 2005: 139-140). However, departing from Hou’s everyday aesthetics, Chang also allows space in the everyday for real-life fantasies, thus lending a touch of magical realism his films.

**Stillness: Hybridity in Domestic Space**

In her discussion of *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, June Yip argues that “[t]he film marks the beginning of Hou’s construction of the Taiwanese nation as a hybrid space,
shaped by multiple waves of refugees, immigrants, and colonials and characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity” (1997: 140). Indeed, *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* not only looked at the past with a nostalgia filled with remembrances of childhood and adolescence, it also projected the director’s experience of living under KMT’s totalitarian rule while rethinking ethnic diversity and cultural identity. Hou set the semi-autographical film in Fengshan District in Kaohsiung where he grew up, and provided his own voice-over in the opening sequence.

Thematically, Hou’s film problematizes the meaning of the homeland. In the context of Hou’s film, the homeland is, on the one hand, located in Mei County in Guangdong Province on the southern coast of mainland China, and associated with the grandmother and father of the main protagonist, A-Ha. On the other hand, for A-Ha, despite his second-generation waishengren background, the adopted country of Taiwan is also making a claim on the meaning of homeland, a place where new cultural identities can be formed.

Stylistically, the portrayal of the everyday in Hou’s films is associated with stillness. Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh defines Hou’s “static aesthetics” as a method that “elongates the distance between spectator and focal point of the narrative” (2005: 176).
This aesthetic negotiates a relationship between spectatorship and an everyday perspective within the narrative. For instance, the film opens with a close-up shot of a plaque outside a house, which informs the viewer that the Japanese retreated from Taiwan after its defeat in World War II, and that many houses left vacant by the Japanese were later taken over by the mainlander diaspora that moved to Taiwan after Kuomintang’s defeat by the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese waishengren families hence lived in Japanese style houses which were diasporic spaces for the Japanese, now engraved with the legacy of Japanese colonialism and occupied by a new diasporic community.

Figure 1.1 The empty living room
Following the opening shot, we are presented with everyday life in different domestic spaces, including a shot with a static camera showing an empty living room and foreyard (Figure 1.1), and another of the empty kitchen and deserted backyard (Figure 1.2). Here the images are accompanied by Hou’s voice-over which speaks of his father as the most crucial figure in his childhood memories, while the still camera shows everyday objects around the Japanese-style house, such as a bamboo chair and a wooden desk in the living room, or cookware surrounding the kitchen. This opening sequence indicates the ways in which objects shown in a series of still images are developed into a repetition of everyday patterns. However, instead of merely projecting an empty interior space, the film then draws attention to activities of daily life performed by all the family members.

More crucially, the film constructs this space as a hybrid space, one that bears the
double traces of exile, one Japanese and one Mainland Chinese, but firmly located on Taiwanese soil. As Gary Needham points out, the domestic space constructed in these opening shots “functions as a palimpsest as Japan is rewritten over by China, literally in the erasure of Japan through a Sinicisation programme but also figuratively through the mundane nature of what is being represented, a family home of Chinese exiles” (2006: 378). For example, a static medium shot places Hou’s father sitting in a bamboo armchair as the voice-over explains why Hou’s family had moved to Taiwan after 1949. However, unlike in Japanese homes where people would usually sit on the tatami floor, here the father has bought a bamboo armchair for his lifetime reading habit. For the father, the bamboo armchair is not only preferable because it is cheap, this everyday object also embodies a desire to return to mainland China, thus treating Taiwan as a transient abode, precisely because the bamboo chair is not built to last. As Tonglin Lu suggests, the chair “for temporary usage has become a symbol of [the father’s] life, which the chair has ironically outlived” (2003: 97). Within this one shot the different historical temporalities (Japanese colonialism, mainland Chinese exile, Taiwan’s present and presence) co-exist, and a space and a time regarded as temporary turned out, for the father, to be his permanent and final home.
From this point on, the film proceeds to show us aspects of exilic everyday life through daily routines and activities. One scene shows Ah-Ha’s siblings playing around the dining table and bamboo chairs while the mother cooks in the kitchen. The next shot captures the sister in school uniform, confined by family and gendered obligations to help with daily chores in the backyard. The scene then returns to the kitchen where the mother and the sister are working silently together. These shots illustrate vividly, as Hsiu-Chuang Deppman puts it, images of “a quotidian past in which the carefree frolicking of the brothers and the hardworking mother convey normalcy and everydayness” (2010: 156). The everyday in Hou’s film assumes particular relevance in a feminist perspective since it is often a feminized domain, and “it is here, above all, that gender hierarchy is reproduced invisibly, pervasively and over time” (Felski, 1999/2000: 30). Alongside other scenes in the film that involve dinner preparation, cooking and boiling water, these images demonstrate how everyday activities can grant a sense of permanence in a space initially regarded as temporary, an exilic existence slowly taking root through day-to-day routines, thus crossing a temporal border from temporariness to permanence.

In Hou’s films, moreover, language plays an important role in the characters’
identities and identification. This scene sets the stage for portraying the linguistic multiplicity in the film. It is clear from the scene that first-generation mainlanders such as the grandmother, father and mother all speak mainly in the Hakka dialect from their homeland in China. Those among the second generation who grew up in Taiwan, on the other hand, tend to speak either Taiwanese, the local dialect, or Mandarin, the official language. They do not speak Hakka but clearly understand it. Thus family conversations are often conducted with different members using different languages, showing an easy crossing of linguistic borders within the home, a microcosm of the broader Taiwanese society.

Figure 1.3 An empty shot outside the household

Figure 1.4 Ah-Ha singing a Taiwanese song
Yet this linguistic multiplicity can also result in miscomprehension, as demonstrated in a scene set on the day before the eldest sister’s wedding. Beginning with the sound of raindrops, the first shot is an empty shot outside the household (Figure 1.3), with Ah-Ha’s singing voice coming into the soundtrack moments later. Next, a medium shot of the interior shows a half-naked Ah-Ha sitting on the windowsill, looking through the window, and singing a melancholy song in Taiwanese (Figure 1.4). Then, while two
close-up shots (Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.6) capture the family photographs and heirloom that convey a sense of nostalgia for a family in exile, an extremely long-take shot (230 seconds) shows the mother and elder sister in conversation whilst sitting on the tatami floor (Figure 1.7). During the long take shot, the elder sister asks Ah-Ha to stop singing the song, because she claims that the song’s lyrics are vulgar. In fact, she has misinterpreted a line in the lyrics, “I can no longer endure it”, as “selling bronze”. Indeed, as Hsiu-Chuang Deppman notes, while the Taiwanese dialect of Holo is used in earlier exterior scenes when a younger Ah-Ha plays with his mates, this Taiwanese song rendered by a now teenage Ah-Ha “indicates for the first time that the local dialect is used in a household where his Chinese immigrant parents and grandmother (Tang Ruwen) communicate exclusively in Hakka, and his siblings talk to each other in Mandarin” (Deppman 2010: 167).

Hou’s film shows, with the passing of time, the increasing role of the Taiwanese dialect in the everyday life of this main character which plays Hou’s alter ego in this semi-autobiographical film. It also implies that some members from this family in exile are developing new identities in a new land. As Tonglin Lu suggests,

Hou has been interested in searching for a Taiwan identity in his films.
His works, usually set in either a rural area or a small town in the less industrialized South, focus on personal histories in which family ties play an important role. […] At the same time, various groups in his films often use different languages: Taiwanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and occasionally Japanese. All these diverse cultural components contribute to forming a concept of a hybrid identity, suitable to the current population in postcolonial Taiwan (2002: 18).

The above scenes set in the domestic space not only depict nostalgia for the past and conversations among family members but also reveal different identifications between the first- and the second-generation mainlanders through the use of multiple languages. In the scene above, the mother goes on to narrate in Hakka events from the past while Ah-Ha sings in Taiwanese and the sister shouts to him in Mandarin to stop singing. The scene then shifts to a quiet moment and only the sound of the pouring rain outside the window is heard. Hou’s focus on the everyday life of a family in exile throws light on the broader picture of the Taiwanese collective memory and the experiences that shape the dynamics of Taiwan’s local history.

The hybrid domestic space of everyday life marked in A Time to Live, A Time to Die is echoed in The Best of Times, which also depicts Taiwanese daily life as well as the characters’ struggling pain, including tensions between family members, sub-cultural identity and peer group pressure. These characters are eventually allowed
to escape from the world full of worries by plunging into an imaginary water where
they receive their spiritual sustenance. Significantly, *The Best of Time*; like *A Time to
Live, A Time to Die*, is also set within a household, where an extended family of Hakka
origin enacts everyday events, activities and interactions.

In the opening sequence the film seems to exhibit the traits of real-life drama. In
his discussion of Chang’s previous film, Feii Lu comments that, “[d]espite the trace of
the heritage of the TNC, *Darkness and Light* also shows his unique ‘real-life drama’
integration of reality and drama” (Lu 2005: 140). To cast the term “real-life drama” in
another way, I would suggest that Chang’s aesthetics relates to narratives of the
everyday. This can be seen in the setting and features of mise-en-scene in the opening
sequence.

The everyday narrative of Chang’s film depends heavily on interior settings,
which establish the protagonists’ intimacy with their family members. In *The Best of
Times*, from the opening sequence in which the family is engaged in preparing for the
Dragon Boat Festival, Chang positions viewers in a space that is decidedly everyday,
the living space of a local family. The Dragon Boat Festival, which commemorates the
patriotic poet Qu Yuan and involves the eating of rice dumplings and the racing of
dragon boat, is also typically an occasion for family reunion. Thus Chris Berry notes its appearance in the film as signifying “the idea of multiple and different modernities” in TNC (Berry 2007: 47). Chang provides a social setting for portraying contemporary Taiwanese familial conflicts.

*Figure 1.8 Ah-Wei is playing Nunchaku and Grandmother asks him to help*

*Figure 1.9: Ah-Jie is playing a magic trick for Min*

*Figure 1.10: Ah-Wei helps to decorate the house for the Dragon Boat Festival*
As with the beginning of *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, the opening of Chang’s film presents a household environment that seems randomly arranged and decorated but whose order is, in fact, carefully constructed. All three deep-focus shots are set in interior spaces and explore everyday activities and daily conversations among family members. They also introduce almost all the family members. In the first long-take shot (around 110 seconds), Chang’s camera pans from right to left, which shows Ah-Wei (played by Wing Fan) practicing Nunchaku like Bruce Lee (Figure 1.8), and then the camera pans from left to right, which captures Ah-Jie (played by Gao Meng) trying to show a magic trick to Wei’s elder sister Min (Figure 1.9). The next shot
shows Ah-Wei helping to decorate the house for the festival (Figure 1.10); in this shot, we can also notice that Ah-Jie’s father walks into Ah-Wei’s house as if it is his own. Here, Chang intends to mark the houses of the two families as opposite each other across the lane. In the following shot, Chang shows Ah-Jie’s father taking rice dumplings out from boiling water into Ah-Wei’s house (Figure 1.11). Finally, the medium shot captures both teenagers enjoying the falling rain (Figure 1.12). Through the above shots and with the use of panning, Chang offers a portrait of the extended family comprising multiple ethnicities and communicating in different dialects without difficulty. With the use of panning, Chang creates the impression of a frame horizontally scanning the household space. Furthermore, while language can be a potent issue in the discussion of Taiwanese identities (such as an over-emphasis on the use of Hoklo), Chang demonstrates in this opening sequence a crossing of linguistic borders within a family household where different languages are spoken and understood by everyone.

Unlike the still shots in *A Time to Die, A Time to Live*, a projection of multiple ethnicities in *The Best of Times* is composed through the use of editing and camera movement. The first three shots all maintain a medium shot distance in order to capture
a full picture of family interaction, allowing several characters to share the screen in their everyday activities. Adhering to realist traditions, every shot offers a representation of interactions among family members that are developed into everyday patterns, such as practising martial arts or showing magic trick. Additionally, the editing is based on the continuity of time and space, which erases the interior/exterior boundaries of the household space, for instance, with Ah-Wei helping to decorate the grandmother’s door or Ah-Jie’s father taking the rice dumplings into the house.

Set in the margins of the city, Chang’s location shots function not in isolation but in relation to the whole structure and composition of the film. Following the interior setting of the first three shots, the fourth shot turns to an exterior space which offers a closer framing of the protagonists’ faces. Contrasting with the fluid camera movement in the first three shots, Chang introduces Ah-Wei and Ah-Jie as the protagonists of the film through the stillness of the camera in this shot, with the two teenagers playing in the rain after the festival. The shot establishes the surrounding on which everyday life for the protagonists is built and thus the wishes of the two boys to escape into their own imaginary worlds. While everyday objects (such as the poster of Bruce Lee and the aquarium) and everyday practices (such as magic tricks) dominate these shots, the
protagonists’ imaginary worlds, as Chang states in an interview, “represent hope” (Berry 2006: 412). Because of the existence of these imaginary worlds, the protagonists constantly cross the boundary between reality and imagination whilst living out their everyday lives in a cosmopolitan urban society.

**Familial Relationship and Eating Scene**

Writing on what he calls “undramatic” style in film and discussing Yasujiro Ozu’s *Late Spring* (1949), Andrew Klevan observes that the film’s style “accommodates the range of behavior within this manner of family interaction, and therefore cannot rest its effects, as melodrama might, on short-term emotional crisis.” Against the dominant structure’s cause-and-effect relation such as that of classical Hollywood cinema, Ozu’s characters “do not let matters explode into conflict, or release their emotion by directly connecting with each other” (2000: 135). Similarly, in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *The Best of Times*, the family members spend a lot of screen time conducting everyday conversations with each other but these conversations do not create a dramatic effect. In the following section, I will discuss the daily eating scene in both films and, more precisely, how Chang’s staging of these scenes compares to that of his
mentor, Hou Hsiao-hsien. These scenes mainly consist of the repetition of everyday activities, including daily conversations and eating. They introduce the films’ main characters to the audience, and reveal the humour underlying daily routines which are imbued with the symbolic meaning of reunion. More significantly, in the hands of these directors, the everydayness of these routines encapsulates complicated human relationships within a single scene.

In Hou’s film, eating is not only a necessity but it also represents the value of family and community life. In particular, the eating scenes in Hou’s and Chang’s films are symbolic: food preparation and eating in both films often deliver a historical message and political critique. Generally speaking, shooting an eating scene, especially one containing more than one character within the frame, is challenging because the shot can easily fall into either flat or fragmented composition (Bordwell 2005: 158). In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, the first family eating scene is completed in only one take. Though only a one-minute-long take, this sequence illuminates many details about the collective memory of Ah-Ha’s father, mother and grandmother. In order to capture the ordinary event, Hou delivers a fine utilization of a medium long shot.
In this eating scene, the father’s monologue is preceded by a Mandarin radio broadcast on the air battle over the Taiwan Strait between forces of the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party in 1958 (figure 1.13). Here, radio sound is employed to provide a socio-political context to the film, emphasizing KMT propaganda during a period of military tension across the Taiwan Strait. While the father is speaking, the radio announcer continues to describe KMT’s successful battle against its mainland counterpart. The father narrates in the Hakka dialect his memory of the peculiar death of a relative on the mainland decades ago. Speaking in the Hakka dialect, the grandmother and the mother also join in the father’s recounting of the story, which reorients the viewers’ attention from the official propaganda to the daily conversation of a family relocated in Taiwan. On the linguistic diversity in this scene, Chris Berry argues that “Hou marks out Taiwan as a space crisscrossed by a specific and intricate network of nuanced and subtle differences. It is noteworthy that pure Mandarin is
associated most strongly in the film with the voice of the radio announcer, who is the agent of the nation-state bringing news about national day celebrations and so forth” (Berry 1994: 57). While Mandarin is clearly the preferred language of a government that originates from the mainland, here Hakka, spoken by Ah-Ha’s parents and grandmother, is also associated with mainland China. These languages and their speakers do not exhibit identification with the Taiwanese society in which they live, their ideological struggles and collective memories of “homeland” are firmly located elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Ah-Ha and his siblings are enjoying eating the sugarcane and keeping quiet. They cannot seem to relate to the death of a relative in the past nor do they have any connection to mainland China. While the radio broadcast seems to have triggered the father’s memory, this scene demonstrates, as Tonglin Lu observes, “how distant the father himself is from actual life” (Lu 2002: 98). Unlike the first-generation mainlander who live in past memories, the children are the ones whose lives are rooted in everyday reality in Taiwan. As Bérénice Reynaud suggests, “Hou explored the history of his family, from their arrival in Taiwan when he was a small child to the death of his grandmother and his entry into the adult world” (Reynaud 2002: 73).
However, this familial history is also intertwined with the nation’s history. Through this scene, however, Hou shows that China is gradually receding into the distance while the everyday experience in Taiwan quietly takes over.

![Figure 1.14 A still long-take shot showing everybody having dinner together in Ah-Wei’s house](image)

In *The Best of Times*, eating scenes also stand out as the most representative portrayal of everydayness. Sequences such as the one shown in Figure 1.14 stage family dinners and draw our attention to daily conversations and squabbling between members of an extended family. In order to capture the atmosphere, Chang Tso-chi utilizes static long takes with medium long shots and deep focus. While the family members are obviously contained within this medium long shot, the framing functions almost like a theatrical stage with clearly defined spatial boundaries. In the above eating scene, a three-minute long take illuminates many everyday details about Ah-Wei’s twin sister, Ah-Jie’s mentally-challenged brother and drunken father, and a family with no mother.
We see Ah-Wei and Ah-Jie walk in and sit down, after which Ah-Jie stands and begins to prepare a bowl of food for his father. There is no close-up on either character’s face, and the staging of this eating scene invites observation of small gestures in daily life without giving the audience any reaction shot of any single character. All characters are, in a sense, equal, and the hierarchy within the family is shown subtly through these everyday activities.

Moreover, this dinner scene is structured around the table placed at the centre of the frame, with a door on the left that enables characters to come in and out from the edge of the frame. For example, first we see Ah-Wei come in through the door and find his place to sit. Then, Ah-Jie passes from the table through the door to ask his father whether he is going to have dinner or not. Later he comes back to the table, picks up a bowl of food for his father, and then goes out again. Chang does not cut to Ah-Jie’s movement, but rather directs our attention to selected participants through such happenings within the same long take. Another interesting example is when Ah-Ji, who is Ah-Jie’s elder brother, is sitting with his back to the camera but positioned in the centre of the frame, making it impossible to see his face. However, Chang designs activities to overcome this staging problem. As a result, Ah-Ji is made to sneeze
frequently as if he has caught a cold, so that Ah-Wei asks him to get some tissue paper.

When Ah-Ji stands up and moves to the edge of the frame, we can see his face in profile as well as his small gestures and bodily movements. This staging using a still long take thus records time and preserves space both in their entirety.

However, Chang varies his cinematic staging so that different strategies are adopted to achieve different aesthetic effects in the film, as shown in another dining scene which uses two shots rather than one. In this breakfast scene the father is placed on the left side of the frame and is the only one who stands from time to time to pick up food for his family. The first take (Figure 1.15) is shot from the interior of the house whereas the second take (Figure 1.16) looks into the house from the exterior. In the meantime, the father blames his son for neglecting his duty of taking care of his sister. Although the father is framed entirely outside of the second take, his voice-off addressing his son Ah-Wei reminds us of his presence and thus his patriarchal position. Unlike the previous eating scene with a long-take shot, Chang here employs the use of editing between the two shots. Instead of a conventional approach such as shot/reverse-shot, Chang’s editing offers the perspective of the teenager against his patriarch. The previous eating scene provides a sense of intimacy within the family
through a ritualistic everyday activity, but this scene emphasises the emotional conflict between two generations.

Figure 1.15 Ah-Wei’s father blames his son for neglecting his duty

Figure 1.16 The shot focuses on teenagers’ identity

Through these eating scenes, the characters become increasingly aware of the reality of life. Chang’s characters are, like Hou’s characters, “often merely hanging out, dining and drinking, quarreling and tussling, observing dramas playing out around them, trying to avoid parental harangues or the boss’s wrath, using their downtime to devise clumsy scams or to consummate a courtship” (Bordwell 2005: 189). Chang’s films are compiled from routines depicting ordinary life, repeating daily events and routine
scenarios. Without dramatic effect in most scenes, Chang gives the illusion of everyday observation, whether for the actors who are involved in their ordinary routines or for the audience.

While the eating scenes in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *The Best of Times* share many similarities, Hou tends to position the most significant figures in the centre of the frame whereas Chang concentrates more on the protagonist’s perspective. For instance, in the above dinner scene (Figure 1.14), we see Ah-Wei entering from the door on the left side of the frame. The whole dining room is captured, with the wall on the left and the television set on the right. The family dialogue is carried on within this frame, with no dedicated single shot on any particular character. In this way, Chang reconfigures cinematic conventions established by his predecessors, particularly Hou.

I would argue that Chang’s treatment of eating scenes is not by using conventional point-of-view shot, but neither is it totally inherited from Hou Hsiao-hsien. Beyond the concerns about Taiwanese history, Chang develops his film in a different direction, adopting an everyday perspective. Aside from realist elements, Chang’s film employs a circular narrative structure in order to illustrate the anxious and repressed feelings of teenagers. In the eating scene, Chang is not afraid to break
the balance of his framing for his characters are not exactly in the centre of the frame, but Hou searches for the balance most of the time.

**Narrative: The Desire to Return**

For exilic filmmakers, as Hamid Naficy suggests, “[a]lthough they do not return to their homelands, they maintain an intense desire to do so—a desire that is projected in potent return narratives in their film” (Naficy 2001: 12). Similarly, characters in the films of Hou and Chang often demonstrate a desire to return to their homeland. In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, for instance, the grandmother is still very much attached to Mainland China, and she hopes that she will be able to return to her homeland as soon as possible. This section will discuss the strong desire to return to a homeland in both films, as the first generation of Chinese mainlanders illustrate how they bring the notion of home to their new settings in ways that question national forms of belonging and ethnic identification.

Exploring a series of everyday events, these two directors mainly place emphasis on the daily routine of characters even in relation to the symbolic meaning of travel. When the Kuomintang retreated to Taiwan in 1949, it brought with its regime a
migrant population of between 1.5 to two million (Roy 2003: 76). The everyday life of this mainlander generation was embedded in the historical landscape of Cold War Taiwan, an era in which the very notion and function of history was to create a sense of “Chineseness” and to repress memories about the “homeland” (whether Taiwan or Mainland China) into a taboo issue. As a result, the mainlander generation repeatedly struggled with the impossibility of a return to their homeland.

In the case of *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, “[t]he haunting power that the homeland holds over the imagination of these exiles is most poignantly articulated in the scenes between Ah-Ha and his grandmother” (Yip 2004: 82). This “haunting power” emphasizes the connection between Mainland China and Taiwan, the continuity between past and present, but it also bridges the generation gap between the mainlander generation and its offspring in relation to the nation’s history. Unaware of political transformations in the People’s Republic of China, Ah-Ha’s parents depend upon and share their memories of China to instill a sense of Chinese cultural identity in their children, who simultaneously negotiate their identities to cope with everyday life in the changing historical and cultural landscapes of Taiwan. On the other hand, throughout the film the younger generation usually does not realise the most intense
anxiety of its parents’ and grandparent’s past. An interior shot of a conversation between Ah-Ha and his grandmother (Figure 1.17) demonstrates the conflicting quest for national identity. In this scene Ah-Ha turns down his grandmother’s invitation to return to China with her by asking curiously, “What will we do in China?” Her wish to return to Mainland China is thwarted by the totally different preoccupations of her grandchildren. He cannot comprehend why his grandmother longs to return to China as, for him, their home is in Taiwan.

![Figure 1.17 Conversation between the grandmother and Ah-Ha](image)

Indeed, in the following scene, Ah-Ha and his grandmother walk along a country road, and it is later revealed that she is trying to take him back to Mainland China. The scene
opens with a long shot of the two walking along the main street in the village. The following long shot shows a steam train passing a crossing by a narrow street of shops. While they are taking a rest and enjoying ice cream in the snack shop, the grandmother patiently asks the owner the way to Mekong Bridge in Mei County (Figure 1.18). The owner does not understand her as the Hakka dialect is not spoken everywhere in Taiwan, and she has not heard of Mekong Bridge either. Here, Hou holds the shot for the entire duration of the train’s passing, the train standing in as a figure for the grandmother’s wish to return to her imagined homeland. In fact, the way back to Mei County in Guangdong is not only the grandmother’s most intense memory of home but also embodies her identification with the nation, which is located in the geographical and historical landscape of China.

![Figure 1.19 The landscape of southern Taiwan](image)
For Ah-Ha, however, his nation is located in the reality of everyday life in Taiwan.

Cutting to an extreme long shot of a village road on which Ah-Ha and his grandmother are sauntering up and down, the camera beautifully frames the landscape of southern Taiwan (Figure 1.19). On this futile journey in search of her homeland, the grandmother “becomes so completely absorbed in her memories that her nostalgia for her motherland transforms the alien landscape into the more familiar roads and waterways of her home on the mainland” (Yip 2004: 82). In the respect, the grandmother’s confused sense of geography clearly relates to her loss in a historical sense, which is bound to her memory of the past and deeply filled with the consciousness of a community that she used to know. Therefore, her dream to return to the motherland becomes an imagined journey, which wraps her in an imaginary world in which she does not realise that Mekong Bridge cannot be reached from her current location. Because the Taiwan Strait physically separates Taiwan and China, she can never reach the mainland. For the older generation, the obsession with a return to the homeland is predominant, embodied by the grandmother in the film who naively believes that she will be able to return to the mainland by simply crossing a bridge. She has forgotten about the boat she took to come to Taiwan, which in turn suggests the
lost feeling of exile that will be forgotten by future generations.

Figure 1.20 The drivers always send the grandmother back home to collect payment from her family

The shots discussed above show the mainlander generation’s desire to return to a homeland that they have left behind. In addition to the grandmother’s journey with Ah-Ha, other scenes also portray her desire to return home. The grandmother often wanders off on a journey and gets lost, before being picked up and sent home on a rickshaw. Focusing on these repeated journeys, Tonglin Lu comments on the significance of the rickshaw, “The repeated association with the old fashioned vehicle portrays Grandma in a slightly humorous but touchingly nostalgic light” (Lu 2002: 98).

In the film, the grandmother tries to go home, and orders a rickshaw driver to take her to the motherland. However, the drivers always send her back home to collect payment from her family. One of these journeys is shown in a long shot following Ah-Ha’s mother punishing him for stealing money from home (Figure 1.20). A rickshaw then
unexpectedly comes into the centre of the frame, the vehicle movement interrupting a
dramatic scenario and creating a feeling of everydayness within the diegesis. In this
scene, by repeatedly cutting back to show similar shots of the grandmother’s journey
and long shots of the village landscape, the film emphasizes the imaginary journey
taken each day by the exile. These shots represent the grandmother’s exilic everyday,
which confuses and conflates the landscapes of a faraway homeland and her exilic
reality.

Chang Tso-chi thematically inherits TNC’s focus on local people, locales and
cultural diversity. Even though Chang often highlights the predicaments of
marginalized teenagers, The Best of Times also invokes the trauma of exilic everyday
life. The film was made in 2002, fifteen years after martial law was lifted in Taiwan,
and it deals with political traumas of the Taiwanese people that were hitherto
unspeakable. For example, the film shows Ah-Jie’s father grumbling about his
experience garrisoning at Gui-shan Island, a reference to his once radical political
position that is no longer a taboo. More importantly, we see the extended family
comprising multiple ethnicities and communicating with each other in different
dialects without difficulty. Like the exilic narrative in Hou’s A Time to Live, A Time to
*Die*, Chang’s story centres around a mainlander father and his children in a multilingual milieu, playing out their family life in the landscape of the everyday.

The extended family in Chang’s film embodies ethnic diversity. Chang’s film functions as an example of the fragmentation of families and communities in contemporary Taiwan, highlighting an anxiety about cultural identity. In *The Best of Times*, the world revolves around individual families. Chang’s characters are members of families, rather than members of society. Even though blood ties and support suggest traditional family values, each family member seems physically and emotionally deserted by a missing maternal figure, such as Ah-Jie’s trauma about his mother’s long absence.

![Figure 1.21: Ah-Jie’s father sits in the centre of the frame](image)

*Figure 1.21: Ah-Jie’s father sits in the centre of the frame*

Ah-Jie’s father is a first generation Chinese mainlander in Taiwan, and his Taiwanese wife is missing. In order to instill realism in his films, Chang prefers to
work with non-professional actors. Tian Maoying, who plays Ah-Jie’s father, is a retired mainlander soldier. In the scene in his room, he sits in the centre of the frame (Figure 1.21). The camera is placed to one side of the entrance to the room, producing a wide-angle, medium shot of his upper body. As if observing an everyday routine, we not only see Ah-Jie’s father in full concentration whilst checking his personal belongings, but also glean a political reality through objects in the room. As Naficy points out, in exilic filmmaking, “[s]ometimes a small object taken from the house into exile becomes a potent synecdoche for the house, home, or even the homeland, feeding the memories and narratives of placement and displacement” (2001: 169). Looking at the decoration and display in his room, we can see some photos on the wall, including Taiwan’s ex-president, Chiang Kai-shek, which signposts the father’s mainlander and army veteran background. The photos represent his memory of the past, and the medium shot with deep focus not only generates a sense of nostalgia but also reveals his political orientation. As a result of the use of lighting, the everyday objects and personal belongings surrounding this interior space all look obscure and dark. The dark colour instils a sense of melancholy, and hints at a crisis in national identity in the post-KMT era.
The following shot cuts to a veteran’s village, where Ah-Jie and his father walk through the front yard and talk to an elderly friend. As his best friend has passed away, Ah-Jie’s father would like to collect his belongings and send them back to Mainland China. Through a shot of Ah-Jie’s father’s back in full height, Chang shows his emotional voice and reaction. As Dai Jinhua comments on the scenes in which the grandmother attempts to return to her hometown in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, “images like this are allegorical explorations of the absurdity of the fate of Taiwan and the promise of ‘returning to the mainland’” (Dai 2008: 244). In *The Best of Times*, Ah-Jie’s father, who is extremely upset by his friend’s death, accuses the KMT government of irresponsibility. Echoing Dai’s comment on the absurdity of Taiwan’s fate, he says, “When they [the KMT] brought us here from the mainland, they had promised us they will make a way home. However, nothing happened. They don’t even
really look after our lives at all. They are all liars. This is the way of betrayal.” The
next shot cuts to an interior scene of his friend’s home where the father seems to be
torn by grief (Figure 1.22). Next is a medium shot of his profile, a sharp silhouette
portrait as he weeps by the basin over his best friend’s death. As the father and son
leave the veteran’s village, the weight of history seems to remain in the neighborhood,
which has become a legacy of KMT’s retreat to Taiwan.

The location of the village clearly has historical implications. As Chris Berry
comments, “The focus of Chang’s film is on the lower-class margins of Taiwan society,
produced out of its modern transformation since the KMT took over from the Japanese
colonizers in the late forties” (2007: 46). In the case of Ah-Jie, Berry continues,
“Ah-Jie is the son of a KMT soldier who came to the island as a displaced refugee, not
as a member of the KMT ruling class” (2007: 46). Compared to Hou’s A Time to Live,
A Time to Die, Chang’s film is able to offer a more critical space for the subjective
reflection of the exilic condition as the first generation of mainlanders like Ah-Jie’s
father and his friends all share the same fate on the island. The narrative of border
crossing in the film, therefore, conveys a sense of dislocation and displacement, which
manifests in the characters’ existential anxiety and a crisis in national identity. More
significantly, I would argue that a narrative of border crossing also problematises the issue of ethnic diversity. Chang thematically inherits Hou Hsiao-hsien’s focus on ethnic diversity, ordinary living experience and translingual practice.

In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, the grandmother’s repeated homebound journeys gradually shape an everyday narrative—a desire to return. In *The Best of Times*, Ah-Jie’s father also has a desire to return to the homeland, even though this homeland is still part of Taiwan territory rather than located in mainland China.

Ah-Jie’s father used to live in Guishan Island, an island in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Yilan County. The local population, consisting mainly of fishermen and soldiers, was relocated in 1977 when the island became the site of a military base. As a result, Ah-Jie’s father is, in a sense, exiled in Taiwan because he cannot return to Guishan Island. In a dining scene, the father grumbles loudly about the life he leads and complains about the forced retirement system that led to his relocation to Taiwan. As a Chinese mainlander exile, he does not have any relatives in Taiwan and thus wishes to travel back to the island. The father’s verbal expression of a desire for the homeland underlines the sense of displacement in the everyday life of an exile.
Instead of showing an attempted journey to return to the homeland with the older generation, Chang places Ah-Jie in a location where he can see his father’s symbolic homeland. Later in the film, having been involved in a gang fight, Ah-Jie and Ah-Wei escape from Taipei to Yilan County where they temporarily live with a friend. They go to the seaside to fish late at night, and Ah-Jie falls asleep on the beach. As the sea level rises and covers his body in the morning, he suddenly wakes up and sits still. Here, Ah-Jie is framed sitting in the centre with his back to the camera (Figure 2.23), and we see in the distance the island where his father was garrisoned for decades. Ah-Jie’s father will not have the opportunity to return to the island after he was forced to retire. However, his son now gets the chance to see the island, albeit from a distance, and can begin to understand that his escape from Taipei has turned out to be a kind of homecoming. This scene, therefore, serves as a symbolic reconciliation between the father and his son in *The Best of Times*.  

*Figure 2.23 Ah-Jie looking at Guishan Island*
The image of the island and its surrounding ocean is symbolic in Chang’s work, as there is a clear longing for the sea in almost all of his films. As he mentions in an interview, “The ocean is very important in my work. I think the ocean is like one’s mother” (Berry 2005: 413). The word “mother,” as Chang points out, not only refers to the relationship between mother and son, but also makes a clear connection to the homeland. Commenting on the fish tank in the opening sequence of *The Best of Times*, he says, “We actually shot that first ocean scene. Then we went back and arranged the coral and elements in the fish tank to match the ocean footage we shot, so it is a microcosm of the sea” (Berry 2005: 413). Thus, water in Chang’s film points to a way for the exile to reconnect with the homeland. In this film, water is variously represented by the ocean, the fish tank and the canal. Taken together, these symbolic objects give *The Best of Times* a unique angle to approach the settings of daily events, through which the themes of identity, exile, home and journey are haunted through an everyday aesthetic.

Chang represents a new milestone in contemporary Taiwan filmmaking as he reconfigures the realist tradition into a form of magical realism, demonstrated in the fantasy ending of *The Best of Times*. When Ah-Wei and Ah-Jie encounter the group of
gangster and are chased to the bank of a gutter in their neighborhood, into which they
jump. A couple of dissolves bridge the slow motion of the teenagers, depicting how
Ah-Wei and Ah-Jie realise they have nowhere to run and finally decide to jump into
the gutter. The two discrete types of scenes are edited together to form the concluding
sequences of the film.

Chang’s film does not adhere strictly to realist conventions; rather, it extends the
realist aesthetics to the point of the fantastical. This occurs at the ending of his film,
which has been described as one of the most striking examples of Chang’s “haunted
realism” (Berry 2007: 48). The sequence begins with an establishing long shot of
Ah-Wei and Ah-Jei’s neighbourhood environment, followed by a tracking shot of
Ah-Wei’s escape from the gangsters in the narrow alleys. The logic of Chang’s editing
is clearly demonstrated in the next shot, in which Ah-Wei appears at the head of the
passageway, walking toward the camera. A shoulder appears in the right extreme
foreground. Ah-Jie is recognized by the pattern of the shirt he wore the day he was
stabbed. This shot is identical to one in the last chase sequence, which ended with
Ah-Jie being stabbed. As the clothing and other aspects of the settings are unchanged,
we are confused about the continuity of time. Is this Ah-Wei’s wish fulfillment? Or is
the previous death scene only a figment of his imagination? Through the creative use of editing, Chang provides the doomed teenagers with a second chance to escape reality by jumping into the deep blue ocean in the forking path structure.

Discussing Chang’s film using the concept of “haunted realism” and in the context of the ghost and horror genres, Chris Berry argues that the fantastic or even ghostly elements can mark the “potential breakdown of the barrier between the real and the unreal” (Berry 2007: 45). The film’s final underwater shots are presented as a jump cut to a fantastic world, freezing time by having the two teens swimming and playing in the gutter, almost as if to suggest that only by escaping the real world can they survive. The underwater scene represents a kind of rebirth for the two teens. Their figures on the screen eventually swim away, and the film’s final minute is comprised of a single shot of the ocean, as beautiful as it is surreal.

The ending of Chang’s film blurs the line between fantasy and reality, with fantastical elements within scenes of ordinary life functioning to deconstruct and disrupt conventional realist mode of temporalities. Elements of daily life pervade Chang’s The Best of Times, but they are always overshadowed by the existence of supernatural elements. For instance, Ah-Jie constantly practises magic tricks, and the
return-from-death ending of the film betrays the desire to return and the possibility of having a “second chance” in life. By way of these fantastical elements within everyday narratives, we can mark the difference between Chang and the first TNC generation. Chang redefines reality from another point of view. His arrangement of fantastical elements in realist scenes shows his radical departure from his predecessor’s work.

**Everydayness: Ethnic Diversity in TNC**

In the mid-1990s, Chang Tso-chi, like a number of his contemporaneous filmmakers, attempted to depart from the nostalgia of the earlier wave of TNC filmmakers. He did not, however, reject historical subject matter, and used his camera to explore how history is manifested in the private sphere of painful and ambivalent everyday life. As Feii Lu suggests, “along with all the hallmarks of the TNC, Chang has also integrated drama into his unique manifestation of ‘real-life fantasy’”(Lu 2005: 138). Chang’s realist approach, which responds to the first wave of TNC filmmakers, centres on the depiction of the outcast and disenfranchised in suburban Taipei. Nevertheless, the images of ethnic diversity in his films are not limited to daily affairs in minoritised families but carry a wider range of local ingredients, such as the use of multiple
dialects, colourful and sometimes vulgar conversations, and splendid folk customs. In her discussion of the legacy of TNC, Tonglin Lu argues that, “[a]lthough each of them [Tsai Ming-liang and Chang Tso-chi] has chosen a highly personal path, both have been visibly influenced by New Taiwan Cinema” (Lu 2011: 125). For instance, in Chang’s *Ah Chung/Zhong zai* (1995), we see the protagonist getting involved in the rituals of the “ba jia jiang,” or Infernal Generals. As a kind of folk traditional in Taiwan, the Infernal Generals not only symbolize the religious beliefs of the people but also represent the cultural and historical background of their ancestors. In *The Best of Times*, Ah-Jie devotes some of his time to such religious practices. Similar religious themes can be found in Tsai Ming-liang’s films such as *Rebels of the Neon God/Qingshaonian nuozha* (1992).

The most significant feature of Chang’s filmmaking lies not in the thematic adherence to his predecessors but rather in stylistic renovation. Chris Berry suggests that “although allegory is not part of Hou Hsiao-hsien’s realist mode, perhaps it is the very realist recreation of the past in films from *A Summer at Grandpa’s* to *A City of Sadness* that provides the foundation for a haunting and nostalgic effect” (2007: 48). I would conclude that the importance of Chang Tso-chi lies in his realist aesthetic codes,
which adhere to the tradition of early TNC, especially in relation to Hou Hsiao-hsien.

To recall Hou’s films in the 1980s, such as *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hou promotes a longing for the past precisely in terms of everyday life, exilic displacement and ethnic diversity. Yet, Chang’s *The Best of Times* is located in contemporary Taiwan society, its thematic concern shifting slightly from the family to the underworld, painting a picture of urban dystopia. This self-awareness of influence is magnified by the presence of Hou’s themes and stylistics, which have shaped TNC in the realm of the real.

In both cases, Hou and Chang deploy Taiwan’s suburban space as a reflection of ethnic diversity, and use exilic familial narratives as metaphors for collapsing traditional values. Chang shares with Hou the challenge of portraying not only everyday routines but also the intangible tension in familial relationships. However, as this chapter has shown, Chang’s film departs from his predecessor’s focus on nostalgia. Instead, Chang brings new innovation to a realist style by using fantastical elements. Chang’s fantastical elements are symptomatic of the need to find new images for the transforming suburban experience in which cultural identities are formed among multiple ethnic groups. Through their cinematic representation of everyday life in
postcolonial Taiwan, Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Chang Tso-chi, the representatives of the two waves in TNC, break new grounds in the representation of ethnic diversity. Their films explore the anxiety, transgression and absurdities of ordinary life in Taiwan, creating a cinema of the everyday through realist representations of everyday life both of the past and the present.
Chapter Three:

Traumatic Body:

Edward Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day*

Seeing through Trauma

Following *That Day on the Beach/Haitan de yitian* (1983), *Taipei Story/Qingmei zhuma* (1985) and *The Terrorizer/Kongbu fenzi* (1986), *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) is the fourth feature-length film of Edward Yang (1947-2007), one of the pioneers of TNC. Based on a true story that took place in the “White Terror” era of Taiwan under martial law, *A Brighter Summer Day* tells the story of Xiao Si, a student of a prestigious high school, Jianguo Junior High School, who gets involved in the conflicts among young gangsters and falls in love with Xiao Ming, the girlfriend of one of the gang bosses. More importantly, through the scenes showing the violence of Chinese Mainlander gangs, the interrogation plot and Xiao Ming’s death, the film creates images of violence, displacement and the traumatic body. For Taiwan theatre and film director Stan Lai, *A Brighter Summer Day* is “not just a film about some teenagers from a previous political era but is essentially about that era itself” (2008: 4). In other
words, *A Brighter Summer Day* is representative of an era of oppression, during which a campaign of politically motivated arrests of intellectuals took place (Phillips 2003: 99). The film illustrates the suffocating atmosphere of Taiwan in the 1960s, and shows the everyday life of a Chinese Mainlander family seeking their cultural identity and sense of belonging in an alien land.

As if to respond to some of the issues regarding the interpretation and representation of the 2/28 Incident (February Twenty-eight, 1947) in *A City of Sadness* (1989), Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day*, released two years later, revisited the event of the Mao Wu Incident. In contrast with the focus on Taiwanese consciousness in *A City of Sadness*, Yang’s film pays more attention to the Chinese Mainlanders’ exilic experience. Xiao Si (played by Chang Chen) and his civil servant father (played by Chang Kuo-chu, also Chang Chen’s father in real life), represent the so-called “Mainlander Chinese” (*waishengren*) generation. The film is a historical representation that focuses on the anxiety of displacement; it also revisits the site of the incident, Guling Street, in the Chinese title of the film. The film was inspired by the Mao Wu Incident on June 15, 1961 in which a fourteen-year-old girl was killed by a male high school student in Taipei. According to the film’s Chinese title, as Leo Chan-jen Chen
indicates, Yang “built his narrative around a traumatic legend of his adolescence” (2001: 119). With the once-taboo street name appearing in the Chinese title of the film, Yang’s film sets out, like Hou’s 1989 landmark film, to challenge political orthodoxy in the immediate post-martial law period in Taiwan.

In Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh’s essay on A Brighter Summer Day, she emphasizes the influence of American rock culture on the Chinese Mainlanders, arguing that “the subcultural practice in Edward Yang’s film must be recognized as a reaction against Taiwan’s internal politics and a repugnant national identity” (Yeh 2009: 92).

According to her analysis, Yang provides an answer regarding the Chinese Mainlanders’ national identity through the influence of American rock culture on teenagers in Taiwan in the 1960s. However, it is worth mentioning that the film is also closely related to the consequences of traumatic events that took place in Taiwan during the White Terror period. John Anderson argues that the film “picks the scab off of life in Taiwan in a way Yang’s earlier films only seemed to, and it finds an unresolvable issue,” and it “questions the soundness, even the existence of the national soul” (Anderson 2005: 54). Trauma, therefore, is the primary theme of the film.

This chapter will investigate how a historically traumatic subjectivity becomes
formulated through cinema and how Yang’s film reveals the negotiation and the 
eventual recuperation of that traumatic subjectivity. I am particularly interested in 
cinematic depictions of traumas and crises that demolish, for the film’s protagonists, a 
conventional worldview before rendering a new subjectivity. In this chapter, I will 
analyze *A Brighter Summer Day* from three different aspects: the setting of 
interrogation, the narration of post-trauma, and the portrayal of violence. The chapter 
will demonstrate how a key historical incident and the traumatic subjectivity of 
Chinese Mainlanders have been represented. In order to address these questions, we 
should firstly discuss what the traumatic narrative and traumatic image are. Moreover, 
we can further examine how the film deals with the portrayal of the White Terror 
period, which will contribute to our understanding of Yang’s realist aesthetics in 
representing individuals caught in a violent historical incident.

**White Terror, Traumatic History, and TNC**

The “White Terror” was a political campaign of general intimidation and brutality 
against Taiwanese elites and dissidents from the 1950s (Phillips 2007: 302). Most 
scholars agree that the political campaign began as a response to the 2/28 Incident in
By the mid-1950s, thousands of Taiwanese and recently arrived Mainlanders were suspected of having connections with the Chinese Communist Party or harbouring political dissidence towards the KMT. Many were killed, arrested, or intimidated for their alleged ties to the Communist activities. Estimates of the number of victims of the “White Terror” run as high as ninety thousand arrested with about half that number were executed (Roy 2003: 90).

During the period of martial law (1949-1987), public discussion of the White Terror was outlawed and fear loomed over the collective memory, reinforced by a programme of state-sponsored terrorism, which claimed the lives of untold thousands of Taiwanese and Mainlanders. The Taiwanese were faced with what Homi K. Bhabha calls “the obligation to forget,” which is inherent in nationalist discourse. As Bhabha argues, “to be obligated to forget—in the construction of the national present—is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will” (1994: 161). For most Taiwanese, the coercive silencing of Chinese nationalism and its

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7 On February 27, 1947, there was a confrontation between investigators of a government agency that monopolized the sale of alcohol and tobacco and a woman who was illegally selling matches and cigarettes on a Taipei street. Unexpectedly, the incident turned ugly and a government officer unintentionally shot a Taiwanese bystander. That next day and all the following day, mobs of Taiwanese in Taipei and other cities across the island went on a rampage assaulting Mainlanders and destroying their property (Wachman 1994: 98-99).
obligations to forget reinforced its own antithesis, that the KMT was in fact another foreign regime in Taiwan. Therefore, the great divide between Mainlanders and Taiwanese after the February 28 Incident was intensified by the imposition of a Chinese nationalist discourse that rejected rather than incorporated Taiwanese local culture, language and, perhaps most importantly, collective memory of the White Terror period. Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day* was the first major film to confront the traumatic experience of Mainlanders during the White Terror era.

Sylvia Li-chun Lin explores the trope of slaughter in both film and literature in Taiwan by discussing a body of work that represents the 2/28 Incident and the White Terror period. She suggests that “we [therefore] must be aware that the ways we understand and interpret a given event are intertwined with the ways in which the event is represented” (Lin 2007: 2). However, the White Terror was referred to only in a very small number of TNC films prior to Yang’s masterpiece. The first representation from the victim’s point of view appears at the beginning of *Banana Paradise (Xiangjiao tiantang)*, 1989), directed by Wang Tung, showing three mainlanders who survived the White Terror era. Even though Wang’s film was released only two years after the lifting of martial law in 1987, as Chen Kuan-hsing points out, “the film’s critical stance
towards the state is mediated by the strategy of black humor throughout” (2005: 47). In

*Banana Paradise*, the protagonist has to pretend to be insane after being tortured as a communist suspect, generating comic moments in the film. In contrast, Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day* critically examines the traumatic experience of Xiao Si and his middle school classmates as his father faces political interrogation and persecution under the KMT regime.

In his recent work, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, Michael Berry examines how historical violence and atrocity have been remembered, presented and represented (2008: 2). Examining a range of works such as fiction, film, and other popular media, he argues that these literary and cinematic representations of atrocity “come[s] alive and articulate[s] human experience in ways that traditional historiography is incapable of speaking” (ibid.: 3). In turn, the purpose of his study is not to “call into question traditional historiography” but rather “to offer that there are also other ways to approach history and resurrect the past” (ibid.).

Arguing that the discipline of history is continually being constructed and deconstructed, Berry is most interested in revealing what these representations tell us about history, memory, and the shifting status of national identity. An important
element of Berry’s work that I wish to underscore then is precisely his call for an examination of how difference is represented within the construction of national history, especially a history within the multiethnic and multicultural make-up of the island of Taiwan.

The contradiction of a national history that surrounds Taiwanese cinematic representation of the White Terror period can be approached in terms of trauma theory. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is “not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history” (1995: 5). Launched in the 1980s, TNC is possessed by local history. The repeated possession of TNC by historical traumas began in earnest with its most celebrated manifestation, Hou Hsiao-hsien’s A City of Sadness. In Berry’s discussion of traumatic films, he claims that the 2/28 Incident was “arguably the defining incident in Taiwan’s modern history and the direct catalyst for the White Terror, a long period of political repression and human rights violations taking place under the smokescreen of martial law (2008: 184). This might partly explain why the White Terror has been addressed in a spate of Taiwan films such as A Brighter Summer Day, Good Men, Good Women/ Haonan hannü (dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1994), Super Citizen Ko/Chaoji da guomin (dir. Wan Ren, 1994) and March of Happiness/Tianma

As a traumatic film, *A Brighter Summer Day* has shown how everyday events can trigger sadness and inflict wounds. Some of the victims, such as Xiao Si and Zhang, respond to the traumatic experience of the “White Terror” by exhibiting some of the characteristics that Caruth and Walker describe. Examining the traumatic cinema of the Holocaust in Europe and the United States, such as *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1964) and *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985), Joshua Hirsch argues that these films “responded to the trauma of the Holocaust by rejecting the classical realist forms of film narration traditionally used to provide a sense of mastery over the past, and adopting instead modernist forms of narration that formally repeat the traumatic structure of the experience of witnessing the events themselves” (2004: 14). In Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day*, both the individual and the historical past are constantly recalled to serve the traumatic structure of the experience of witnessing the White
Witness: The Setting of Interrogation

In this section, I will examine the traumatic event experienced by Xiao Si’s father, Zhang, focusing on the scene of interrogation in the Garrison Command. Because Zhang refuses to collaborate in a corruption scheme with his friend Wang Gou, he was reported to the secret police and accused of having connections with the Chinese Communist Party. As a film that deals with the White Terror, *A Brighter Summer Day* portrays the detrimental effects of political oppression. According to Louis Althusser, repressive state apparatuses include the prison, the police, the army and the government (Althusser 1971: 136), and Yang’s film bears witness to the way in which some of these state apparatuses become instruments of trauma on Zhang’s body in the interrogation scenes. This section will analyse these traumatic images by paying attention to the position of the persecutor in these scenes.

As a cinematic re-creation of the White Terror, Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day* takes up the issue of reintegration into society but pays more attention to the betrayal of political ideals. In the following sequence, we will see how Zhang has been
terrorized in a government grilling, forced to fabricate charges against his beliefs and to implicate his acquaintances. While there are many scenes that portray violence in Yang’s film, most of which related to fighting between youth gangs as they mark out and seize their territories, the interrogation scenes deserve special attention because they touch directly upon the role of the state during this political period. Yang uses a series of long, still shots to frame Zhang’s fear, showing how Zhang’s traumatic experience signals the beginning of the collapse of patriarchy. These scenes, I would argue, witness to a historical period that has become a symbol of collective trauma in Taiwan.

Figure 2.1: Empty shot of the roof
Using extreme long shots, Yang keeps the viewer at a distance and denies the viewer access to the victim’s traumatic mental processes. In *A Brighter Summer Day*, Zhang is summoned several times for interrogation. The first interrogation is conducted in broad daylight but it is raining. The first shot (Figure 2.1) is an empty shot of the roof, which indicates that Zhang has been arrested and is now put in an interrogation room. In his voice-off, Zhang speaks out strongly against the interrogator and claims that he did not collaborate with Wang Gou in the corruption scheme. The second shot shows Zhang
being investigated by the interrogator (Figure 2.2). Even though Zhang sits with his back to the camera in the medium shot of the interrogation room, Yang emphasizes Zhang’s righteousness and integrity by showing his upright posture.

After the interrogation, Zhang walks behind the interrogator as they return to his cell. In a long shot both characters are seen walking on the disorderly corridor into the shot’s background (Figure 2.3). In Figure 2.2, we can see a pool of water on the floor, and in Figure 2.3 we can see ice blocks on the corridor. As a later scene will reveal, the ice blocks are used as a means of torture by forcing the victims to sit on them, and the water on the floor is a result of melted ice. However, in these shots, the viewer still has no idea why there is water on the floor or ice blocks on the corridor; it is unclear if Zhang himself is aware of their purpose either. Finally, Zhang is led to the room to rest while he waits for the next interrogation (Figure 2.4). In another long shot that frames the beds in a similar fashion that the corridor is framed in the previous shot, Zhang sits on the bed, beyond the middle ground, in a vast but dreary and gloomy room, his lone tiny figure betraying a feeling of isolation.
Figure 2.5 A medium shot showing the lamp casting a shadow over the dispirited face of Zhang.

Figure 2.6 Zhang notices that another interrogation is taking place.

Figure 2.7 Zhang’s point of view shot shows a prisoner sitting on an ice cube and writing the confession.

Another related scene is conducted in the middle of the night. Zhang is awakened from his sleep and asked about his relationship with his friend Wang Gou, who is regarded as a suspected communist. A medium shot is used to emphasize the exhausted Zhang, who bends his head while answering the question, a stark contrast to
his upright stature when protesting his innocence during the first interrogation (Figure 2.5). More significantly, the shadow of the lamp casts a shadow on the face of a dispirited Zhang, who seems like a docile lion without resistance. When he realizes that he has to confess to his relationship with Wang Gou, Zhang constantly stammers and asks: “Must I write it down?” In fact Zhang is not really asking a question but muttering to himself, showing clearly the extent to which his spirit is now worn.

When he returns to the cell after the interrogation, he passes the corridor again. Compared to a previous similar shot (Figure 2.3), this time the camera is placed in a different way and shows the giant ice blocks on the ground (Figure 2.6). Cutting to a deep-focus shot, Yang then shows Zhang’s point of view of the back of a prisoner sitting on a giant ice block in another interrogation room (Figure 2.7). It now becomes clear that the purpose of the giant ice block is for the prisoner to sit on while writing his confession. While Zhang does not know the other prisoner, a glimpse of his treatment is enough to bring a chill down Zhang’s spine knowing what awaits him if he does not comply with the interrogators.
The next scene cuts to the interrogation room in the daytime when Zhang is focused on writing the confession. Here Yang uses off-screen sounds of footsteps and poundings on doors, which create suspense and tension, as reflected in Zhang’s expression of fear in the shot (figure 2.8), Deducing from the sound of footsteps that he will be facing another interrogation, Zhang says: “It is going to be done soon. Please give me a little more time.” He turns his body slightly to the right and continues writing. However, a voice behind him replies: “OK, all right. You can go. Hurry up!” The voice-off belongs to an interrogator but his face is hidden from view. Instead of using shot/reverse shot, Yang’s long take shows Zhang turning his head with an

Figure 2.8 A median shot conveys Zhang’s lack of joy when he is released.

Figure 2.9 Zhang’s point of view shot showing nobody is out there.
expression of shock on his face, though his shaking shoulders show no sign of joy on
the news of his release (figure 2.8). The next shot is Zhang’s point-of-view shot out of
the open door of the interrogation room, but there is nobody outside (Figure 2.9).

The above shot can be said to be from Zhang’s point of view. It can be argued that
the off-screen sound of footsteps and the interrogator’s voice-off are not necessarily
real but are borne out of Zhang’s imagination because of the pressure he has been
under, as a form of traumatic psychic reaction. Although Zhang was released
immediately, his reaction reflects his sense of insecurity. Due to the constant writing of
confession and repeated interrogation, Zhang’s body has been transformed into a
confessing machine, always imagining itself being tortured.

In their introduction of Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations, E.
Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang argue that analysis of traumatic images in films depends
on how viewers define trauma rather than on the film’s genre. They therefore suggest
four main positions for viewers, namely the position of being introduced to trauma
through a film’s themes; the position of being vicariously traumatized; the position of
being a voyeur; and the position of being a witness (Kaplan and Wang 2004: 9-10). In
particular, the position of being a witness is “arguably the most politically useful
position of the four,” because this position “may open up a space for transformation of
the viewer through empathic identification without vicarious traumatization—an
identification which allows the spectator to enter into the victim’s experience through a
work’s narration” (ibid.:10). I will use the position of the witness to analyze Yang’s *A
Brighter Summer Day*.

One of the key achievements of *A Brighter Summer Day* is precisely in its
expression of the pain of torture and atrocities committed during Taiwan’s “White
Terror” period, which had been absent from Taiwan cinema due to censorship or
self-censorship. The above sequence in which a prisoner sits on the ice cube
emphasizes the violence inflicted on body, a vivid form of traumatic experience.

Through Zhang’s point of view shot, the film bears witness on behalf of the viewer.
Instead of using close-ups, Zhang’s sighting of the torture in another interrogation
room serves a rather different function, stressing political and perceptual complexity
rather than dramatic effect. Consequently, the viewer can be seen as occupying the
position of a witness who shares the traumatic experience during the White Terror
period of the 1950s. Elaine Scarry has written about the political significance of
expressing physical pain, notably in contexts where this is not normally permissible:
The failure to express pain […] will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation (1985: 14).

If this traumatic cinema presents an important opportunity for the public to witness this episode of Taiwan’s history, and if the White Terror era has presented great difficulties for the public to witness its history, *A Brighter Summer Day* has given voice to the individual suffering of some Chinese Mainlanders under the violence of the state apparatus. Notably, the setting of the interrogation bears witness to the suffering of many victims during the White Terror era, which has since become a collective memory through oral history and literature. As Michael Berry argues, the intertwining of individual suffering “explores representations of individual torture through which the ‘body in pain’ becomes increasingly symbolic of the national body in pain” (Berry 2008: 18). Yang questions the political legitimacy of the KMT and its acts of torture during the White Terror period through the witnessing position of Chinese Mainlanders. In other words, the film describes the collapse of the national body through the emerging identity crisis of Chinese Mainlanders in Taiwan.
Parallel: Post-Traumatic Narrative

According to the previous section, Taiwan Garrison Command is the symbol of the state apparatus, and one of the protagonists, Zhang is the primary victim who experienced the unfortunate effects of imprisonment and interrogation, sharing the traumatic experience with the viewers. In the previous section, the political interrogation can be regarded as a traumatic event. In this section, I will focus on the post-traumatic narrative of the son and the father, and how Zhang faced his family members before and after the traumatic event. In A Brighter Summer Day, Yang manipulates the two similar sequences, connoting the presence of trauma as the force of a dialectics of articulation and disarticulation. To be rejected by society, both Zhang and Xiao Si represent self-destructive behaviours on the basis of identity crisis. Two streetwalking scenes in particular bear closer examination.

In Chapter 1, I argue that Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chang Tso-chi have dealt with father figures by focusing on their voicelessness or absences. For Yang, he does not replace the absent father with a salient form of masculinity (Liu 2006). However, he cautions us against longing for the reconstitution of nation, home, and family as they
all point to a distinct and dangerous movement toward totalitarianism, one of the tropes that is consistently negotiated with the KMT regime in his film. By showing the post-traumatic narrative of the ordinary people, be it the local Taiwanese or the Mainlanders, Yang has therefore reconstructed an alternative which tries to act against the grand narrative that the KMT regime has promoted.

According to Kirby Farrell, a “post-traumatic symptom” often emerges whose mission is to help viewers remember what is too painful to recuperate (1998: 11). In particular, emotional detachment is one of the post-traumatic symptoms. On a larger scale, a similar dilemma is often articulated in national cinemas in countries attempting to come to terms with their own humiliating pasts by confronting the task of self-reflexively engaging with a history that resists both remembrance and representation. In his film, Yang draws attention to Zhang’s emotional detachment, as well as dislocation, which leads to the feeling of despair, lost of self-esteem, and frequently depress. Through analysing the parallel sequences and other relevant scenes, I would discuss how Zhang’s attitude changes from being ideal and positive to a more silent and voiceless figure after experiencing a serious political investigation.

This comparative narration of the father’s figure is shown in two scenes, namely
at the dean’s office and on the way back home from school. Like virtually all the
authority figures in *A Brighter Summer Day*, the dean is a miserable tyrant. In the first
sequence, Xiao Si is accused of cheating in an exam. Xiao Si and his friend, Xiao Ma,
sit next to each other in the classroom. The problem is that they had the same wrong
answer on the answer sheet. In fact, Xiao Ma was a person who really tried to cheat.
However, the dean’s treatment of Xiao Si is injustice personified. For the first time,
Zhang went to school because he attempted to prevent his son, Xiao Si, from being
punished. In the scene at the dean’s office, there are two long shots using a fixed
camera. One is the image of the dean and the father from the right side. The first shot
presents Zhang and the dean arguing about Xiao Si, sitting on two sides in stalemate
(Figure 2.10). The next is a medium shot of Xiao Si’s upper body (Figure 2.11). He
stands behind the father and watches his back. The conflict between the father and the
dean provides direct support to Xiao Si.

*Figure 2.10 Long shot shows Zhang arguing with the dean.*
After the meeting with the dean, the father and the son wheel their bikes side by side on their way home. The tracking shot shows the father being extremely angry and supportive of his son: “There’s no justice! How can you teach with such a bureaucratic attitude?” A tracking shot with a still camera records their conversation (figure 2.12), and it shows how a positive father figure plays a significant role in a teenager’s development. By using high-key lighting, Yang manipulates a brighter exterior to highlight the positive father figure. The father insists that he will do everything so that Xiao Si does not need to apologise if he is not at fault. Zhang says to his son: “You must know that your future can be decided by your own hard work,” which is, however, ironic in the context of the film. Like his son, in the previous section Zhang was also falsely implicated as a suspect by Taiwan’s secret police. As mentioned earlier, Zhang seemed shaken and voiceless after the interrogation. Examining a similar scene in
another part of the film, Zhang becomes more emotionally distressed and isolated when his son has assaulted the dean of the school with a baseball bat.

As mentioned in the last section, Zhang has suffered a great deal from the secret investigation. After several days of interrogation, Xiao Si is forced to withdraw from school after being accused of assaulting a school nurse. The second sequence marks a significant turning point in the film. This time, the scene is set inside the dean’s office and was shot during nighttime, different from the natural lighting used in previous scenes. The light in this scene comes mainly from a lamp, similar to the lamp in the interrogation room where Zhang was investigated. Compared with the previous scene (Figure 2.10), Zhang’s attitude has changed dramatically, showing his weakness and voicelessness (Figure 2.13). Zhang was a man who has lost himself after being involved in interrogation. Although he intended to help prevent Xiao Si from being
punished, he was however, afraid to see the dean directly and his voice started to sound lower and lower.

*Figure 2.13 The medium shot conveying a sense of the powerless.*

*Figure 2.14 A similar tracking shot revealing a world of hopelessness.*

According to Janet Walker, it is a commonly accepted idea within trauma theory that cinema tends to “figure the traumatic past as meaningful yet fragmentary, virtually unspeakable” (2005: 43). After a traumatic experience, victims may have problems that they did not have before the event. In Yang’s film, the truth of the past is traumatic, violent, and unspeakable in image. In the second tracking shot, while father and son walk down the street in the nighttime, the streetlights occasionally shine down from almost directly above their faces. In contrast to the previous scene set in the same
location (Figure 2.12), here Yang creates a world of hopelessness (figure 2.14). Unlike before when Zhang was the one setting the rules, this time he is the one who is silent while Xiao Si, on the other hand, is the one comforting him. Xiao Si reassures his father and tells him not to worry about him leaving school and that he is confident about passing the re-examination. Through these parallel scenes, Yang presents a father who has been reduced to wordlessness and who could not face his son, showing only depression and hopelessness. As Yeh and Davis comments on these parallel scenes, Yang provides “a strong institutional association, like schools or prisons, in which extreme mental and physical discipline is enforced” (2005: 107). The father can only respond and talk about another topic. He pulls out a cigarette and murmurs: “If I quit smoking, I can afford to enroll you in a couple of classes on an installment basis from the money that I can save.” From his words, we can understand the complete change in the father’s attitude due to the trauma he had experienced during interrogation. Even though it can be seen in his eyes that he cares about the son, he is now far from the idealistic intellectual he once was.

Unlike the interrogation scene in the film—which create a scared, isolated, sense of suffering—the streetwalking scene is related to the post-traumatic symptom.
The interrogation scene is all about punishment, which can be regarded as the feeling of power and ability to inflict pain. Zhang had suffered traumatically from the discipline and torture of the state-supported institutions. John Anderson comments on these parallel scenes, “the contrast between the two sequences—the first of a father, one who is righteous and courageous, the second, that of a shattered man—is certainly among the film’s more horrifying dualities” (2005: 60). As Anderson indicates, Zhang’s dignity is manifested not just in the fact that he has been assaulted when his belief has been attacked by state power, but in the hollow and sunken face and the skinny body: he seems to embody weakness where his torturers embody strength.

One of the reasons that the two above sequences play such a crucial part in A Brighter Summer Day is that Zhang experiences a sense of trauma. He suffers traumatic symptoms brought about by past trauma that has been repressed. For Xiao Si, the trauma is rooted in lies, injustice and prejudice. For Zhang, the trauma is rooted in his denial of his emotional attachment to the state apparatus, as well as his illusion about his traumatic experience of being interrogated at the Garrison Command.

As mentioned before, Zhang was taken away by the secret police and interrogated for a number of days, a traumatic experience that permanently scars him. In this
domestic scene, following Xiao Si’s younger brother stealing and pawning his mother’s watch, which causes the outburst from the father, we can see how Zhang whips the boy seriously. In addition to this scene, he becomes a harsher parent, brutally beating his son for pawning his mother’s watch (figure 2.15). As Xiao Si comes back later, he climbs over the fence and witnesses the whole process of the punishment.

According to Caruth, traumatic events are never fully assimilated in the present but they take time to manifest themselves, often migrating to a different place and a later time to make their impact felt. She terms the temporal dislocation that she identifies within trauma “inherent latency,” writing that “since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (1995: 8). Following a traumatic event, Zhang reacts in different ways, experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. This might explain why his violent attitude has been addressed in the following traumatic symptom.

*Figure 2.15 Xiao Xi’s point-of-view shot showing the “violent” father being out of control.*
Here, Yang uses not only a point-of-view shot of Xiao Si but also a long distance framing. Although we cannot see the faces of the family members including Xiao-Si’s father, mother, brother and sister, we can still see that it is the most violent and dramatic performance of Zhang in the film through the fierce act of hitting the son with the cane while the elder sister and mother try to separate them. Through an extreme long shot, Yang creates a violent father figure who reestablishes his patriarchal status in his own family. Seeing the world from Xiao Si’s perspective, in particular, the violent figure is related to Zhang’s traumatic experience or reminds him of the event in any way. In other words, it is not surprising that Xiao Si kills Xiao Ming at the end of the film since it is an action copied from his father’s example, aiming to relate it to the father’s traumatic experience.

Darkness: The Portrayal of Violence

This section will discuss how the second generation of Chinese Mainlanders, Xiao Si, who is involved in serious crimes more than once, seek to rebuild his cultural identity in order to symbolically fight against injustice and inequality, which are the causes of
his withdrawal from school. I will analyse two murder scenes to explore how the
patriarchal system rebuilt for Xiao Si and his friends in society is gradually destroyed
by the oppressive state apparatuses.

By mapping the image of Taipei in *A Brighter Summer Day*, Yang is not only
deconstructing the family structure and the patriarchal ideologies in Chinese culture,
but also in a way challenging the national identity constructed by the KMT regime,
During the martial law period, when as A-chin Hsiau notes, it “controlled various civic
organizations and schools as well as state apparatus, playing a central role in
maintaining political stability” (2000: 65). Public security personnel took posts in
workplaces and schools to report on the political views and activities of employees and
students. Therefore, the drive to supervise and punish became systematized and
bureaucratized, and spread to reach almost all islanders (including Taiwanese and
Chinese Mainlanders), particularly intellectuals. As mentioned previously, like school
and prison, Yang’s cinematic strategies find parallels with his traumatic narrative
patterns. In *A Brighter Summer Day*, the first generation of Chinese Mainlanders such
as Zhang basically believes the KMT can realise the promise of returning to the
Mainland China. For Zhang, a traumatic experience produced emotional shock and
causes many emotional problems. The second generation such as Xiao Si, on the contrary, fights against the school’s dean (who represents patriarchy and the state apparatus) and the 217 Gang, which is a mainlander gang from a working class district, and finally, to kill his girlfriend Xiao Ming.

Nothing is stable in Yang’s film, and conjoining the mysteries of adolescence with the historical tension of the “White Terror” makes the film arguably a traumatic film about the oft-misapprehended difference between the teenage and adult worlds. "Brighter Summer Day" thus can be understood as a “coming of age” film. For the director, the traumatic experience is the main purpose for creating this film. The film is inspired by real events, and Yang said that it “really reflects on the oppression that we were living under during that time” (Berry 2005: 283). In other words, the Mao Wu event brought a huge shock to the director and was also the most crucial topic in the history from below. Thus Yang believed that he had to make this film, because “it is an incident in modern Chinese history that I felt deserved to be recorded and remembered” (ibid.: 283). According to Yang’s words, the film is not only derived from the director’s traumatic memory itself, but also poses a central question for contemporary national identity. Thus, although the film cannot be accurately described as an
autobiographical film, the director’s own recollections of the depicted historical events would constitute the substrate of the fictional dramatization. This viewpoint of the film is further evidenced by its visual style which, at strategic moments, stresses a subjective point of view.

In order to visualize the historical atrocity, *A Brighter Summer Day* neither concerns itself with shock effects nor does it use a lot of close-ups. Instead of heightening the dramatic effect, the main characteristic figure of style in Yang’s film is the use of long shots. Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis note a particular visual style used in *A Brighter Summer Day*, which they call “tunnel vision”:

In tunnel vision, darkness often surrounds and frames the space. Depth is enhanced through pools of light and shadow, which sometimes confuse one’s perception of distance. A lighted window or bulb in the distance will immediately attract attention overriding dark spaces in the foreground. We call these setups “tunnel visions” because they pierce a given space and thereby channel attention through a gauntlet of obstructing views, giving the shot a strong inward pull, as well as screening out larger social and political dimensions until just the right moment (Yeh and Davis 2005: 104-105).

Different from the position of a voyeur, tunnel vision does not create the dramatic effects seen in horror films, but emphasizes Mainland Chinese characters in the larger
political and social repression of the White Terror period. Using long shots through
doorways, arches, windows and various tunnel visions, Yang intends to produce the
oppressive atmosphere of the White Terror. If *A Brighter Summer Day* is said to
provide a number of expressive traumatic images, the tunnel vision of Edward Yang
can be considered as the visual form of constructing ethnic identity and exposing the
nature of traumatic memory. Therefore, Yang’s tunnel vision should be taken into
account, so as to understand the traumatic experiences among Mainland Chinese,
Taiwanese and the political authority from the perspective of a witness.

Generally speaking, the narrative of Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day* has been
occupied by violent gang activities. Notably, the protagonist Xiao Si gets involved in
the conflict between the 217 gang and local gangs. Local gangs and Honey’s Little
Park are allies in this conflict. Honey used to be the leader of the Little Park, to which
a number of Xiao Si’s classmates belong. After Honey died in a car accident that was
clearly planned by Shandong, the local gang in turn plans to fight against Shandong’s
217 gangs. Since Honey was Xiao Si’s role model, Xiao Si is willing to be a part of the
plan to kill Shandong. Xiao Si was followed by the local gangs and entered the
poolroom operated by Shandong to conduct the murder. In the blackout on a typhoon
night, death creeps in under the cover of the storm. The revenge scene took place in the dark poolroom with chiaroscuro lighting that contributes to real-life violence. In this revenge, although Xiao Si did not actually kill anyone, he began to consider himself as the protector of Xiao Ming, Honey’s ex-girlfriend, since he witnessed the death of Shandong.

In the revenge scene, it is worth noticing the long take where Xiao Si witnessed Shandong wounded seriously lying on the ground and gasping for breath. Yang used long distance framing, with light from Xiao Si’s flashlight being the only light source. In the entirely dark interior space, we can only distinguish the positions of characters through the faint light and tiny sound. The flashlight was shaky at first and then focused on Shandong’s body.

*Figure 2.15 Shandong is lying on the floor and nearly dead.*

The flashlight that Xiao Si plays with is not only a source of light in this scene but
points to the main theme of the film in relation to the switching on and off of lights.

Although there is lack of light in the interior space in this scene (figure 2.15), the viewer can tell that the one lying on the ground was Shandong based on the groans of pain. In this revenge scene, Xiao Si is foregrounded as a witness of events occurring in a dark place. Although Xiao Si took a Japanese sword with him, he did not commit the murder or even hurt anyone. Xiao Si just asks Shandong once: “Did you really kill Honey?” Of course, he never received a response. According to Xiao Si’s question, however, he eventually get revenge for his friend, Honey.

Finally, the above reading is by no means one that *A Brighter Summer Day* seeks self-consciously to encourage. In other words, the film has overtly subverted its construction of Xiao Si’s subjective positioning, which reaches its climax with his witnessing of the killing of Shandong, who is killed by a local gang while he tries to escape from his house. But what is remarkable about this sequence is the oblique, elliptical rendering of the killing: we neither see Xiao Si stabbing nor do we see Shandong being killed; we only see his body crawling slowly along the ground using his bloody arms. The long take is symbolically ended by reattaching Xiao Si’s voice to Shandong’s body, thus sealing the fate of the minority of Mainland Chinese exile, the
people shown on the image track. Importantly, Yang creates a witnessing position that provides an omniscient perspective of the characters’ lives. In this way, the most seemingly empathic identification—the witnessing position—is made to confront the highly dramatic and corporeal reality of traumatic experience.

By addressing this historical event, Yang has not only rebuilt the street scene, but also expressed the subversive nature of his film. This case is significant because this hidden history mainly concerns Chinese mainlanders who faced challenges in a developing national identity in the 1960s. Instead of establishing an official narrative of the murder, Yang attempts to look deep into the frustrations that the teenagers (especially second generation mainlanders) were facing at the time. Moreover, he has constructed an alternative discourse that subverts the KMT’s ideologies that I have mentioned earlier in this chapter. Coupled by the use of low-key lighting, which has created a gloomy atmosphere, the murder scene then is portrayed as a site of trauma. In terms of the film’s style, however, Yang, as Yeh points out, “is less interested in reworking the gangster genre than in rewriting the role of gangsterism and rackets in the context of the Chinese diaspora in postwar Taiwan” (2009: 85). The film is, ultimately, not a gangster film but about the traumatic collective memory of second
generation mainlanders during the White Terror era.

At the end of the film, the final murder scene marks precisely the pain of national trauma. Ming is originally the girlfriend of Honey. Because she lost her father in the Chinese civil war, Ming and her mother depend on relatives in Taiwan who take them in grudgingly. After Honey’s death, Ming grows closer to Xiao Si, who becomes almost flighty in his happiness with her. Meanwhile, she also becomes closer to Xiao Si’s best friend, Ma, who is able to treat her with the respect and care she craves. When he discovers that Ming is also becoming intimate with his best friend, Xiao Si decided to take revenge on Ming. Here, the representation of the incident rises silently to a chilling moment of climactic violence, but its mode is undramatic. In this sequence, Yang cuts, first and foremost, to Ming in medium shot (Figure 2.16) angrily telling Xiao Si, “You are just like all the rest. You cannot change me. You want me to change? I am like the world. The world will never change.” In response to her words, Xiao Si stabs Ming several times, embracing her as the life ebbs from her, then her head lolling on Xiao Si’s shoulder. He screams at her, “You are hopeless and shameless,” a retort that applies equally, in his equation, to the world at large. Finally, Yang cuts from the medium shot of their dance of death to a wider extreme long shot that takes in the
activity surrounding them (figure 2.17). The distance framing demonstrates that everyday life flows on around them, oblivious to their personal tragedy. The background image shows a crowd of people continuing to enjoy themselves, taking no notice of the catastrophe unfolding in their midst.

Figure 2.16 Ming argues with Xiao Si.

Figure 2.17 A wider extreme long shot showing the death of Ming

In addition to this murder scene, Yang deliberately distances himself, trying to objectively reflect this traumatic event that he recalled as a youth. Furthermore, the wider framing catches both the murder and the historical background of the event. We can see in the shot the unusual calm of the crowd despite the low-key lighting. With
violence rampant in the dimly lit space, everyone is without a face, whether the rogues beaten up in the street or the intellectuals imprisoned in the interrogation room. No one had noticed a girl was killed. Yang’s aesthetics of the long shot thus conveys the meaning of darkness, trauma, and the failure of rebellion against the state during the martial law period. The murder scene reminds viewers that the murder incident has the effect of making the past more vivid. Moreover, viewers become witnesses of the violence, experiencing the traumatic event through the use of long shots.

To combine screaming sounds, shadows, flashlight and the darkness of space, the above extreme long shot is a ‘tunnel vision’ setup showing Xiao Ming being killed, pushing the violent confrontation to the edges of, or even off the screen. It is important to note that such setups are often used in this film, in which Yang avoids the use of medium close-ups in scenes of emotional intensity. Instead, he favours the use of extreme wide shots to depict violence and emotional expression. Here, the use of extreme wide shot in fact collapses memory and history, that is, while inviting the viewer to engage sympathetically with Xiao Si’s subjective experience in the foreground, the Taiwanese “coming of age” wound occurs against a historical and traumatic background that appears to be “always already there”.

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Much has been written about the changing fabric of memory in TNC. We need to understand the place of *A Brighter Summer Day* in the contemporary culture of memory and memorializing, and the film in turn may help us understand that past. These images are traumatic, but they are also welcome as a means of preserving memories of the traumatic past. In other words, after seeing the murder scene, which evokes collective memory of our culture, it can be considered as the reflection of the identity crisis of Chinese mainlanders. Yang’s film thus crystalizes the hope that TNC will continue to provide a witness position from the site of trauma.

**Conclusion: Traumatic History from Below**

To sum up, Yang’s film deals with a subculture of Chinese mainlanders who fled to Taiwan after the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949. They were living in a state of uncertainty and some had taken to forming street gangs for a sense of safety and control. In the previous chapter, the films by Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chang Tso-chi adopt everyday narratives to provide both an individual experience and a collective memory in terms of rewriting history. In contrast, Yang rewrites history by depicting a traumatic experience based on a real event. By analysing the development of the main
characters, I have shown that they portray diverse traumatic bodies. In other words, Yang shares with us the perspective of his witnesses of a past traumatic event. From their perspective, there is an interaction among viewers, characters and the traumatic events in selected scenes.

*A Brighter Summer Day* is an epic achievement, and merges the personal and political to reveal a traumatic wound for an entire nation. Yang’s film engages with traumatic memories of oppression, violence and injustice in relation to history. In Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day*, moreover, writing a history from below is one of the primary purposes of his filmmaking. In other words, the film is a traumatic film that challenges the official historical narrative through the representation of a social event during the martial law period.

Finally, this chapter argues that the film as a whole suggests the dislocation and violence experienced by Chinese mainlanders who are adrift between patriotism and individualism. The older generation such as Zhang became more weak and powerless, while the next generation such as Xiao Si became involved in gang warfare. With the aesthetics of the long shot, Yang shows the intention of rewriting national history and highlights the traumatic narrative of the Chinese mainlanders. Through the murder
scenes, he further reconstructs the mythical formation of Chinese nationalism. Thus, the film shows the intertwined perils of personal, ethnic and national identity. If in trauma theory “the impact of past crimes in a nation-state may evidence itself in the form of ‘cultural symptoms’ analogous to those in individuals” (Kaplan 2005: 68), then *A Brighter Summer Day* appears to be suffering from the compulsion to repeat the enactment of crimes. Alternatively, the film delves into the historical and social predicament of Taiwan by rethinking through the trauma, displacement and culture of the times.
Part Two: Popularity
Chapter Four:

Political Satire:

Wan Jen’s *The Taste of Apples* and Wu Nien-jen’s *Buddha Bless America*

This chapter discusses two films set in the post-Cold War period, namely, Wan Jen’s *The Taste of Apples* (1983) and Wu Nien-jen’s *Buddha Bless America* (1996), and explores aspects of neocolonial anxiety and cultural ambiguity in TNC. Following the release of the four-part episode film *In Our Times* (1982), which succeeded in garnering excellent reviews and earned unexpected profits at the box office, the state-owned film company CMPC produced the next episode of the series. *The Sandwich Man* (1983) consists of *Son’s Big Doll, Vicki’s Hat*, and *The Taste of Apples*. *The Taste of Apples* was the last, but the most political among the three films. Moreover, *The Taste of Apples* satirizes the late 1960s fascination with American popular culture, and the implication of Cold War policy between the United States and Taiwan. Coincidently, the scriptwriter of *The Taste of Apple* Wu Nien-jen is also the director of the satirical film, *Buddha Bless America*. Using satire to criticize or poke
fun at authority, *Buddha Bless America* is set is the 1960s, at the height of U.S. involvement in Taiwan, when troops and military advisors were flooded onto the island. At the time, Taiwan and the American army very close due to their shared interest in containing communism.

In this chapter, I would argue that these two filmmakers not only offer a critical angle on neocolonial awareness, but also engage with issues of linguistic diversity, racial hierarchy, and cultural translation. This chapter establishes the satirical links between the two films through context and sequence analysis. The objective is to demonstrate that they are two aspects of the same historical representation, and to indicate the sub-genre of comedy deployed to investigate or question Western modernization and Cold War Taiwan. More significantly, by using satire as a mode of comedy, both films open a window to the political struggle in Cold War Taiwan, and lead the critique of cultural neocolonialism in TNC.

**Political Satire**

Satire belongs to a genre of humour that is intentionally cynical or critical, and it is often confused with parody. According to Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, parody
emphasizes “aesthetic conventions” while satire “works to mock and attack” (1990: 19). This chapter demonstrates that the films use satire to highlight the cultural resistance in both films. The difference between parody and satire is addressed in this chapter. Several modes of comedy are double-edged, and satire is the sharpest of all its modes in this respect.

Satire has had moments of popularity in the history of humour. It was apparently related to pedagogy among the Ancient Greeks and Romans, a classic example of whom was Aristophanes, whose comedies were not part of everyday life but special performances at symposia through which the elite demonstrated its superiority over the masses through the use of mocking humour (King 2002: 94). However, by the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Europe, satire was mainly a literary activity with a revolutionary social and political purpose, aimed at challenging the control of the elite through ideology. According to John Peck and Martin Coyle, during the golden age of satire in English literature (between the late seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century), “the common feature of all satirical works is that they present a picture of people in society, and by exaggerating or distorting the picture draw attention to how people often act in an outrageous or absurd manner” (2002: 170). In
other words, the link between politics and satire has been long established.

From the 1960s, satire has been frequently used in film and television to comment on social and political events, and to expose rhetoric and mystification. A considerable number of films featured political satire, such as *Bob Roberts* (dir. Tim Robbins, 1992), *Wag the Dog* (dir. Barry Levinson, 1997), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (dir. Michael Moore, 2004), and *Team America* (dir. Trey Barker, 2004). For example, the outcry caused by *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Team America*, which focused on post-September 11th American politics with respect to the Middle East and terrorism, demonstrates that satirical films have a critical edge. The films of Wan Jen and Wu Nien-jen, in their interweaving of satire, social comment and farce, conform to an established nativist literary tradition in Taiwan in the 1970s and the early 1980s. As Ming-yan Lai indicates, “Nativist literature’s conscious social criticism and its advocates’ provocative political positions drew public attention and posed significant challenges to the state’s vision and construction of modernity” (2008: 41). More importantly, nativist literature, such as Huang Chunming’s short story *The Taste of Apples*, is often treated as political satire that criticizes Japanese colonialism or American imperialism. In other words, while the Vietnam war may provide the backdrop to the narrative of *The Taste of Apples*, the
film is really about the effects of American imperialism and neocolonialism on the Taiwanese people.

*The Taste of Apples* is a satire about how a serious car accident of a Taiwanese worker turns into something good for his family. One morning a Taiwanese worker, Ah-Fa, is hit by a car by an American colonel in the early morning, and is taken to the American army hospital. To inform the labourer’s family, the nationalist government officer accompanied an American colonel through a slum in Taipei. The labourer’s family is then taken to the American army hospital to see the patient, in recovery from an operation. In order to compensate for the car accident he inflicted on the Taiwanese labourer, the American colonel gives a large sum of money to the man and his family and offers to pay for the education for his deaf-mute daughter in the United States. The film ends with the family eating apples for the first time, presented to them by the American colonel as a gift.

The script for *The Sandwich Man* was written by Wu Nien-jen, the most noteworthy screenwriter of TNC. As an up and coming writer, Wu began publishing short stories in the early 1970s. He started writing screenplays in 1978, and was hired to work in CMPC’s production unit in 1981 (Yeh & Davis, 2005: 68). During the TNC
movement, his major screenplays included *The Sandwich Man* (1983), *That Day on the Beach* (1983), and *Dust in the Wind* (1986). In the 1990s, Wu directed his first feature film, *A Borrowed Life* (1994), an autobiographical and nostalgic depiction of his father, and his difficult transition from the period of Japanese occupation to that of post-war Taiwan. His second feature, *Buddha Bless America*, is a political comedy with a touch of satire that dramatizes U.S. military manoeuvres and their effect on a Taiwanese local village in the 1960s.

The narrative of political satire often engages social and national subjects. To understand Wan and Wu’s satirical style, it is useful to review the emergence of TNC. Both filmmakers began their careers during the new wave. The totalitarian power of the KMT (Kuomintang) in the early 1980s became more fragile. More importantly, the decline of authoritarian political systems began with the death of Chiang Kai-shek in 1975. When the new wave emerged, young directors began to seek new cinematic approaches, such as social realism. TNC promotes social realism, cinematic innovation and local culture as a critique response to political propaganda and commercial genre films of the 1970s. Taiwanese filmmakers, as Douglas Kellner argues, “have produced an excellent series of films to explore social tensions and problems in cinematically
compelling and often original ways, blending social realism with modernist innovation” (1998: 101). Considerations of social realism in TNC have to take into account the influence of domestic filmmaking on narrative film form.

*The Taste of Apples* uses a satirical perspective to show that the protagonist received a basket of imported apples as compensation from the U.S. army. However, the satirical tone in this short film angered a local film critic. After an advance screening for journalists, conservative critics complained that the episode presented the Taiwanese too negatively, and the resulting uproar even led to deleting final scene where the children taste the imported apple (Kellner 1998: 104). Finally, CMPC ordered eight changes to the short film, involving dialogue, tone, behaviour, and the outdoor location shots in relation to images of poverty in the capital city. Nevertheless, director Wan Jen, writer Huang Chun-Ming, producer Xiao Ye, and screenwriter Wu Nien-jen discovered the plot and with the help of a journalist exposed it to ridicule in the local press.

The so-called “apple-peeling incident” brought publicity to struggles over means of expression in films and highlighted issues of artistic freedom (Yeh and Davis 2005: 60-62). It can be seen as a political event under the totalitarian power of the KMT in
the 1980s. Such a critical controversy highlights TNC’s relative ambitiousness. In response to the “apple-peeling incident,” I-Fen Wu suggested, “The success that *Sandwich Man* achieved at the box office loosened the strict censorship policies, gradually allowing the CMPC to be more flexible and more supportive of new directors and their individual styles” (2006: 366). In other words, Wan’s *The Taste of Apples* dramatically changed the Taiwan film industry, the regulation policy, and the film critic culture. More importantly, the controversy created interest in the manner in which the satirical tone influences the interpretation of the film.

The early 1980s was a time of drastic social change in Taiwan. A more open political and social atmosphere was a crucial contributing factor to the rise of the TNC. As Berry and Lu argues, “in the years that followed there were many works on the cutting edge thematically, because of their focus on local Taiwan history and society, and cinematically because of their pursuit of the observational realism associated with Hou Hsiao Hsien or the modernist expressionism associated with Edward Yang” (Berry and Lu 2005: 6). In other words, this trend of alternative filmmaking, gradually switched its attention from traditional Chinese culture to a culture that focused on the local historical experiences in postwar Taiwan. The films of Wan and Wu, however,
are noteworthy because of the tone of satire. They are willing to present its society statically and critically and to underline social tensions in a way never attempted by previous conservative, propaganda films. Both filmmakers consistently use jokes and comical images in their political satire. If this form of cultural representation can be referred to as political satire, it must also be historicized. This chapter will demonstrate that *The Taste of Apple* and *Buddha Bless America* use a particular satirical target that focuses on the past, Cold War experiences, and working-class everyday life.

*The Taste of Apples*

Much of TNC has been a search for cultural and national identity. For example, Wang Tung’s *Strawman/Dao cao ren* (1987) and *Banana Paradise/Siangjiao tiantang* (1989) focused on innocent and ignorant ordinary people and the working class, and captured the absurd nature of everyday events that occurred in rural areas during the Japanese occupation period and early KMT rule. Conversely, Ang Lee attracted international attention with his relatively urban comedies, *The Wedding Banquet/Si yan* (1992) and *Eat Drink Man Woman/Yin shi nan nu* (1994). Born in 1950, Wan Jen graduated from the Department of foreign languages in Soochow University. Wan studied filmmaking
at Columbia College in Hollywood, where he made two student films, *Morning Dream/Che meng* (1979) and *Perplexed/Miwang* (1981), both winners of Best 16-mm Film prizes at the Golden Harvest Awards in Taiwan. After returning from the United States, he was invited to direct *The Taste of Apples*. Wan Jen’s career in the 1980s, however, appears difficult to reconcile with the main features of the TNC, such as autobiographical elements and elliptical narratives. This difficulty is captured by Yeh and Davis, who delineate the contradiction between Wan’s style and content as follows:

Wan Jen’s career in the 1980s, especially his attempt to be assimilated into the commercial establishment and his insistence on making socially relevant films, typifies problems of the New Cinema in relation to the realities of commercial production (2005: 84-85).

In contrast to the main features of New Cinema, the most distinctive style of Wan’s films relates to political satire. His films in the 1980s including *The Taste of Apples, Ah Fei/You ma cai zi* (1983), *Super Citizen/Chaoji shimin* (1986) and *Farewell Coast/Xi bie haian* (1987), depict traditional identities coming into conflict with an urban life. As John Lent notes, Wan’s films are “more audience-oriented (audiences were tiring of films about the past) and less expensive (pictures of the past require automobiles and
settings of those periods)” (Lent 1990: 86). In particular, *The Taste of Apples* is his first work that can be considered political satire, and is one of the most representative of Wan’s films to date.

**Contrasting Colours between Two Worlds**

*The Taste of Apples* unfolds a series of images of poverty, Cold War politics, and the transformation of urban public space. Throughout the film, the contrasting colours, such as black and white, provide two distinct spaces, and also demonstrate the difference between the authoritarian state and an ordinary member of the subaltern. Because the film is set during the Cold War period, Wan questions the legitimacy of the superpower, that is, the neocolonialism of the United States, and depicts Taipei as a city colonized by the U. S. In this selection, I will argue that Wan uses contrasting colours to shape the visuality of the screen space to achieve dramatic effects.

In *The Taste of Apples*, Wan uses contrasting colours to question the type of economic and political strategies that helped keep Taiwan in a state of underdevelopment. Colours, especially contrasting colours, have their own symbolic meanings. For example, red, yellow, and orange are associated with warmth, and blue
and black are associated with coldness. In the opening sequence of *The Taste of Apples*, Wan depicts a serious car accident involving a Taiwanese labourer on a street in Taipei city. After a dark green sedan crashes into a rickety old bike, we see a solitary salted egg that accompanied the rice lying smashed at the edge of the safety island. A wide shot frames the puddle of congealed blood on the ground, which indicates a motor vehicle accident (Figure 3.1). As the camera slowly zooms in, the scene turns into a flesh red (Figure 3.2), depicting the blood and injury to A-Fa’s body caused by the accident. Subsequently, the image of blood dissolves to the next shot, which is a dark gray slum area in the heart of the capital (Figure 3.3).

*Figure 3.1 A wide shot frames the puddle of congealed blood on the ground.*

*Figure 3.2 The scene turns into a flash red.*
The cinematic colour function of depicting the city in red is used to satirize the social and political geography. On the use of a single colour on the screen, Natalie M. Kalmus (2006: 26) suggests that red can refer to “a feeling of danger, or a warning” Here, red is a colour that represents violence, although red colour symbolizes prosperity in Chinese culture. By using a dissolve technique, contrasting colours are related from shot to shot, and also create a satirical tone. The dissolve briefly superimposes the end of shot A (a puddle of flash red blood) on the beginning of shot B (a slum area). Both images are briefly shown on screen simultaneously, and the screen shows the slum area as flash red for approximately one second because the dissolve creates a connection between shot A and shot B. The camera zooms in and subsequently focuses on a close-up of Ah-Fa’s bloodshed (Figure 3.2) in the car accident scene to show the effect of the violence of the American car on a Taiwanese labourer. The focus then shifts from the blood (Figure 3.2) to the living space of the poor (Figure 3.3), drawing a parallel between the two. In other words, the composition of the two shots as the size and shape of the blood is almost identical to that of the

*Figure 3.3 A dark gray slum area in the heart of the capital.*
An establishing shot of the slum is also used as a metaphor in relation to the fate of the working class family. The slum area is the place where the protagonist Ah-Fa and his family live. Ping-hao Chen commented on this scene, stating that, “Wan Jen’s camera zooms in and then fixes on a close-up of Ah-Fa’s blood shed in the opening accident scene to show that, to the working class the city brings more harm than gain” (2009: 150). Wan’s framing of the cityscape, in other words, can be viewed as inserting a Taiwanese labourer as an urban victim into the image of the city. In addition, from an aerial perspective, this establishing shot shows a desolate and gray urban landscape.

Cut to the next shot, in which the foreign affairs police and the American colonel arrive at the slum area to inform Ah-Fa’s wife. The slum area is depicted as messy (Figure 3.4). Using long shots, the following sequence displays a mass of rooftops made of sheet metal and plastic covers. A subsequent empty shot shows an array of wooden crates, glass bottles, and birdcages on some roofs. The slum is located at the centre of the capital city, but it has messy lanes without streetlights and a lack of clean roads. In addition to the gray colour scheme, the location shot explores a dynamic
relation between characters and locale. Focusing on urban development and cultural identity in TNC, Yomi Braester argues that the film’s location generates a sense of collapse of a national history and collective memory. In his words, The Taste of Apples “breaks new ground by focusing on the aftermath of citywide planning, and shows an urban environment built on the ruins of its former architecture and identity” (2010: 193). This indicates that the transformation of the city resulted in the crisis of the working class.

![Figure 3.4 The slum area is depicted as messy.](image)

The American colonel briefly comments on the urban ghetto, “What a great place for a game of hide-and-seek!” According to his words, the film reveals that American colonel disparages developing countries such as Taiwan. As John A. Lent notes, the film “showed the poverty and humiliation of Taiwan’s poorer classes” (1990: 84). Compared to the following scene in the American hospital, the gloomy images in the slum area represent a slum as a living space for the working class family during the
Cold War period in Taiwan.

The colour scheme helps to structure the film as a political satire by providing a contrast between Taiwanese living space and American modernist buildings, thus highlighting the oppressed situation of the working class. Yeh and Davis argue that the slum “functions as a visual motif, the ‘spectacle’ of Taiwan’s Third privation in need of American aid” (2005: 82). The contrasting colours associated with these modes of living are underscored by the narrative space in which each character lives. For example, the contrasting colours between Ah-Fa’s home and the American hospital underscore the gap between the working class and upper class. Ah-Fa’s house is dominated by gray furniture, gloomy illuminations and a broken roof. In particular, the point of view shot from the perspective of the American colonel (Figure 3.5) shows Ah-Fa’s youngest deaf-mute daughter doing housework. This medium shot reveals that the room is rough in texture, and the furniture appears more casually placed than in the hospital. In the slum scene, as Chen Ping-hao argues, the inhabitants “piece together and pole up their temporary ‘homes’ with bricks, tin, metal sheets, and wood, forming a layer-clustered and montage-like construction without any order, offensive to official urban-planning” (2009: 158). By contrast, the American military hospital is
considerably brighter (Figure 3.6), and features white decorations such as sofas, painted walls and silk curtains. The younger brother, Ah-ji, comments on the American hospital, stating, “The sheets are white, the blankets, even the bed. So are the windows and the walls.” In the hospital scene, Wan creates a hazy, dreamlike world with help from soft-focus filters.

![Figure 3.5 Ah-Fa’s youngest deaf-mute daughter “in need of American aid.”](image)

**Figure 3.5 Ah-Fa’s youngest deaf-mute daughter “in need of American aid.”**

![Figure 3.6 The American hospital is considerably brighter.](image)

**Figure 3.6 The American hospital is considerably brighter.**

The film favoured outdoor locations, but also used a studio setting, especially in the hospital scenes. Therefore, it explores the contrast between natural and artificial lighting, and draws a line between Ah-Fa’s living place and the American military hospital. Ah-Fa’s family looks very excited to walk around in the American military
hospital (Figure 3.6). Focused on the hospital wall, the potential of colour to function is not solely motivated by the emotional register of melodramatic comedy. In other words, the colour scheme and satirical narrative space in the film do not simply establish a binary opposition between the Taiwanese working class and a foreign authority.

The final scene shows that the family members of the injured Ah-Fa’s family room are not entirely enjoying American apples in the hospital room. In the film, the face of each family member is shown as they take their first bites, but they say nothing. They feel that the apples are not as sweet as they had imagined (Figure 3.7). In other words, the taste of apples is slightly sour and pulpy. In addition to this scene, Wan uses soft-focus and high lighting to soften the background, while keeping the subject crispy sharp, such as Ah-Fa’s two little boys (Figure 3.7). For them, it is difficult to tell whether it’s sweet or sour. Focusing on the colour of red, moreover, an “American apple” here can be regarded as a cultural symbol of U.S. luxury and of Taiwanese fascination with American material goods and culture during the Cold War period. It is also “satire,” and signifies the emotional reaction that underscores the familial and social pressures on a working-class family.
Language Diversity and Comic Interaction

In this section, I would contend that another crucial satirical element in *The Taste of Apples* is linguistic diversity. In 1980s Taiwan, the loosening of censorship was most obvious in the use of dialogue. Before the lifting of martial law, KMT government forbid the use of Taiwanese languages and only allowed the use of Mandarin Chinese in public settings and at school (Liao 2002: 435). The trio of short films, *The Taste of Apples* displays a black humour with multiple linguistic expressions in several scenes. Language is crucial because it indicates the regional and class location of the speakers. James Udden states that *The Taste of Apples* “carries a mishmash of English, Mandarin and Taiwanese, which is no less accurate because of the types of characters involved (American soldiers, American nurses, *Waishengren* soldiers and a *Benshengren* working class family who have moved to Taipei in search of better opportunities)” (2009: 56). This film addresses the problems of the working class, women, children,
and various marginalized and oppressed groups, as well as the transition from rural to urban environments, and the issue of language diversity.

Figure 3.8 A local labourer is hit by a car driven by an American military figure.

_The Taste of Apples_ begins with a car accident. The opening sequence depicts the empty cityscape of Taipei during the early morning hours. It shifts from an empty cityscape to a slow motion sequence, in which a local labourer is hit by a car driven by an American military figure (Figure 3.8). After the car accident, a long shot shows the labourer (named Ah-Fa) lying on the street, and a black sedan with an American flag. This shot emphasizes a traumatic event, which cannot be considered a simple car accident, but a clash between an American colonel and a Taiwanese labourer. The scene suddenly cuts to a building, and the establishing shot sets up the beginning of the next scene. As the camera zooms into the building, the American embassy in Taipei, Wan starts the location shot with the phone ringing. Cut to the next interior scene in the American embassy, in which the secretary picks up the phone and starts the
conversation with Colin Grant, the driver of the car in the accident:

Secretary: Hello, this is a second junior secretary to investor of America.
Grant: This is Colin Grant. Is Chairman back this morning?
Secretary: Colin Grant, no. He wouldn’t be here this morning.
Grant: Well, I had a car accident this morning.
Secretary: I’ve already heard about that accident. Don’t worry. I can handle a matter like this.
Grant: But I hit a guy here...
Secretary: Is he a labourer? Is he…he is a labourer, isn’t he?
Grant: As far as I know, yes.
Secretary: Listen. This is the Asian country with which we have the closest cooperation and friendship. So, I don’t think it should be a problem. However, the President will be very unhappy if there was any trouble with the local people or the government.
Grant: What do I do?
Secretary: I’ll take care of the details. You take the family to the hospital, and I’ll meet you there. OK?
Grant: But I don’t speak Chinese?
Secretary: That’s OK. I’ll have the foreign affairs police accompany you.
Grant: OK.

Figure 3.9 The second junior secretary is shown almost entirely in silhouette.

This scene is set in the office at the American Embassy, and depicts the conversation
between the second junior secretary and the American colonel Colin Grant, who hit the local labourer with his car. By using backlighting (Figure 3.9), the face of the second junior secretary is hidden, who is shown almost entirely in silhouette. The backlighting originates from the window behind the second junior secretary. The use of backlighting, with no other sources of light, creates a silhouette and shadow of the character’s body. In this scene, I would argue that the American secretary is being deliberately portrayed as shadowy, his face hidden from view, thus suggesting that American power is also operating in the dark, hidden from ordinary Taiwanese citizens. The conversation between the colonel and the secretary confirms that “Americans were closely allied with the KMT throughout the Cold War and were intent on preserving a relationship that sustained U.S. hegemony in the Pacific” (Yeh and Davis 2005: 60). The English dialogue between them can be considered an affirmation of American authority in Taiwan. The power relation between the American officials and the Taiwanese labourer, as disclosed in this conversation, represents a national allegory of Taiwanese dependence upon the United States in the 1960s, and reveals the context of Cold War politics.

In his discussion of the comic element within the critical power of satire, Geoff
King argues that satirical film “has its own specific effect as a way of representing sources of absurdity or oppression (2002: 107). In this scene, the colour black has a distinctly negative connotation in relation to American authority. The tone of satire was used, where possible, by filmmakers in Taiwan during the years of totalitarian rule, usually during periods in which particular historical factors led to a relaxation of Cold War restrictions on cultural production. This scene shows this specific period, as “[i]t is clear from the dialogue between American embassy staff and a colonel that it is set during the Vietnam War” (Yeh and Davis 2005: 82). According to the conversation between the speaking subject (American embassy secretary) and object spoken to (colonel), although the face of the secretary is hidden, we can easily realize that their dialogue and image embody the power of American authority in Cold War Taiwan.

The use of multiple languages is crucial as identity markers for the characters, and as a sign of the hybridized and contested cultural identity of the island. On His Son’s Big Doll, June Yip argues that “the filmmakers’ insistence on dubbing all the dialogue in Taiwanese (it was one of the first films to be widely distributed in the local dialect), was once again interpreted as a potentially subversive rejection of the cultural authority of Mandarin Chinese officialdom” (2004: 62). In this film, linguistic diversity is
demonstrated in a scene in which an American colonel, a Mandarin-speaking policeman (waishengren), and two Taiwanese women speaking the local Taiwanese dialect try to converse during a rainstorm in the slum, thereby highlighting the cultural differences at play.

Policeman: Ah-Fa is your husband? (to Ah-gui) Ah-Fa is your father? (to Ah-Chu)
Gary: I am terribly sorry. I had a terrible accident with your husband (in English).
Policeman: Ah-Fa had a car accident this morning (in Mandarin).
Ah-qui: I don’t understand what you are saying (in Taiwanese).
Policeman: Your father got in a car accident. Can you explain it to your mother? (in Mandarin)

A long shot shows the embarrassment on the faces of the family members (Figure 3.10). Because the wife of the injured labourer speaks Taiwanese instead of English and Mandarin, the police must explain the situation in Mandarin to her daughter who, in turn, translates it into Taiwanese for her mother. Chen commented on the issue of language diversity, and argued that the film shows that the inter-weaving of languages, (lost in) translation, and linguistic misunderstanding among the local family’s Taiwanese, Colonel Gray’s English, the policemen’s Mandarin, and the mute daughter’s sign language, together “articulate the ‘polyglot’ or ‘multiple-languages’ of
Taiwan society and history” (2009: 159). The domestic scene ultimately shows the power dynamic in relationships among inhabitants of the island during the Cold War.

Figure 3.10 A long shot shows the embarrassment on the faces of the family members.

The next scene in which Ah-Fa displays his sociocultural concern includes the following dialogue with the foreman in the hospital room. The dialogue shows black humour among Ah-Fa, his wife Ah-gui, and his foreman. The scene begins with the foreman and another younger labourer entering through the door of the hospital room.

The foreman is especially pleased that Ah-Fa is all right and has received a large amount of compensation.

Foreman: Wow, what a life, nothing but lying in bed, eating and crapping. As for the rest of us, nothing’s changed. We’re still working like animals. Who could have it better than you? Ha ha ha!

Ah-Fa: Hey, what are you talking about? You’re getting me all confused.

Foreman: Don’t put on an act with us. You think we don’t know? Americana fellow told us all about it. You have received compensation of around fifty thousand dollars. They’re even going to send your mute daughter to a special
school in the United States.
Ah-gui: Who said?
Foreman: There must be a hundred of us at the job, and we know all about it.
Ah-Fa: Sure, that’s right. This Mr. Grant, he’s a nice guy.
Foreman: Hey! Ah-Fa, did you do it on purpose? Ha ha ha!
Ah-Fa: Damn you, you had to say it, didn’t you? No goddamn kidding!

Based on the foreman’s question, “Did you do it on purpose?” we realize that political satire can refer to a work of art that satirizes the notion of violence. The dialogue, with satirical tone, shows the cultural clash between the upper class and the working-class world of developing Taipei during the Cold War. At the beginning, Ah-Fa and his family undertook a journey to Taipei from southern Taiwan to improve their quality of life. As a consequence of losing his legs after the car accident, he realizes that the only available option is to accept the car accident compensation, which is offered personally by the American colonel. In the subsequent close-up shot of his face, Ah-Fa has nothing to comment. For him, it is just like the taste of American apples in the image at the end of the film; that is, it is difficult to discern whether the apple is sweet or sour (Figure 3.11). In the close-up, moreover, we cannot determine whether Ah-Fa entirely enjoys the apple. He has lost both of his legs; on the other hand, his family has received a large sum of money, and his mute daughter will be able to study in the
United States. The three characters speak in a Taiwanese dialect during the dialogue. They are from the working class, and use the local dialect throughout the film to emphasize the gap between themselves and the state of authority, such as the mainland policeman and the American colonel. In this sense, the black humour may lead to the audience laughing and reflecting upon the sociocultural context.

*Figure 3.11* It is difficult to discern whether the apple is sweet or sour.

In an interview about the TNC movement, the director Wan noted that “he and his colleagues chose themes of the recent past reflecting common people’s thoughts and feelings and the transition from agrarian to urban life” (Lent 1990: 84). In *The Taste of Apples*, Wan placed the emphasis on the lives of people at the bottom of society who were undergoing dramatic social changes. He used political satire to reveal the absurdity of society. The final sequence of the film shows a family photo as a happy ending; however, the film has a darker social subtext as well. We should note the family photo at the end of the film (Figure 3.12), and the split between those who
can afford to eat American apples and those forced to lose a family member (mute girl) as a result of a car accident. Moreover, this photo shows that Ah-Fa sits on a wheelchair, with a piece of blanket covering his lost legs. The family image eventually reveals the dubious benefits of being run over by an American military car. At the end of the film, the story is resolved happily, for ironically the family gains more than what they lose in the car accident.

Figure 3.12 It is Ah-Fa’s family photo without the mute daughter.

Buddha Bless America

As mentioned before, Wu Nien-jen played a crucial role in the development of the TNC movement during the early 1980s when he worked as a screenwriter for CMPC. As a prolific screenwriter in TNC, he provided screenplays for the leading figures of the movement, including Edward Yang’s That Day on the Beach (1983), and Hou Hsiao-hsien’s Dust in the Wind (1986) and City of Sadness (1989). He also wrote screenplays for young first-time directors, such as Zeng Zhuangxiang’s Vicki’s Hat and
Wan Jen’s *The Taste of Apples*. Wu was also an actor, playing leading roles in Yang’s *Taipei Story/Cing met jhu ma* (1985), *Mahjong* (1996), and *Yi Yi* (2000). In addition to his career as a writer, Wu has, to date, directed two feature films, namely *A Borrowed Life/Duo sang* (1994) and *Buddha Bless America* (1996). Tonglin Lu thus commented on Wu’s filmmaking, stating that “[B]oth films can be considered a continuation of the New Cinema Movement, as they combine cultural awareness of Native Soil literature, autobiographical tradition of early New Cinema works and sophisticated cinematography” (2011: 125). Wu’s second feature film, *Buddha Bless America/Taiping Tianguo*, in particular, is an impressive and amusing piece of political satire that captures a number of crucial social contradictions of Cold War Taiwan.

Set in the Cold War era, *Buddha Bless America* depicts a remote village in southern Taiwan, which has been used as a training ground for the American troops preparing for the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Brain (played by Lin Cheng-sheng, who is also a distinguished Taiwanese director), who is an opportunistic former teacher, convinces his fellow farmers to allow American and Taiwanese troops to perform manoeuvres on their lands by informing them that the government will pay for the resulting damage. While the troops are in the village, the peasants are forced to
temporarily reside at the primary school, to the delight of the children who are consequently on forced vacation. The remainder of the film emphasizes the reaction of the villagers to the American troops, and vice versa. Therefore, the plot of *Buddha Bless America* is constructed around a military exercise and its destruction of farmlands. Wu’s film embodies several characteristics of local life in Taiwanese villages, such as the centrality of family, an intimate kin relationship, a geographically bound area, and a high degree of face-to-face contact. Furthermore, his film constructs a peasant community, weaving together the everyday lives of southern Taiwan local inhabitants.

As a political satire, Wu created a cynical tone with undertones of melancholy. For the genre of satire, King argues that some similarities are found in the targets of several satirical films produced in various parts of the world. He wrote, “A cynical distrust of politics, politicians, and government institutions is quite deeply ingrained in many American myths and ideologies, including their Hollywood manifestation” (2002: 102). For instance, American satirical comedy film *M*A*S*H* (*dir.* Robert Altman, 1970) displays “a set of self-professed norms against which to measure the undemocratic and inhumane practices both of the American military and governmental
establishments” (Neale and Krutnik 1990:19). By using the actual event leading up to
American-led military action against Vietnam in the Cold War era, Wu presents a
cynical distrust of American politics and military power in his political satire. The U.S.
military also maintained and repaired facilities in Taiwan for naval ships and army
vehicles, thereby allowing the American government to take advantage of Taiwan’s
proximity to the war zone and lower labour costs (Roy 2003: 128). Taiwan eventually
became a leading host to U.S. military personnel on recreational leave in East Asia.
Wu’s film shares a similar concern with The Taste of Apples, particularly the focus on
postwar neocolonialism and the dominant motif of Americanization.

In his analysis of Buddha Bless America, Yingjin Zhang indicated that the film
“pits innocent Taiwan villagers against various ‘colonizing’ powers—the KMT
regime, the U.S. army (which uses the village land for military exercises during the
Vietnam War) and American culture” (2004: 177). The film basically shows the
triangle of power dynamics, that is, the KMT regime, U.S. authority, and native
resistance. The film can be interpreted as a tale of rural Taiwan defeating the
modernized American military and the nationalists. The film subsumes the peasants’
personal identities, and collectivizes and openly articulates their conflicts within the
nation. It reveals tensions within the hegemonic ideal of the nation in pluralistic Taiwan, which disrupts the nationalist narration in previous propaganda cinema to explore a satirical history. This section argues that the film, despite its humour and jocularity, not only questions various hegemonies but also addresses the precarious nature of such national myths.

**Misinterpreting: Intellectual Imagination and Hierarchical Orders**

*Buddha Bless America* is a political satire that shows the effect of the arrival of the U.S. military on a rural village. The black humour in the film, along with a series of misinterpreted jokes, makes *Buddha Bless America* a more lighthearted film than Wu’s previous work. Davis commented that Wu’s *Buddha Bless America* is not only a “black comedy,” but also that “its raffish humor enfolds postcolonial experiences and ideas” (2005: 252). Therefore, *Buddha Bless America* is a comedy that uses a number of satirical images to highlight the type of postcolonial strategies that helped maintain most of the island in a state of underdevelopment in the 1960s. It depicts U.S. neocolonial domination and the KMT subjugation of the Taiwanese people against the backdrop of earlier Japanese colonial rule and continuing economic exploitation. It
speaks for the powerless people, and is constructed around their stupidity, ignorance, superstition, ideological enslavement, political naivety, and even racism and sexism, which are revealed often in a comical yet critical manner.

Writing about Soviet satire, Andrew Horton suggests one of the characteristics of satire in a Soviet context, which is “the satiric impulse as demonstrated in jokes, ironic comments, and such is a necessary ingredient of daily life for citizens within a totalitarian or authoritarian state if they are to maintain their own sense of worth, individuality, and self-esteem” (1993: 6). Compared to Soviet satire, Wu’s *Buddha Bless America* mainly focuses on everyday life under the KMT’s totalitarianism, and aims to engage the “joke” and the subjectivity of the common people. Wu stated, “I wanted to show that Taiwan has already been culturally colonized by America without even knowing it—not only that, they even feel proud of it” (Berry 2005: 313). In this section I will focus on the protagonist, Brain, and how his flaw or error in judgment causes his downfall in the story.

The film is set in a Taiwanese coastal agricultural village during the Vietnam War, and emphasizes national cultural powerlessness and the force of Americanization, resulting from a joint U.S. and Nationalist military endeavour. Once the peasants have
been told that U.S. troops will be performing military exercises on their land, they
become wary of these foreigners. However, Brain, an educated villager with a degree
of respect for the Americans, convinces them that the U.S. troops will be more careful
than their counterparts, the nationalist troops. However, he turns out to be wrong, and
American tanks ride roughshod over the peasants’ land and crops. More
misunderstandings occur when the government interpreter misrepresents the peasants
as beggars and the U.S. troops as tyrants. Indignant, the peasants turn to scavenging
and stealing goods from the U.S. army camp, and Brain tries to outdo everyone by
stealing two large trunks.

In an exterior scene, Brain brings his younger brother to talk to an American
doctor outside the military camp. Brain’s brother seeks the army’s help to sew on three
fingers, which were amputated at work in a Japanese factory and preserved in a
traditional manner in the hope of one day finding a surgical cure. However, the
Chinese military interpreter humiliates and dismisses Brain and his young brother as
beggars. At the beginning, Brain innocently believes that the American doctor will be
able to reattach his brother’s fingers. However, Brain could not use a word of English
and tells his story in Taiwanese, which is their local dialect. He requires a translator to
interpret his words for the American doctor. A nationalist soldier is the only Asian
character in the film that speaks some English, and translates for Brain and his brother.

Although the nationalist soldier can speak English, he misinterprets their request in
Mandarin. In the following scene, the conversation not only shows the social hierarchy
between peasants (Brain and his younger brother) and authority (American doctor and
nationalist soldier), but also results in an intellectual awakening in Brain. The
nationalist soldier as a translator was able to help, but he deliberately misinterpreted
Brain’s request. As a result, because of the misinterpretation, Brain felt angry and
disappointed with the American doctor.

American: What’s going on?
Nationalist soldier: He wants some money.
American: Oh, God. OK.
Nationalist soldier: It is ten U.S. dollar. It is enough to you. Don’t be begging
somewhere else (Mandarin).
Brain: What’s that?
Brain’s brother: I don’t know. Whenever I showed this jar, they always offered me
money.
Brain: Take the money back. Please tell the American doctor: “We are not beggars.
Don’t misunderstand.”
American: What’s going on now?
Nationalist soldier: They think it’s not enough. They think all American are rich.
Besides, you are a doctor.
American: Have any shame? It is ten U.S. dollar!
Brain: All right. Thank you. We are going home now. We are not beggars.
Brain’s brother had lost the fingers on his right hand while working at a
Japanese-owned factory. He stores his fingers in a jar because Brain tells him that only
American doctors with “high technology” can reattach his fingers. The fingers, as
Eileen Chia-Ching Fung commented on this scene, “become a symbol of inconceivable
loss and the impossibility of recovery” (2002: 50). Because of the misinterpretation by
the translator, the scene shows the nationalist soldier is unwilling to help, and even
read it differently, his wish to exploit the doctor for money to help the locals. The
film’s separation of subaltern and elite domains of language is a crucial political
statement in the context of the Cold War period, during which the English language
facilitated American neocolonial occupation. It is also a crucial statement in the
context of the neocolonial present in Taiwan, where proficiency in American English
has become a marker of modernization and progress.

By using political and satirical tone in this film, as Tonglin Lu stated, “The
miscommunication caused by a mixture of linguistic, cultural, and economic
differences colors the drama created by the conflicts between the Taiwanese villagers
and the American military, and filters it through a lens of comic absurdity, despite
potentially or realistically tragic consequences” (2002: 195). Although I agree with her observations, Lu’s argument seems to neglect a crucial character, the Chinese military interpreter, who assisted American authority in his role with the nationalist government. With the negative portrayal of Chinese army interpreter, Wu’s film in the fact that criticizes the KMT for its authoritarian regime in the cold war era.

In his examination of discursive struggles in postcolonial India, Partha Chatterjee argued, “Both colonial and nationalist politics thought of the peasantry as an object of their strategies, to be acted upon, controlled and appropriated” (1993: 159). In this scene, Chinese soldiers lost people’s trust. Due to the Chinese interpreter’s misinterpretation, peasants are treated as beggars by the American military doctor. Therefore, Brain’s first encounter with an American leaves him with a feeling of racial humiliation. As an intellectual, Brain fights a losing battle, and steals two large metal chests from the American military camp at the end of the film to maintain his dignity and honour.

The following scene shows American soldiers searching for their missing military supplies at the local village. American military experience certainly caused significant damage in the village. Some peasants thus decide to steal some groceries from the
American camp. Later, the U. S. army came to investigate the rampant loss of their property, stolen by the villagers as compensation for the devastation of their cultivation.

Villagers are accused of stealing supplies from the military camp. However, after they finish searching, the American soldiers do not find enough evidence in the living quarters of the villagers. Eventually, with the help of the government translator, the American colonel recites a short warning speech to the villagers.

Colonel: Thanks for your cooperation. The war materials are missing, but we have nothing to prove there is any misconduct. Therefore, I believe there is maybe something misunderstanding. I apologize again for any inconvenience. I am proud of all you.

Translator: Although we could not find any crime proof today, in fact you are lucky. As you know, American technology is excellent. Someone will be arrested on suspicion of stealing war materials as soon as possible. Understand! (Mandarin)

Villagers: Yes. (Mandarin)

Translator (to colonel): They said ok. No apologies necessary.

This scene demonstrates that the interpreter misleads both the villagers and the American colonel (Figure 3.16). An American colonel apologizes for having raided the community hall, in which the villagers have resettled during the army base’s construction. While the American colonel tends to express his desire for friendship with the villagers, the Chinese interpreter assigned to them manages to mistranslate all
significant messages, leaving the villagers humiliated and scared.

As mentioned before, *The Taste of Apples* features the role of a Chinese policeman who can speak English and Mandarin, and is able to communicate with the local working class. Like *The Taste of Apples*, the presence of Americans in *Buddha Bless America* similarly relies on an interpreter. According to the dialogue, we can clearly distinguish the layers of social class, including the foreign colonizer (commander), local ruling class (translator), and the subaltern (peasants). During his public announcement, the attitude of the American colonel was not snobbish and haughty. In fact, due to a lack of evidence, the colonel felt sympathy for the villagers. By contrast, the government interpreter is sure that the villagers stole war materials from the American camp.

As one of the crucial filmmaking motifs, Wu depicts the experiences and sufferings of local Taiwanese people under the American military modernization during the Cold War. Through the misinterpreting scenes, *Buddha Bless America* shows that the narrative’s binary opposition of powerful authorities and subordinate minorities contains the symbolic threats to racial and national hierarchy. Wu’s film demonstrates layers of racial stereotypes that define the subaltern self-consciousness:
the black and white outsider, “other” (American), the comprador bourgeoisie (Chinese mainlander, the interpreter, Brain), marginalized groups (peasants), and subordinate groups (women and children). As the colonel in Wu’s film is a white American, the contrast between American army and Taiwanese peasants becomes a metaphor for power relationships, because a binary opposition in narrative naturalizes and universalizes the hierarchy implied by the opposition. Although American characters only have small roles in *Buddha Bless America*, they occupy crucial supervisory positions in the storyline, regardless of whether they are good or evil.

In addition to racial and national hierarchy, *Buddha Bless America* depicts the ambiguous relationship between contemporary American rightwing ideology and Taiwan’s Nationalist government. Since the exile of the nationalist government from the mainland to Taiwan in 1949, it has relied considerably on American political and economic power and military protection (Roy 2003: 125). Wu’s film thus focuses on a military exercise in the 1960s, when the United States still a military ally of the Nationalist government in Taiwan. At a point in Cold War history, Taiwan became a key anti-Communist base for the United States in exchange for military and financial aid to assist the nationalist government to maintain its hegemony and to develop
Taiwan (Yeh, 2009: 87).

As the educated villager, Brain welcomes American technology and progress. Brain does not trust any nationalist officer, but was an “American dream.” Hence, the film depicts reasons for which such a distinction may have been necessary to avoid confusion. Ironically, Brain represents an enslaved brain, full of illusions of modernity and blind faith in the superiority of American technology, modernity, and reported medical achievements. Compared to Brain, the head of village, an ignorant peasant, eventually impresses upon the villagers the need to act collectively by reminding them of the bonds of solidarity that already exist between them, and that they have decided to take action against the American rulers.

**Subaltern Encounter with America**

In Wu’s film, the satirical vision takes the necessity of an institution such as the military for granted. On the one hand, the existence of U.S. military, even currently, poses a danger to villagers, and it is no longer possible to justify the military as a defense against aggression because of contemporary weapons. On the other hand, the military served the American empire against the communist world during the Cold
War. Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argued that the American empire “consisted of a network of client states overseas, in places like the Philippines and Iran, that were tied into the imperial economic and military system by treaty and corporate investment” (2006: 250). By becoming a part of the American empire, the KMT ideology in the Cold War in Taiwan was indistinguishable from anti-communism.

Wu’s film rewrites history from the bottom up by describing American atrocities against the Taiwanese local people. In other words, despite their powerlessness, the peasants exhibit solidarity and a sense of pride. *Buddha Bless America* is set around the devastation to a rural community caused by the intrusive construction of an American military base in a village. At the beginning, the peasants look to Brain for leadership for the event that is beyond their mundane daily routine. The peasants, who were promised compensation for the damage to their homes and crops, are resettled in the school buildings while the local entrepreneur builds a temporary nightclub to entertain the GIs. However, a number of riots occur after considerable damage to their farms, and the peasants fight against the U.S. armed power. The film depicts conflict scenes in which the Taiwanese peasants attempt to fight back against the American soldier, and it does so by using subtle political implication and sly humour.
The following sequence suggests that satirical film can invert hierarchies of power.

At the beginning of the scene, two airplanes fly across the sky and bomb the farmlands.

After the bombing, the peasants become concerned about their economic loss and begin distrusting Brain. Instead of listening to Brain, they decide to fight for their rights. When most villagers confirm that the American military exercise resulted in considerable damage to their fields, they decide to fight back against American military power. The head of the village, along with other men, encounters the American soldiers in front of the restricted area. However, the American soldiers do not understand the source of their anger. One of them fires a machine gun towards the sky to keep the villagers away from the military restricted area.

In order to avoid violence between the soldiers and the villagers, the American soldiers yell “Hey you” when confronting the villagers. For the American soldiers, “Hey you” means that the villagers should stop advancing. More significantly “Hey you” here can also refers to Louis Althusser’s example for the idea of interpellation. Althusser complicates the relationship between domination and subjugation by introduced the interpellation process, where individuals recognize themselves as subjects through ideology, thus illustrating how subjects can be complicit in their own
domination. He gives the example of a police officer shouting out “Hey. You there!” in public. Upon hearing this exclamation, an individual turns around, and “by this mere one-hundred-and eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject” (Althusser 1972: 174). Although most villagers do not understand the exact meaning of “Hey you,” they use the same words to yell back at American soldiers. The conflict between the American soldiers and the villagers appears politically comedic in the scene, which shows a dramatic encounter between peasants armed with sticks and stones, and American soldiers armed with machine guns and powerful tanks (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13 American soldiers armed with machine guns and powerful tanks.

Regarding the function of dialects and accents in relation to the nation-state and identity-formation in Chinese-language cinema, Sheldon Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh argue that dialects and accents “serve as a backdrop to show a lively diversity within a grand national unity” (2005:5). Buddha Bless America is an entirely Taiwanese (dialect)
film. Set in the period of the Cold War, the film is a satire of the corruption and cruelty of the new imperialism. In the above sequence, the film depicts how the KMT was supporting the American war campaign in Vietnam, and how KMT soldiers economically exploited poor peasants and coerced them to abandon their property.

In addition to the encounter between villagers and the American tank, Wu’s engagement with the power of rural spaces to provoke humour, anxiety, and displacement is crucial in his political satire. The most powerful of these interactions between human figures and the landscape is provided by Wu’s fascination with desolate spaces that have the power to evoke deep irony. Wu’s use of these arid landscapes as a political metaphor shows the director’s attempt to use ideological motifs drawn from nature to articulate a wider critique of American neocolonialism. In other words, subversion of the institution of power is connected with conventions of language, genre, and media. Therefore, the sequence plays with the forms or conventions of cinematic language, which is political. This sequence shows the subaltern perspective when revolting against American military power. The film contains delicate humour, and has a deftness of touch that is absent from his first feature film, A Borrowed Life. The friction between the peasants and the American
tanks is handled gently through comic exchanges. In the following sequence, an old lady, equipped with nothing but a bamboo stick, attempts to fend off a group of tanks advancing on her crops.

To prevent the tanks from disturbing her economic goods, the footage repeatedly focuses on the character, Granny, the Taiwanese old lady who visits her cabbage field and the tomb of her dead husband every day. Since the arrival of American soldiers in the village, she has been afraid that the military exercise would completely destroy her livelihood. One day, while commemorating the tomb of her dead husband, the military performs manoeuvres and advances towards her. In her anger, she picks up her bamboo stick to fight back. When she sees tanks driving towards her cabbage field, she uses her sticks in an attempt to change their direction. She confronts the tanks to avoid any damage to her crops. Eventually, she achieves remarkable success in this “battle.”

Figure 3.14 Wu uses a wide-shot and long shot to comprehensively capture her confrontation with the tank.

Wu used a landscape shot to explore the confrontation between the old lady and the
American army (Figure 3.14). Tonglin Lu argues that, in this scene, instead of using language, Granny’s stick “speaks for her against whoever contributes to the American settlement in the village, which disturbs the normal course of her life” (2002: 203). Wu explores a dramatic effect between the elderly woman and American tanks. Lu continues to comments on the elderly woman, “Granny, with her stick, uses the same language to that of the American soldiers with their tanks, a wordless language that is incomprehensibly threatening and annoying” (Ibid., 203). According to location shooting, Wu’s framing focuses on the physical confrontation between humans rather than rely on verbal communication.

In addition to focusing on the Granny, Wu captures the heroine, who picks up a broom and runs along the arid landscape. This wide-shot image not only makes the farmland behind the woman and tanks a virtual two-dimensional backdrop, but also creates a horizontal composition. Indeed, by using an extreme long shot, the depiction of the binary opposition of powerful tanks and a subordinate Asian elderly woman can be regarding the Tiananmen Square Incident. This shot is reminiscent of the photograph of a lone man who steps in front of a column of tanks at Tiananmen Square on June 5, 1989, a moment that instantly became a symbol of the protests as well as of
communist oppression worldwide. The scene in Wu’s *Buddha Bless America* similarly explores the narrative voice of the Granny. The Granny did not speak English, but she was not afraid of attempting to stop a column of tanks that was advancing towards her farmland. Compared to the image on Tiananmen Square, the scene is a political parody, and comments on the manner in which Taiwanese subalterns encountered American neocolonial power in the cold war era.

The film critiques colonialist and nationalist assumptions that the peasants in Cold War Taiwan were ignorant and unaware that their poverty was the result of neocolonial exploitation. At the beginning, the peasants seemed to require intellectual guidance and leadership, such as the role of Brain, to act effectively. After the bombing, the peasants are intelligent enough to recognise their oppressor. They identify the “real” enemy as the American soldiers, rather than the government interpreter. Thus, they form an alliance to resist the current oppression and demands of the Western “other,” and the peasants join arms as a community. Solidarity for their land and livelihoods enable them to become active historical agents and exert some control over the conditions of their present and future. The film thus shows that the processes involved in reaction to American and nationalist authority incurs varied solidarity in unexpected ways. The
voice of a peasant consciousness forces us to recognize visions of an anticolonial satire, rather than a nostalgic domestic melodrama.

The American presence in the film began when the United States entered into a defense treaty with Taiwan after the outbreak of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Regarding the dominance of European/American forms of cinema, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam noted that ‘Eurocolonial cinema’ “mapped history not only for domestic audiences, but also for the world” (1994: 103). The colonized are denied speech in Hollywood mainstream narrations of the stories, especially political comedies, because the Western hero/narrator speaks for the native, who is not recognized as being capable of speech. By contrast, Buddha Bless America reverses this norm by presenting history from popular memory, legitimatizing oral history, and demonstrating the linguistic autonomy of the colonized subject. By engaging the postcolonial discourse, as Eileen Chia-Ching Fung indicates, Wu’s Buddha Bless America “teaches us that surviving in the postcolonial era is about negotiating change and disorientation” (2002: 52). The subaltern voices in Buddha Bless America may be severe postcolonial criticism of the broader American political system in modern history.
Conclusion

*Buddha Bless America* ends with the inter-title “Did the Americans ever leave?” which is a reference to the continuing influence that the United States has over Taiwan. The material-cultural effects of neocolonialism caused by the development of capitalism since the Cold War may lead to an obsession with the culture of commodities, and considerable materialism that will make Taiwanese people more confused and less aware of the needs of others, such as the effect of globalization on local cultures. The complexity of the cultural encounter was derived from the simple self-other opposition that undergoes dissolution in both films. That is, the Taiwanese as “self” and the Americans as “other” are not sustained as absolute antinomies by the films’ context. The border-crossing cultural encounter of the pair originates from the shared “Western modernity” during the Cold War period between the people in Taiwan and Americans. However, both films show the dark side of “Western modernity” in a satirical manner. In addition to their satirical patterns, both films share the view that ambivalence towards its postcolonial future can result in the composite nature of Taiwanese cultural identity. In this case, Taiwan’s cultural identity includes a colonial capitalist/Westernized component, which serves as the basis by which Taiwan can
view America as the “other” (and for America to view Taiwan as the “other”), and a national/racial component, which allows the Taiwanese and Americans to have a shared opposition to communist China during the Cold War. Because both films connote anxiety on postcolonial transformation and express discontent with the state of things at the time, they also reproduce the paradoxical inclinations of the composite identity, and cannot be simply reduced to either “anti-America” or “pro-American” labels.

The construction of anxiety and trauma among characters of these political satirical films is a trope of this collective memory; therefore, it constitutes a narrative/filmic response to the historical conjuncture. By showing the distrust and disenchantment with the nature and development of the American imperialism, the cynical tone in *Buddha Bless America* has a popular and political basis outside of cinema. By contrast, the melodramatic humour in *The Taste of Apple* appeals to a colonial narrative that is being appropriated by the discourse of neocolonialism of Cold-War policy. The coexistence of a cynical tone and melodramatic humour attests to the ambivalence and syncretism of TNC since the 1980s. The Taiwan-American cultural encounter has fostered a more intense economic and political experience that
has implications for TNC, and remains underexplored.
Chapter Five:

Between Family Melodrama and Accented Cinema:

Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands*

Chinese/Taiwanese Diaspora in America

Ang Lee’s first film, *Pushing Hands* (1991), not only depicts conflict and conflict resolution within an inter-culturally married family, but may also be seen to articulate the melodramatic mode. *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and Lee’s third film, *East Drink Man Woman* (1994) are commonly called the “Father Knows Best” trilogy. *Pushing Hands* describes how a Chinese Tai Chi master, Mr. Chu, who does not speak English, moves from Mainland China to New York to live with his son, Alex. On the one hand, the film emphasizes Mr. Chu’s confrontations with his daughter-in-law due to cross-cultural misunderstandings and the generation gap. On the other hand, it explores how a displaced subject relocates himself and opens up his own future in America. At the beginning of the film, with no verbal communication and very little non-verbal interaction, direct conflicts happen between Mr. Chu and his American daughter-in-law Martha because they are unable to communicate with each
other. Frictions and tension occur in the domestic space, especially in the living and the
dining room. Alex tries to be matchmaker between Chu and Mrs. Chen, a widow who
shares a similar background with Mr. Chu (they were both born in Beijing). However,
when Mr. Chu knows about Alex’s intention, he is disappointed and flees his son’s
house to live in Chinatown, where he works as a dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant.
Due to the boss’s insult, Mr. Chu stands up to him and is put into jail, but turns out to
become a hero in Chinatown. At the end of the film, Mr. Chu decides to teach Tai Chi
and stay in Chinatown by himself instead of living with his son’s family.

To understand Ang Lee and his narrative style it is useful to first examine his
career. Lee was born in 1954 in Pingdong and grew up in Tainan City, located in the
southern plain of Taiwan. Even though he went to New York in 1981 to study at New
York University, he switched from Theater Direction to film studies and has gradually
developed a distinctive melodramatic form since the debut of his first film, *Pushing
Hands*. Before given the opportunity to direct a film, however, Lee spent many years
staying at home to revise his original screenplays. In 1990, his submitted two
screenplays, *The Wedding Banquet* and *Pushing Hands*, to a competition sponsored by
the Republic of China’s Government Information Office, and they came in first and
second respectively. The major Taiwan film company CMPC sponsored the production of *Pushing Hands*, which was filmed entirely in America. Lee also began to work with a newly established independent production company, Good Machine, based in New York (Wei 2005: 101-102).

Given his diasporic background, Ang Lee’s oeuvre can be considered profoundly accented. “As a consequence of diasporic films being produced in the transition between cultures and societies,” Hamid Naficy argues in his book *An Accented Cinema*, “‘accented’ cinema is interstitial and can be described as engaging in dialogue between the home and host societies of the filmmakers” (2001: 6). In terms of accented cinema, moreover, Naficy argues that many films that deal with migration demonstrate how difficult and even possible it is to really leave everything behind. (Ibid.: 11-17). In this chapter, I will look at Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands* considered to be an accented film, in that it deals with issues of migration. It is arguably true that diasporic perspective is at work in Lee’s film, pushing critics and commentators to reconsider what the nature of TNC is.

Lee’s *Pushing Hands* demands, more significantly, a more transnational critical perspective, one that enables us to see how the local and the global are inextricably
bound up with one another and that can illuminate what Aihwa Ong has called “the
condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space” (1999: 4).

*Pushing Hands* is worth studying precisely because it is embedded within a network of
transnational flows—of people, capital, texts, and ideas—that blur the distinction
between the global and the local. The film thus emerged not out of any neatly-bounded
nation or cultural space called “China,” “Taiwan,” “America,” or even “the East” or
“the West,” but from the border-crossing processes of migration, capitalist exchange,
aesthetic appropriations and memory.

Song Hwee Lim argues that, unlike TNC directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien and
Edward Yang, who made films in the 1980s, “Lee’s first two films do not share their
obsession with Taiwan’s history, modernity and society, but are diegetically located
outside Taiwan and attempt to give voice to a diasporic experience” (Lim 2012: 131).

Without much attention to Taiwanese historical concern, *Pushing Hands* can be read in
a context of diaspora. The film is materially grounded in multiple geographical
locations, makes multiple aesthetic affiliations, and fails to map neatly onto a single
nation-state or cultural tradition. In reading *Pushing Hands* as a diasporic melodrama, I
will examine how its melodramatic elements and its aesthetic form have been shaped
by Lee’s embeddedness within a parallel relationships: to his Taiwanese homeland, and to the Chinese diaspora.

In this chapter, I intend to use *Pushing Hands* to demonstrate that Chinese diaspora is located in a transcultural context. In Whitney Crothers Dilley’s book, *The Cinema of Ang Lee*, it has already been noted that the film “is an intimate study of the cultural tensions of the diaspora that at its essence deals with the confrontation between Chinese and Western culture” (2007: 52). By paying particular attention to fluidity and diversity of cultural identity among Chinese diaspora, I will argue that in this diasporic melodrama, *Pushing Hands* shows not only transnational tensions and conflicts derived from misunderstandings and cultural stereotypes, but also the ambiguities of cultural identities.

Reconfiguring the Chinese Family Melodrama

The family melodrama has been one of the dominant genres in Chinese cinema. The Chinese family melodrama in the 1980s offers “the representation of family conflict and its resolution functions as a symbolic reenactment of the general sociopolitical confrontation” (Ma 1993: 32). In dealing with the social inscriptions of the Chinese
melodramatic text, Ang Lee particularly sought to render this diasporic experience cinematically by evoking a particular moment in the evolution of the Chinese family melodrama (jiating wenyi pian). As a genre, however, there is a significant difference between Chinese wenyi expression and Western melodramatic imagination. According to Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh’s cross-cultural analysis, the essential Oedipal drama of melodrama “is less visible in wenyi because wenyi’s historical role of advancing modernization, not individual repression” (2011: 111). When we turn to the family melodrama, as Chris Berry notes on Ang Lee’s second film, The Wedding Banquet, the Chinese term is not “jiating wenyi pian” but instead “jiating lunli pian” (family ethics film). Berry argues that the so-called “family ethics film” particularly deals with “ethical expectations based on hierarchically defined social and kinship position,” (Berry 2006: 185) for instance, the expectation by father of son, or husband of wife. In other words, the families in Lee’s film become the site of patriarchal expectations. Compared with The Wedding Banquet, Pushing Hands shares a similar family theme and melodramatic effect. Moreover, the family in Pushing Hands produces a variety of tensions not only between the father-son relationship but also between father and daughter-in-law, registering the transnational and the diasporic in New York.
By mobilizing Mandarin-language melodrama, we can argue that Lee has expressed interest in the narrative of popular cinema in terms of film genre.

Mandarin-language melodrama, as Stephen Teo defines, “has been combined with other genres—for example, the comedy melodrama and musical-melodrama” (2006: 206). Lee’s self-awareness in popular genre films thus can be explained through what Julianne Pidduck labels as the relevance between Lee’s working background and content:

While many Asian filmmakers (including Taiwanese new Wave directors Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang and Tsai Ming-liang) have found Western critical acclaim through the art cinema circuit, Lee has specialized in popular genre films, a choice that has afforded him comparably broader audiences in Asia, North America and Europe (2006: 394).

For Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands*, the “popular genre” might be linked to the historical role of Mandarin-language melodrama. The term *aiqing wenyi pian*, for instance, refers to romance films that were generic staples in Taiwan’s commercial cinema of the 1970s, making a so-called “golden age” of Taiwan *wenyi pian* production (Yeh 2011: 111). Ang Lee’s predecessor, for instance, Pai Ching-jui’s melodrama *Home Sweet Home/Jia zai taibei* (1969) deals with cultural encounters between Taiwanese
protagonists and Westerners that serve to problematize Taiwan’s engagement with modernity and the West. Lee’s melodrama, however, provides the centrality of the diasporic sensibility to his aesthetics vision. In other words, *Pushing Hands* can be seen as an American-based Taiwanese director’s homage to Chinese popular genre such as *Home Sweet Home* that expressed their makers’ nostalgic longing for a lost Chinese homeland.

**Melodrama, or Diaspora**

As mentioned before, Lee’s Mandarin-language melodrama would be considered as a popular and commercially viable genre in Taiwan. While I share their concern (Berry 2006, Tao 2006, Yeh 2011) that the concept of Western melodrama may not be sufficient to explain Ang Lee’s cinema, I would argue that the hybrid nature of melodrama allows us to depart from neat categorization and to see the cultural dynamic from a diasporic perspective. Generally speaking, Mandarin-language films in Taiwan are themselves best understood in diasporic terms. Filmmaking in Taiwan has historically been organized into two parallel industries, one making films in the Mandarin language and the other in the local Taiwanese dialect. The
Mandarin-language industry took root when directors from Shanghai fled the mainland at the end of the 1940s, driven out by the war with Japan, the civil war and Mao Zedong’s victory over the Kuomintang (KMT) regime. In terms of film production, however, as Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar indicate, the KMT in Taiwan “faced a practical obstacle to continuing its insistence on Mandarin (2005: 192). Many KMT soldiers, officers, and their followers who came to Taiwan spoke neither Taiwanese nor Japanese. In order to communicate with the islanders and to promote Chinese identity, the KMT rigorously pursued policies promoting Mandarin as the national language. In cinema, the biggest government-owned studio CMPC refused to embrace local culture and instead made films suffused with a longing for the lost homeland in Mainland China. Diasporas rather than immigrants, these filmmakers ignored Taiwan itself as a specific place, often setting their films in locations that suggested Shanghai, Beijing, and the landscapes of the mainland. Mandarin-language cinema in Taiwan was also driven by the demands of its audience, which included many Chinese diasporas living in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Melodrama directors such as Lee Hsing (1930-) and Pai Ching-jui (1931-1997) shared a similar concern to the Chinese diaspora. Their melodrama created nostalgia within the viewer, fuelled their cultural
nationalism, and promoted their sense of connection with each other.

The Mandarin film industry declined as it lost its market, and was replaced by TNC in the early-1980s. Young directors with a defiantly local Taiwanese sensibility made films in multiple spoken languages (such as Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka and Japanese) in their drive for social realism (Liao 2002: 133). TNC was ushered in by Hou Hsiao-hsien’s social realist masterpieces, *The Boy From Fengkuei/Fongguei lai de ren* (1983), *A Summer at Grandpa’s* (1984), and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985).

The decline of Mandarin-language cinema and the rise to a position of dominance of TNC were thus marked by a shift both in thematic concern (from exile to local), and in genre (from romance melodrama to social realism). As a second generation TNC director, however, Lee’s Mandarin-language cinema extended the diasporic narrative rather than the social realism of Hou.

**Domestic Tension: Cross-border Dispute**

Wei Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung argue that *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet*, both set in New York, “deal with older Chinese/Taiwanese parents coming to an understanding with the European American mates of their sons” (1997: 190) In
particular, *Pushing Hands* involves cross-border dispute as a significant diasporic condition, which first appears in the domestic space. Analyzing Lee’s film from an intercultural perspective, Whitney Dilley conjectures that “pushing hands” is a metaphor with two levels of meaning: one, it represents the clash between husband and wife, and two, it could also be applied to the forces of two cultures—American and Chinese—clashing in the film (2007: 57-58). When Mr. Chu came to live with the family of his son, Alex, the originally open living space became somewhat confined with the addition of an outsider. For this reason, Alex’s wife Martha requested that they move to a larger house. With the outsider being the Chinese father of the husband, the focus of this negotiation was transferred from a husband-and-wife argument to a clash between American and Chinese culture. Despite the conflict between Alex and Martha, they came to a compromise of sorts, as witnessed by a pushing-hands motion between the two at the end of the film. However, the major issue in the metaphor of “pushing hands” is cultural conflict. This not only refers to the language barrier but also to the strain of the struggle between body and space, hidden in the physical movements between Martha and Mr. Chu in the film. As such, we will use this section to further analyze frames showing various degrees of conflict between Martha and Mr.
Chu in the domestic space.

The primary interior setting of the film is an American-style wooden bungalow owned by Mr. Chu’s son, Alex. Prior to Mr. Chu’s arrival in New York, this house was home to Alex, his American wife, Martha, and their son, Jimmy. However, once Mr. Chu moved in, Martha began to feel the lack of space and eagerly discussed with her husband the possibility of getting a larger house. Alex was initially reluctant, feeling that the current house was sufficient. In China, such a home would have been large enough for four families, he said, and therefore he was unwilling to seriously consider his wife’s idea. At the same time, he could not afford a bigger home, and he did not want to accept financial support from his wife’s family. Alex nonetheless compromised in the end due to the tension between his father and his wife. Each of the family members living in this home has his/her own ideals regarding this living space; their cultural identities also lead to mutual exclusion and conflict due to cultural differences. Consequently, the contention for domestic space became one of the main narratives in the film and gave rise to further tension among the family members as well as between family members and domestic space.

In order to create an environment to demonstrate the close interaction between
different family members, Lee decides to set his scene in a house in which characters would easily see and affect each other. Lee indicates that in this interior space, some characters such as Martha and Mr. Chu feel they lack privacy. In *Pushing Hands*, a variety of settings of the house are not clearly divided. The living room, the dining room, and the study virtually share the same space, and characters in each space can easily sense the others’ presence and movement. The kitchen, the living room, and Martha’s study are open to each other. These very different domestic spaces interfere with each other. Consequently, conflict arises inevitably due to the tension between Mr. Chu and Martha.

In the opening scene, Lee immediately highlights the tension between Mr. Chu and Martha. A sequence of shots presents the spatial politics of a diasporic American family. In the first close-up, Lee focuses on Mr. Chu’s hands as he performs Tai Chi while facing the camera (Figure 4.1). The frame follows Mr. Chu’s hand gestures and reveals that Mr. Chu is doing Tai Chi in a kung-fu suit in the living room. The second is a full body shot of Mr. Chu still practising Tai Chi; within the frame, Lee shows the furnishings of the living room, including a scroll with Chinese calligraphy hanging on the wall to the right of Mr. Chu and a western-style sofa to his left (Figure 4.2). The
third shot is another close-up of Mr. Chu’s hands, and along with his fluid motions in Tai Chi, the shot also shows a western-style fireplace mantel with blue and white porcelain on it and an upright bookcase beside it. While showing Mr. Chu performing Tai Chi, this series of shots simultaneously reveals a hybrid living space. In addition to displaying objects of two cultures placed together, the arrangements are also associated with the identities of the main characters. Of significance is the display of Chinese cultural objects, such as the Chinese calligraphy scroll, the blue and white porcelain, and the kung fu suit. They produce discordance in the visual composition of the frame, the imagined projection and its identification originates from a diasporic subject, attached to and nostalgic towards their home culture.

Figure 4.1 The opening shot focuses on Mr. Chu’s hands as he performs Tai Chi while facing the camera.
In contrast with the fluidity of Mr. Chu’s traditional Tai Chi gestures, Martha signifies technology and transcultural modernity. While Mr. Chu is practising Tai Chi, Martha is in the study typing on her computer (Figure 4.3). The first close-up of Martha’s computer screen is a frame within a frame, clearly illustrating that the writing tools she employs are not conventional pens but a modern computer and English words. The western modernity of the computer contrasts sharply with the traditional Chinese Tai Chi. What is of significance is how the sound of typing acts as a bridge between the first and second scenes. The second shot is a close-up of Martha’s hands typing swiftly on her keyboard. Similar to the previous close-up of Mr. Chu’s hand motions in Tai Chi, Martha’s hands are not only creating a piece of literature but are also functioning as a means of economic production. This is not so different from Mr. Chu making a living teaching Tai Chi at a Chinese community centre in New York after he
left home.

Figure 4.3 While Mr. Chu is practising Tai Chi, Martha is in the study typing on her computer.

Despite the ways in which these two characters differ in their daily routines or cultural backgrounds, the close-ups of their hands situate their work in the domestic space in addition to presenting the economic value of that work. However, during the process of typing on the keyboard, efficiency and quality have a direct impact on the amount of income. The next shot returns to the computer screen, at which time the sound of typing halts and a portion of the text on the screen is deleted; the frame within a frame implies some obstacles in the writing process. Subsequently, Lee offers another close-up of Martha’s hands, paused over the keyboard, directly conveying her hampered writing. A close-up shot of Martha’s troubled expression concludes this sequence of shots.

The next set of shots shows that the daily lives of these two people are spent in a
domestic space that is not completely divided. By using a half body shot, Ang Lee shows Mr. Chu and Martha in contrasting positions, one in the foreground and one in the background. A hierarchy is thus established (Figure 4.4). The position of the camera returns to Mr. Chu doing Tai Chi in the living room. In the background is Martha typing in the study room. She then stands up and walks from the study to the kitchen, the route of which is almost parallel to the living room and the two do not cross paths. Just as Martha gets to the kitchen, she stops and turns around to watch Mr. Chu (Figure 4.5). This set of shots presents a contrast to the previous sequence shots. More significantly, an increasing awareness of Mr. Chu’s physical activity is interfering with Martha’s writing.

![Image of Mr. Chu and Martha in contrasting positions.](image)

*Figure 4.4 Mr. Chu and Martha in contrasting positions.*
Here, the film conveys a sense of ambiguity within the domestic space. As Dariotis and Fung comments on this scene, “The difference in their daily activities as well as their division of the space of the home complicates even further the issue of silence both as a linguistic absence as well as visual nonrecognition” (1997: 193).

Staging two characters within the domestic space creates a mutually exclusive perspective for the audience in which each characters regards the other as an outsider. In other words, Lee’s mise-en-scene raises questions about identity related to cultural differences.

Another example of cross-border tension is the interference of sound. Due to the language barrier, Mr. Chu must rely on body language to communicate with his daughter-in-law. In one scene, Mr. Chu is watching and humming along to a Peking opera video in the living room (Figure 4.5). The volume of the television and the
humming interfere with Martha’s writing in the study. She walks in front of Mr. Chu, plugs a headphone into the television, and indicates to Mr. Chu to put it on, forcing Mr. Chu to comply (Figure 4.6). In addition to showing that Mr. Chu’s language barrier restricts his choice of programs, this scene demonstrates that once again Mr. Chu must make a concession in this domestic space. In this instance, he can only watch Peking operas on the condition that he does not affect Martha’s writing. As with his silent Tai Chi, he must also watch Peking operas silently. His activity space is thus reduced from the living room to a TV screen. More importantly, the entire domestic space is still dominated by Martha. From her perspective, the martial arts, Peking operas, and even the Chinese language are unappreciated foreign cultural elements that interfere with her writing and must be monitored or eliminated.

Figure 4.6 Mr. Chu is watching a Peking opera video in the living room.
The interactions in the dining room are also essential in *Pushing Hands* in accentuating the collapse of the possible co-existence in a transcultural context. Silence always exists between Mr. Chu and Martha. They do not understand each other, and misunderstandings often take the place of mutual recognition. In an extreme long shot, Mr. Chu puts aluminum foil into the microwave oven, and it bursts into flames. Martha nervously tells Mr. Chu “no metal in the microwave” in English, but Mr. Chu does not understand, and communication fails (Figure 4.7). Later on, Martha eats her lunch at the kitchen counter, and Mr. Chu walks past her but turns back to eat with her (Figure 4.8). They do not exchange a single word. Similarly, while they are making supper for the whole family, they are always at odds. The close-ups on their hands show them preparing for the meal, yet they do not help each other. These sequences without any communication denote their unwillingness or inability to negotiate with each other (Figure 4.10), even though they share in the same domestic activities.
The sequences above show the non-intersecting lives of these two persons using various domestic spaces. Analysis the above sequence, Julianne Pidduck argues that “this wordless intercutting establishes the film’s central conflict between the traditional Chinese patriarch and the modern American woman writer who resents her
father-in-law’s protracted visit. Chu’s technique of ‘pushing hands’ emerges within the film as a metaphor for a distinctively Chinese strategy of coping with change and conflict, ‘a way of keeping balance while unbalancing your opponent’”(2006: 356-357).

These sequences, without dialogue, precisely emphasize the cultural displacement of Chinese diaspora.

Instead of repeating the stereotypical and over-simplified images of Chinese Americans, Lee portrays the multifaceted cultural identities of the Chinese diaspora by integrating his transnational experiences in *Pushing Hands*. Characters in *Pushing Hands* are depicted as contradictory and ambiguous. Mr. Chu can be seen as a character full of surprises and ambivalence. He is an old Tai Chi master, excellent at the skill of “pushing hands.” Through Mr. Chu is portrayed as an old father in the film, he is a man of strength instead of weakness. As a father, Mr. Chu has lost his position as a leading figure in the family, and he spends most of his time practising Tai Chi rather than trying to learn English to communicate with Martha. Stuck at home, Mr. Chu has transformed himself into a housekeeper, preparing dinners and washing dishes for the family. As a member of the Chinese diaspora in America, Mr. Chu has to use “pushing hands” to deal with the changes from the outside world, not only to release
his disappointment and anger from the failure of coexisting with people from different cultures, but also to protect his dignity against the challenges arising from cultural differences.

Compare with Mr. Chu, Martha is an ordinary Caucasian female. Martha in *Pushing Hands* is presented as a repressed figure. She is a professional writer as well as a housekeeper, who is stranded at home and does not possess the ability to get along with Mr. Chu. She has to rely on her husband Alex’s interpretation rather than trying to understand Chinese on her own. As such, she is excluded from the interaction between Alex and Mr. Chu. In other words, she is silenced in the Chinese conversation without the ability to express her anxiety. Furthermore, as a writer, Martha cannot transform her idea into words, symbolizing another failure of expression. As Dariotis and Fung note, “while the film is centered primarily on the displacement of the Chinese father-in-law, it also illustrates the cultural disorientation of the European American wife when her work space in the home becomes dominated by cultural sighs of China” (Dariotis and Fung 1997: 195). Lacking creativity and the ability to articulate, Martha is doubly repressed and deprived. She is a dislocated family member unable to voice her opinion, and a writer incapable of putting her thoughts into words. Moreover, it
stresses the importance of mutual acceptance as a solution for the tension and
misunderstanding. This film poses a greater challenge to the discourse of immigration
by representing immigrants from an insider’s perspective and including diasporic
languages and accents.

Public Space: The Struggle with Homelessness

The previous section demonstrates that the domestic setting is related to the
confrontations arising from cross-cultural misunderstandings. In this section, it is
noteworthy that the setting at the public Chinese community centre represents the
hybrid culture and the collective interests of the Chinese diaspora. Diasporic characters,
says Naficy, tend to cling to notions of their ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness
(2001: 6). These are achieved through an awareness and perpetuation of elements
specifically characteristic of, or associated with, the homeland. As a diasporic figure,
Mr. Chu teaches a Tai Chi class every Saturday morning in a Chinese community
centre, where the Chinese students all respect him. He also meets a widowed
Taiwanese lady, Mrs. Chen, who lives with her only daughter’s family and who also
retreats from her distressing family situation by teaching a cooking class at the centre.
In the meantime, both realise that their children wish to ease their own burden of care by fixing them up. As a result, Mr. Chu decides to leave his son’s house and rent an apartment in Chinatown so he can live independently. If the domestic setting is the site of cross-cultural confrontations, I would argue that the setting of the public Chinese community centre becomes the site where these elderly figures can reconnect with their cultural identities of in a diasporic space.

The following sequence portrays a contrast between the domestic space and the public space in order to highlight the change in cultural identification of the Chinese diaspora. To begin with, a montage sequence shows a range of activities taking place within the interior space of the community centre. The first shot of this sequence, located at the centre, is a tracking shot showing Alex’s son Jimmy learning Chinese language with a group of other Chinese children (Figure 4.11). On the blackboard, the teacher has written the Chinese characters for “father” and “father and son”, which the children repeat verbally and learn to write. In the second shot, a group of middle-aged Chinese people is learning Wai Tan Kung, a traditional Taiwanese conditioning exercise suitable for older people (Figure 4.12). Then we see an indoor basketball court where Alex is playing basketball with his Chinese friends (Figure 4.13). The fourth
shot shows some Chinese people wearing protective gear and practising Taekwondo moves (Figure 4.14). Finally we enter the formal stage of the narrative, Mr. Chu’s Tai Chi classroom (Figure 4.15).

Figure 4.11 Alex’s son Jimmy is learning Chinese with a group of other Chinese children.

Figure 4.12 A group of middle-aged Chinese people learning Wai Tan Kung.

Figure 4.13 Alex playing basketball with his Chinese friends.
In *Pushing Hands*, the setting of Chinese Community Centre becomes the place to promote Chinese culture and the sequence above is noteworthy for a few reasons. First and foremost, all participants, regardless of the type of activity, are of Chinese descent. Second, the majority of activities in this space are associated with Chinese culture; from Chinese language, Taekwondo, and Wai Tan Kung to Tai Chi and Chinese cuisine, these activities signify this space as a place for an immigrant community to practise their traditional cultures. However, it can be argued that the activities also reinforce traditional power relations. For the children learning Chinese language, they are being forced to sit in a classroom to learn what is, for them, a strange “foreign language”, including the writing of the characters for both “father” and “father and son.” This family motif in Ang Lee’s film, as Chris Berry suggests, “based on hierarchically defined social and kinship position,” references the Confucian code of reciprocal
ethical obligations (Berry 2008: 237). By contract, the activities of their parents’ or elders’ generations exhibit visible Chinese traits using their bodies. This declaration and performance of Chineseness demonstrates the attachment and nostalgia of a diasporic community towards the culture of the homeland.

Later in the film, Mr. Chu gets a job in the Chinatown in New York in an attempt to live independently. While refusing to be fired as a dishwasher at a Chinese restaurant, he has a severe conflict with his boss. In a moment of anger, Mr. Chu refuses to leave the restaurant, after which he gets into a fight with several gang members. In a display of his Tai Chi prowess, even a dozen policemen fail to remove him from his spot in the kitchen (Figure 4.16). In the end, he is taken into the police car by the police officers. Although Mr. Chu is sentenced to imprisonment for some time, this event unexpectedly brings positive publicity to Mr. Chu. In the news, Mr. Chu is reported to have resisted dozens of strong American police officers single-handedly despite his old age (Figure 4.17). At the same time, the news broadcast showing his martial arts prowess makes Mr. Chu an instant celebrity, bringing a considerable number of people to the Chinese community centre to learn Tai Chi with him. As a result, Mr. Chu becomes more confident and economically independent in leaving his
son’s home to live by himself in Chinatown.

Figure 4.16 A dozen of policemen could not remove Mr. Chu.

Figure 4.17 Mr. Chu in the news.

Commenting on this scene, Whitney Crothers Dilley writes, “[a]lthough this part of the story is the most far-fetched—would a Chinese tai-chi expert’s feat of strength and subsequent arrest really make it onto the evening news in New York? —it does restore to him [Mr. Chu] a measure of dignity and even heroism” (2007: 59). Dilley points out that not only the character itself, but also the masculinity in the domestic melodrama is significant. At the end of the film, the conflict scene pushes the film toward a
melodramatic register. However, I will argue that we need to maintain and extend the notion of Chinese diaspora.

The final scene of the film returns to the Chinese community centre where, following the events at the restaurant, an increased number of students have come to learn Tai Chi with Mr. Chu. Lee uses tracking shots to display the Chinese old men’s daily activities in the centre (Figure 4.18). Some of them are playing mahjong, and others are practising Tai Chi with Mr. Chu. Through these shots, Lee gathers some of the representative Chinese cultural signs such as martial arts and mahjong, to demonstrate the transformation of Chinese culture, which is alienated from American daily life. The tracking shot captures these members of the Chinese diaspora doing their routine activities of playing mahjong and practising Tai Chi. The tracking shot of Mr. Chu, moreover, demonstrates that the centre has been turned into an estranged space of alienation.

*Figure 4.18 The Chinese old men’s daily activities in the community centre.*
In the above scene, it is worth noting that in one of the shots of Mr. Chu teaching, we can clearly see Mr. Chu correcting the posture of a Caucasian male student in his class (Figure 4.19). This is the first time a person not of Chinese descent has appeared in Mr. Chu’s Tai Chi class, and it would not be surprising if this Caucasian male student had been inspired to learn Tai Chi after seeing Mr. Chu’s extraordinary skills on the evening news. The appearance of non-Chinese people in the Chinese community centre implies that this community institution not only serves Chinese people but also welcomes those from other ethnic groups. For Mr. Chu, more significantly, he now makes a living by teaching Tai Chi and is no longer dependent upon his son, thus leaving the tension of the domestic private space behind him.

Figure 4.19 Mr. Chu correcting the posture of a Caucasian male student.
Lee’s immigrant characters have undergone journeys in terms of their identity. When Mr. Chu starts to teach Tai Chi at the community centre, he meets Mrs. Chen, who migrates from Taiwan to America and shares a similar loss with Mr. Chu. Due to the Chinese civil war, Mrs. Chen was forced to leave Mainland China and lived in Taiwan after 1949. Mr. Chu stayed in Beijing after the war and underwent a series of sufferings: the red guards took his wife’s life and he was persecuted for teaching Tai Chi. When Mr. Chu is trying to help Mrs. Chen to release her pain (Figure 4.20), they talk about their homeland: Beijing. Furthermore, Mrs. Chen mentions that she had returned to Beijing once and felt that “Beijing had lost its flavour, the warmth was gone.” In this scene, we might have already sensed the affiliation and attraction between two characters. For these immigrant characters, their homeland and traditional culture have changed. If members of the diaspora, as Naficy claims, “maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness, which is consolidated by
the periodic hostility of either the original home or the host societies toward them,” (2001: 6) Mr. Chu and Mrs. Chen, who are shackled by their ages and displaced in New York’s Chinatown, can only recall images of mainland China with the mythic attachment to individual memories and imaginary Chineseness.

**Pushing Hands (Tuishou): Border-crossing Negotiations**

“Pushing hands,” known as a method of Tai Chi, trains people to initiate positive contact with an opponent, rather than to immediately fight back or run away. The notion of “pushing hands,” also refers to the vital spirit of Tai Chi and is a metaphor for border-cross negotiation (Dariotis and Fung 1997: 193). As a form of martial art, Tai Chi emphasizes the conversion of defense into offense. The movements of “pushing hands,” for instance, allow two people to practise balance. As a spiritual discipline, more significantly, the practise of pushing hands is “intended to help one overcome both the desire and the fear that fuel these mistakes” (Raposa 2003: 51). According to Dilley, the metaphor of “pushing hands” not only “represents the clash between husband and wife,” but also “could be applied to the force of two cultures” (2007: 57-58). This might explain why Pushing Hands could be understood as a family
melodrama. However, I would argue that the title of the film is deeply symbolic of border-crossing negotiations. As a result of linguistic and cultural differences, Mr. Chu does not receive the respect he deserves as a father-in-law; and as a daughter-in-law, Martha feels that she is being deprived of her living space. Furthermore, they must coexist in the same domestic space for a long period of time, which requires negotiation. As Martha’s husband and Mr. Chu’s son, Alex becomes a mediator in the whirlpool of family conflicts. On the one side, his father feels uncomfortable in a house in which his daughter-in-law treats him as a stranger. On the other side, his wife constantly complains about the old man’s interference to her life. When Martha eventually learns and practises “pushing hands” with Alex at the end of film, Alex explains to his wife, “You know, for dad it was a way of escape from reality. Even when he did ‘pushing hands,’ for him it was a way to avoid other people.” Compared to a close-up of their hands (Figure 4.21), the motion of “pushing hands,” of which Mr. Chu is a master, becomes a symbol of crossing border and transcultural negotiation between the Chinese diaspora and American society.
Figure 4. Alex and Martha practise “pushing hands.”

*Pushing Hands* utilizes the motion of “pushing hands” to signify the dynamics of the Chinese diaspora. From the diasporic perspective of accented filmmaking, *Pushing Hands* can be interpreted as the process of construction of traditional values recognized by Chinese diaspora, or more significantly, the diasporic narrative should be related to Asian American identity. In the narrative of *Pushing Hands*, particularly in the scenes dealing with the subtle attraction between Mr. Chu and Mrs. Chen, the political issue of the One-China principle is expressed. Focusing on the idea of Chineseness in *Pushing Hands*, Shu-mei Shih suggests that “[a]ny potential tension between China (Mr. Chu) and Taiwan (the widow) is glossed over by a rhetoric of shared cultural Chinese-ness, and a sense of pan-Chinese sympathy is established” (2000: 92). In other

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8 “One-China” principle is known as the 1992 Consensus, which is the current policy of both the PRC and ROC governments. Both sides, however, promoted interpretations of the principle that supported their respective agenda, taking advent of the inherent ambiguity of the term “China.” According to Denny Roy, “Beijing described the one-China principle this way: China equals the PRC; Taiwan is part of China; therefore the PRC has sovereignty over Taiwan. In contrast, Taiwan premise was that “China” was larger than either the ROC or the PRC. China was dived and administered by two separate governments implicitly of equal status” (Roy 2003: 213-214).
words, the love story between Mr. Chu and Mrs. Chen hints that the KMT regime will inevitably decline and that “Chinese culture” is at the stage where it requires a new definition. As Lee said of his earlier works (from *Pushing Hands* up until *The Wedding Banquet*):

Looking back, I realize that I have always had identity problems. People like me, second-generation mainlanders from Taiwan, are a rare breed. They last only about two generations and account for a very small portion of people among Chinese, but we have a very unique experience and, in some ways, represent the true-Chinese—unlike the Chinese in mainland China these days! […] That is because in mainland China, they overthrew so many of those aspects of traditional Chinese culture that define who we are. And in Taiwan there are all kinds of local groups who have different cultural affiliations, whether they be Japanese or whatever (Berry 2005: 331-332).

Since the 1990s, the first few years following the lifting of martial law, Chinese identity was facing unprecedented challenges on the local front. It is not surprising that Lee’s *Pushing Hands* emphasizes his nostalgia for Chinese culture as well as his cultural identity as a Chinese diaspora.

Even though Kenneth Chan comments that the opening scene of domestic sphere is “stereotypically framed as an East-versus-West issue” (Chan 2009: 81), I would argue that Lee uses the family melodramatic mode as the vehicle for his return to
Chinese culture, is fundamental to the nature of diaspora. As he mention the influence of his father, Ang Lee writes “[a]ll though my work, I always tend to think that making films was a way of getting a way from my past, but you always have to come back to your roots” (Berry 2005: 329). A diaspora is a transnational journey created when a people disperses from an original homeland, willingly or unwillingly, and resettles in a diversity of other locations. Diasporas are fundamentally hybrid entities, shaped by their location in multiple places and their participation in multiple societies. Out of this historical experience of uprooting and resettlement often emerge works of culture that have a distinctive diasporic shape. Here, the diaspora discourse in *Pushing Hands* thus moves beyond a fixation on the consequences of migration, displacement, and relation to original homelands to focus on the types of cultural materials on which Chinese diaspora draws in constituting their own culture and communities. For example, the portrayal of traditional cultural artifacts in Lee’s film, such as Chinese opera, calligraphy, and martial arts, shares the collective memories of Chinese diaspora.

Despite the frequent appearances of Mr. Chu’s Tai Chi performance and practice, the effect of Chinese martial arts changes in the film. As mentioned in the previous section, Mr. Chu’s demonstration of his Tai Chi in the domestic space in front of his
daughter-in-law created an impassible boundary of cultural differences. In the public
space such as Chinese community centre, however, his martial arts enables him to
transform from a Chinese father who needs to be cared for into a martial arts master
with expert skills. This public space, moreover, is accessible to various diasporic
generations and different ethnic groups, forming the landscape of a cultural hybrid.

However, in this public space, Chinese martial arts can only represent the
paradoxes of Chineseness. In the scene of Chinese center at the end of the film (figure
4.19), we can see Mr. Chu rents an apartment in China Town, teaches Tai Chi to
Chinese and American, and begins a new relationship with Mrs. Chen. In other words,
Mr. Chu is learning how to accept his position as an outsider in United States and still
living his own life to its self-satisfaction. Using Tai Chi as a symbol, the film
illustrates the identity crisis of Chinese diaspora and poses a challenge to binary
divisions, such as the division between Western and Eastern culture, and offers a space
of articulation for identities outside of these enforced divides. Whereas the ending of
*Pushing Hands* denies the two elderly figures their wish to live with their family, the
film concentrates on their present actions and finds hope within these Chinese
immigrants. The motivation of the elderly figures is the desire to find a new identity.
At the end of the film, both of them are standing on the street in Chinatown. Mr. Chu asks her: “anything to do this afternoon?” She hesitates and replies: “nothing.” The conversation between Mr. Chu and Mrs. Chen also hints at a potential future of mutual support in order to survive in a foreign country.

**Between Chinese Diaspora and National Allegory**

How can displaced people fit into a new location, a new culture, and a new nation? So far, I have discussed the film from an “accented” perspective by considering the director Ang Lee as a member of the Taiwanese diaspora and *Pushing Hands* as a work of diasporic filmmaking. As Naficy argues, diasporic filmmakers can create a new cultural identity, shaped by the migrations of people of many different cultural, racial and ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the extent to which these new identities are free from family constraint is more ambiguous. This accent cinema can be understood as a transnational film movement which is “simultaneously global and local, and it exists in chaotic semiautonomous pockets in symbiosis with the dominant and other alternative cinemas” (Naficy 2001: 19). The accents emanate not so much from the accented speech (which in itself is already an indication of movement) of the films’ protagonists.
as from the displacement of the filmmakers themselves (such as Ang Lee). In other words, Naficy pays attention to the notion that the filmmaker is not only an author, but also an empirical subject who, with his films, performs certain aspects of his individual and collective identity.

At the beginning of the film, we can observe Martha’s prejudice against martial arts. When Mr. Chu suggests that the cartoons his grandson watches on American television are too violent, Martha answers back and argues that Chinese Tai Chi is more violent than the cartoons. However, as the story develops, Martha changes her views from rejecting to understanding through observation and practicing the “pushing hands” (Figure 4. 21). From an arrogant Caucasian female opinionated against Chinese culture, she becomes, at the end of film, a culturally tolerant writer and begins to write a cross-cultural novel about Chinese immigrants. In this way, the idea of “pushing hands” successfully transfers from a Chinese melodrama to a symbol of transcultural negotiation in this accented film.
Part Three: Postcoloniality
Chapter Six

Postcolonial Nostalgia: Wu Nien-Jen’s *A Borrowed Life*

Since the 1990s, there have been transnational trends in deploying TNC as a site of cultural translation, of redressing postcolonial subjects or responses to Japanese contemporary culture. While many Taiwanese people have never forgotten Japanese colonial violence, a large number of the older generation tends to regard their former colonizer in a relatively positive light, the traumatic memories of Japan’s rule having been diminished by contrast with the repressive and authoritarian rule of KMT, which moved from Mainland China to Taiwan after World War II. The relative failures of immediate post-war rule by the KMT led, to a certain degree, to nostalgia towards the Japanese amongst the older generation of Taiwanese who experienced both Japanese and KMT rules. Wu Nien-Jen’s *A Borrowed Life* (1994) deals precisely with this through the life of its protagonist, the story of his father. When Taiwanese director expresses nostalgia for the colonial past, how are we to make sense of such sentiments? In terms of cultural diversity in postcolonial Taiwan, this chapter aims to develop an understanding of a constructed colonial past by examining how time and space has
been represented in Wu’s film.

In discussions on TNC, Wu Nien-Jen, who played an indispensable role in the movement as a screenplay writer, is rarely regarded as an ‘auteur.’ It wasn’t until more than ten years after the movement began that Wu made his directorial debut, *A Borrowed Life*, a biographical portrayal of his father and family life during Wu’s childhood. Just like Hou’s *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, *A Borrowed Life* can also be considered an autobiographical film. The narrative is based on Wu’s father’s experiences of living through Japanese and KMT rule. More significantly, Wu’s film presents a dual portrait of a coal miner, Dou-san (pronounced *otosan* in Japanese), and Wen Jian, his young son who bears witness from his own perspective. Compared with his contemporaries, Wu is more susceptible to nostalgia and memory and less critical of the status quo that characterize the works of other TNC directors in the 1990s.

The key term in this chapter that needs clarification is “postcolonial.” In his discussion of Wu’s *A Borrowed Life*, Darrell Davis argues that Wu’s film “released a barrage of postcolonial feeling among Taiwanese people […] because it intervened at a moment when democratic pluralism was overtaking KMT enforcement but memories of underdevelopment and regimentation still had force” (2005: 239). But when can
Taiwan be said to have entered the “postcolonial” era? This is, indeed, a controversial issue. The orthodox view is that it begins with the end of Japanese rule in 1945.

First-generation mainland Chinese who came to Taiwan with the KMT government around 1947 and their descendants would consider 1945 as the year of Taiwan’s decolonization and hence of its post-colonialism. However, others argue that 1945 marks a tragic beginning, of yet another fifty years of KMT internal colonization (Liao 2000: 4). The lifting of martial law in 1987 was hailed as a great transition of Taiwanese politics and society. Prior to that, media democracy in Taiwan advanced by leaps and bounds. The people of Taiwan enjoy many fundamental rights: freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, among others. It is not surprising that Hou’s *A City of Sadness* (1989), for example, the first high-profile film contemplating Taiwan’s post-Japanese colonial history, caused an emotional division of response among the island’s population.

Examining the postcolonial discourse in Wu’s film, as Leo Ching reminds us, the character Dou-san “refers to the generation of men who spent their formative years under Japanese rule and traumatized by the ensuring recolonization by the KMT” (2000: 766). Between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was considered to be part of Japan. After
Japan surrendered, many older Taiwanese who were educated under Japanese occupation were upset by the arrival of officials of the new KMT regime (some of whom were corrupt) and began to feel nostalgia for the Japanese colonial period. After watching Wu’s film, Davis notes many older Taiwanese were “moved to tears by a narrative of postcolonial intransigence and desire” (Davis 2005: 237).

Given TNC’s postcolonial situation and its preferred biographical form, Wu has changed the representation of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan. Traveling back into his own memory, *A Borrowed Life* speaks to Wu’s ambiguity toward Japanese identity. In this chapter, I examine changing perceptions of nostalgia as a crucial element of reformulating cultural identity by analyzing *A Borrowed Life*. In addressing cultural memory and national identity, this chapter, moreover, focuses on the sense of loss in nostalgic encounters in this biographical film.

**Between Colonial Past and Nostalgic Memory**

The cinematic traditions of TNC in the 1980s in the form of localized narratives continued to appear in these later works. June Yip indicates that “Taiwan may be rushing headlong toward integration into global circuits of commerce, communications,
and culture, but the strongly territorial impulses of the ‘back to the earth’ movement that gave rise to Taiwanese hsiang-t’u (Nativist)\(^9\) literature of the 1970s and inspired New Cinema of the 1980s have not disappeared” (2004: 243). She proceeds to use *A Borrowed Life* as an example to support her argument, saying that this film is “a nostalgic look back at rural life during the years immediately following the Japanese occupation, [and] clearly draws on the yearning for the kind of village-based Taiwanese identity that shaped hsiang-t’u literature and on the traditions of social realism that marked New Cinema in its earliest days” (ibid.). Here Yip uses *A Borrowed Life* to emphasize the localized implications of this nostalgic perspective. As she comments, furthermore, the film employs the strategy of rewriting local postwar history, making connection between hsiang-t’u literature and the New Cinema movement.

Yip, however, did not proceed to explore the connection between the colonial past and the nostalgia towards the Japanese that is clearly portrayed in the film. I would suggest that *A Borrowed Life* can be seen as a postcolonial nostalgic film. The term of “nostalgia” is from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia*, a painful condition—thus, a painful yearning to return home (Davis 1979: 1). Moreover,

\(^9\) Xiangtu is the different ways of romanising the term (in pinyin).
nostalgia can mean a longing for experiences, things, or acquaintanceships belonging to the past. Fred Davis thus considers the relationship between nostalgia and identity, and argues that “nostalgia is relating our past to our present and future, it follows that nostalgia is deeply implicated in the sense of who we are, what we are about, and whither we go” (ibid.: 31). He highlights how nostalgia is an accessible “psychological lens” (ibid.: 31), through which people can participate in the never-ending work of constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing identities.

Therefore, I would not only characterize *A Borrowed Life* by its sense of Japanese nostalgia, but also argue that this sense is derived from the narrative practices that marked TNC. In other works produced during the same period, we can easily find paradigms for the biographical format of *A Borrowed Life*, which were based on memories of the director’s father, for instance, Hou Hsiao-hsien in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. The desire of these two directors to use a nostalgic film script to rewrite the postwar history of Taiwan implies a realistic point of view. Nostalgia, as Pam Cook argues, “plays on the gap between representations of the past and actual past events, and the desire to overcome that gap and recover what has been lost” (2005: 4). Wu’s film plays on the gap between Taiwanese older generation’s nostalgia and
representations of the Japanese rule and the KMT regime.

After the lifting of the martial law, these nostalgic perspectives towards colonial past are no longer taboo for Taiwanese filmmakers. Wu’s ambivalent position on post-colonialism and the struggle with the Japanese colonial legacy are all conveyed through the nostalgic narrative of many works from the TNC period, such as Wang Tong’s Strawman/Dao caoren (1987) and Hill of No Return/Wuyan de shanqiu (1992), and Hou Hsiao-hsien’s City of Sadness (1989) and The Puppetmaster (1993). The commonality of these films is in their realistic viewpoint as they all characterize to some extent the various forms of violence suffered by the people during Japanese colonization. Moreover, the objective of these films was to portray colonial modernity as a foundation of local identity as a form of resistance to the political ideology of Chinese nationalism promulgated by the Nationalist Party. However, the Japanese colonial discourse in TNC has not been comprehensively explored in existing research.

In their book Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam explore the shadow cast by empire over the cinema as an institution whose very origins coincided with the giddy heights of imperialism (1994: 9). From the Western point of view, Shohat and Stam further suggest that the
colonizing intertext of the imperial adventure film and the western film subliminally
structure even contemporary representations, becoming, they suggest, obvious in
“colonial nostalgia” film (Ibid: 118) such as David Lean’s Passage to India (1984) or
Sydney Pollack’s Out of Africa (1985). In the context of the colonial history of East
Asia, the postcolonial nostalgia in TNC can be seen either as a struggle between
writing colonial history or as a crisis of national identity. In Wu’s film, Dou-san is the
protagonist’s bastardized Japanese name, which evokes the Japanese occupation and a
feeling of colonial nostalgia. In this regard, A Borrowed Life helps to crystallize the
beginnings of a dramatic change of Wu’s attitude towards Japan’s historical presence
in Taiwan.

In Wu’s film, the older generations belong to those “Taiwanese” who were
formerly “Japanese” during the period of Japanese rule. When analyzing the narrative
of A Borrowed Life, we cannot merely characterize the film as “biographical”; rather,
as the director states: “Many people think that the film is about my father, but I think it
is about his whole generation” (Berry 2005: 309). In other words, the nostalgic
narrative can be seen as a strategy for rewriting postcolonial Taiwan history. However,
critiques of nostalgic narratives often accuse them of de-historicizing the past and
creating a romantic story and timeless zone outside social change and historical
analysis (Cook 2005: 16). In order to examine the emergence of postcolonial discourse
in the context of TNC, the questions we would seek to explore are as follows: How
does the ambivalent colonial discourse presented in *A Borrowed Life* simultaneously
portray the plight of post-colonialism? Is there any possibility of finding a new
Taiwanese identity through this nostalgic film? In this chapter I will discuss how the
film uses realist cinematic language to create an sentiment of nostalgia in which to
explore the dilemma of cultural identity faced by the protagonist. The following
sections analyze aspects of sound, dialogue and spatial dynamics of the film, and
contribute to debates about postcolonial discourse and changing cultural contexts in
taiwan cinema.

**Voice and Sound**

With the voice-over provided by Wu himself, the film portrays the difficulties faced by
the pre-war generation in relation to their national identity while living under Japanese
rule and then the KMT regime. Dou-san, the protagonist, was born in 1929, thirty-four
years after Taiwan became a Japanese colony, and he received a Japanese education.
After the transition from Japanese rule to that of the Nationalist government, Dou-san still has difficulties freeing himself from Japanese colonial legacies. Hence, the film creates the lure of nostalgia for the colonial past, derived from the director’s yearning for his deceased father, the vivid portrayal of Taiwanese rural life during the postwar years, and most significantly, Dou-san’s attachment to the colonial past, or so-called Japanese ness. As Kuan-Hsing Chen points out, *A Borrowed Life* “was the first film to address the effects of colonialism in Taiwan after the Second World War” (2010: 125).

Diegetic and non-diegetic sounds play a central role in the production of nostalgia in *A Borrowed Life*. In this section I will discuss how voice and sound evoke a sense of colonial nostalgia, and how the feeling of nostalgia associates with loss of a particular way of life. First and foremost, I would argue that the function of the voice-over is a significant component in Wu’s biographical film. Wu speaks in a first person biographical voice-over in the film, sometimes addressing the spectator and at other times addressing his father. In addition to the voice-over narration, the director Wu uses the first person that is supposed to represent Wu in his childhood and his youth, which reenact his time with his family.

It is not surprising that “Japan” has constituted the object of desire in the identity
In colonial Taiwan, the Japanese educational model and its language constituted the foundations of ruling strategies. Through a political campaign of Japanization or imperialization, known as Kominka, between 1937 and 1945, the colonial government achieved a degree of hegemonic control over the Taiwanese population. Beginning with the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, requiring the colonized Taiwanese to speak Japanese as well as adopt a Japanese surname were important parts of the kominka movement, which aimed to transform the Taiwanese into imperial subjects (Lamley 1999: 236). During the period of martial law (1947-1987), ironically, the repression of the KMT government seemed to have revived the ghost of kominka, even in the absence of Japanese colonial power. After 1945, the former national language, Japanese, was replaced with a new national language, Mandarin Chinese.

The KMT government in Taiwan aggressively promoted Mandarin Chinese by banning Japanese in schools, government and local media. Therefore, the generation who was educated in postwar Taiwan held different views towards Japan from the pre-war generation.

However, Dou-san’s life experience during Japanese occupation is absent in the politics of contemporary Taiwan, given its half-century of colonial rule (1895-1945).
Rather, the film sets in the shabby mining village after the end of Japanese colonization of Taiwan. In his biographical film, Wu’s voice-over commentary precisely explores that cultural cringe that makes the older generations admire them to the very end. In one of the earlier scenes, Dou-san brought his elder son, Wen-Jian to the cinema. While walking through the hill, Dou-san carried his son on his back. Using the setting of rural landscape, Wu’s voice-over jumps to the beginning of his father’s national identity:

All his life, whenever someone asked Dou-san how old he was, he was accustomed to replying, “I was born in the fourth year of the Shōwa period.” Therefore, from a young age I learned to remember the following formula: year of the Shōwa period + 14 = year of the Minguo calendar. Just like nowadays we all know that you must add 11 to a year of the Minguo calendar to obtain the equivalent year of the Western calendar. According to these formulas, Dou-san was born in the 18th year of the Minguo calendar and the year 1929 of the Western calendar. He would be 65 years old this year, if he were still alive.

In his voice-over, Wu tells the story of his father through the eyes of the elder son. The narrator comments on the father’s use of the Japanese calendar to identify his age. To help the audience understand the Japanese colonial period in which Dou-san was born, the voice-over narrator provides formulas for converting a year of the Japanese
calendar into the corresponding year of the Minguo calendar, and then converting the result into a year of the western calendar. Why was it necessary to provide a formula?

Not surprisingly, the “we” referred to in the third sentence of the paragraph does not know how to convert the Japanese calendar into a format “we” can all understand—the Minguo calendar. Here “we” refers to the postwar generation, including Wen-jian and his younger brother and sister, educated under the KMT government and accustomed to using the Minguo calendar.

The above commentary serves as an example of how Wu, speaking in his Taiwanese-accented Mandarin, realizes his father’s Japanese identity. Speaking to us of his father, Wu at the same time speaks to his father, bringing him to life by means of his film. Commenting on A Borrowed Life in an interview, Wu says: “I chose an approach that would reflect how people in that [Japanese-educated] generation searched for their own identities and struggled with issues of national identity” (Berry 2005: 311). Through the narrator’s perspective in the voice-over, Wu accounts for his father’s Japanese nostalgia and colonial identity after the Japanese Occupation ended.

Wu’s voice-over reveals a structure of feeling that would be foreign to the majority of the postwar generation: a feeling of nostalgia for the former Japanese
colonial culture on the island. Nostalgic representation here is indeed the best substitute for historical consciousness. Dou-san’s insistence on using the Japanese calendar to express his age was a choice related to national identity. Because the film aims to reflect on the father’s entire life from a son’s point of view, we are not surprised at the appearance of these formulas within the narrative. As a voice-over narrator from the postwar generation, the director uses a biographical genre to describe significant incidents and focus on the sentiment of colonial nostalgia.

*A Borrowed Life* is thus an intimate chronicle of the lives of Taiwanese *(benshengren)*—the ethnic Chinese whose ancestors migrated to the island before the KMT’s arrival, and a group to which Wu belongs, unlike other Chinese Mainlanders *(waishengren)* directors such as Hou Hsiao Hsien and Edward Yang. Where popular Taiwan melodrama films in the 1980s like Wan Jen’s *Ah Fei/You ma cai zi* (1983) routinely depict the values of filial piety in crisis, particularly emphasizing the situation of women, *A Borrowed Life* never falls back on these formulaic reassurances. The film’s precise handling of Taiwan’s postwar melancholia openly invites postcolonial considerations.
Apart from the voice-over narration, the representation of radio broadcast also has a significant function in the film. Wu’s postcolonial concerns, as well as the sense of identity crisis, are hinted at in his use of sound. Japanese-language broadcast expresses the sentiment of colonial nostalgia that developed in the postwar condition and is also a significant diegetic sound source, casting the Japanese language as a symptom of postcolonial anxiety. In the following scenes, we will see it is more convenient the prewar generation to listen to radio news produced by Japan’s national public broadcasting corporation (NHK, Japanese Broadcasting Corporation). I will analyze two scenes from the film that evoke nostalgia through sound and consider the implications of Japanese identity and postcolonial melancholy in a historical context.

The opening shot of A Borrowed Life is clearly nostalgic: the outline of a man polishing his shoes, almost imperceptible actions behind a soft focus. The camera is focused on Dou-san sitting in the doorway, confirming that he is the main character. The opening scene shows Dou-san and his friends secretly discussing their plans to visit the brothel that night. In addition to the scene, the following shot highlights the importance of the radio news. Before leaving home, Dou-san slicks his hair back in front of the mirror for a night on the town. At the same time, the radio begins to
produce static noise (Figure 5.1). Thus Dou-san starts shaking the radio in an attempt to stabilize the signal. Eventually, a component part from the radio falls off, and the Japanese radio news ceases completely. Dou-san is quite unhappy with the performance of the radio, and crossly says: “People never listen to me when I tell them that cheap products are just no good. A Japanese-manufactured radio would last at least ten years without breaking.” This complaint at first appears to be merely expressing admiration for Japanese-manufactured products. As a coalminer, however, Dou-san may not be able to afford a Japanese-made product. For the prewar Taiwanese generation such as Dou-san, it is important to recognize the cultural significance of the radio news on his daily life.

![Figure 5.1 Dou-san is checking the radio to be sure that it is working properly.](image)

Throughout the film the story is narrated through the various diegetic sounds such as the radio. In the above scene we can hear the sound clips of radio reports from NHK
(Japanese Broadcasting Cooperation) radio station. During the martial law era in Taiwan, the electronic media including television and radio was under tight government supervision and control (Hickey 2007: 74). Even though it was illegal, listening Japanese news from NHK was an only way to connect the world. In fact, the following scene will show that his need to catch the radio news is far greater than an attachment to Japanese-made products. Compared to the media censorship of the time, the Japanese-speaking generation in Taiwan believed that the radio news produced by the Japanese public broadcasting corporation was a reliable source of unbiased news.

The habit of listening to Japanese radio news broadcasts is reflected not only in Dou-san’s life but also in that of his friend Tiao-Chun. The front yard scene shows all the villagers resting outside their houses after a day’s work in the coalmines, with Japanese radio playing (Figure 5.2). In the centre of the screen, Tiao-Chun sits on a bench reading a book, listening to the radio news, and watching Wen-Jian use the bench as a desk to do his homework. Dou-san sits on the doorway smoking and his wife gossips with her neighbours while chopping firewood. The interaction among these villagers shows that this is the rest period for the miners, and listening to the radio has been a daily routine for them.
The Taiwanese have struggled with their sense of national identity for many decades, spanning from the Japanese occupation period to the present day. For the Japanese-language generation, this presents a struggle between two cultures. Tiao-Chun is only a coalminer but he is one of the few who are literate. This is the difference between him and Dou-san. As he sits in front of Dou-san’s house listening to Japanese radio news and teaching Wen-Jian to write, he simultaneously plays the role of enlightenment figure of the film.

Throughout Wu’s film, this source of diegetic sound relates, every single time, to the postcolonial identity. The radio broadcast allowed Taiwanese under martial law to continue receiving news from Japan, which strengthened its influence in the public sphere. In the previous scene (Figure 5.2), another dialogue between Tiao-Chun and his wife is crucial. Tiao-Chun’s wife passed through the front yard and asked him:
“Why do you always listen to the radio news here? Would you like to read the newspaper at home?” Tiao-Chun answered her: “Taiwan’s newspaper can no longer be trusted to provide the truth.” For Tiao-Chun, the Japanese broadcast is the only free channel through which world news is transmitted; listening to Japanese radio program is not simply a sense of nostalgia.

In this case, Japanese radio news allowed far greater freedom of the press than postwar Taiwan under the KMT regime. The older generation was born during the Japanese occupation and received a Japanese education; then, virtually overnight, they had to transform themselves into Chinese and speak Mandarin, which, to them, is a foreign language. During the period of martial law, therefore, their Japanese-language education was no longer useful in Mandarin-speaking Taiwan. Listening to Japanese radio news was a way for the older generation to keep updated on the latest international news. Radio news in Japanese, in other words, opens the door to another type of possibility; it provides the Japanese-educated generation with a channel through which to access worldwide news despite the regulation of the news media under martial law. The above dialogue in this scene may appear to be nostalgic escapism, but in fact it is the reconstruction and meaning of cultural identity.
In the 1980s the emergence of TNC fulfilled a cultural need. In particular, cinematic nostalgia was a significant motif in many of Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang’s films. As June Yip comments on Hou’s *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Chinese mainlanders such as the parents and the grandmother in the film “cling desperately to the past and the homeland that has been lost” (2004: 219). This film is certainly not the only one in TNC in which nostalgia impels personal memory to re-trace family history. Wu’s *A Borrowed Life*, in particular, is complex and suggestive of the era of Wu’s childhood, and focuses on the impact of the Japanese colonial authority upon the older generation of the family. This film shows the process by which the Japanese-educated generation identifies with Japan through his growing experience which, though deeply imbued with nostalgia, reflects the colonial past and points to the shift of socio-political climate. This voice of nostalgia not only influences the film’s presentation of the colonial past but also implicitly mirrors the changing political and cultural landscape of the 1990s, when Taiwan was about to start its political and social reforms.

**Dialogue and Conflict**
Wu not only uses his memory of his own life experience as the narrative for the social, cultural and economic changes postwar Taiwan has seen over four decades, but also offers an indelible picture of the mining community in which he grew up. The biographical film centres on his difficult relationship with his father, a coal miner who considered himself Japanese rather than Chinese and never fulfilled his role as head of the family. In this section, I will examine a central line of tension present in the film in order to argue that the story of *A Borrowed Life* is postwar Taiwan’s quest for its identity at the particular juncture of history after Japan’s defeat and the return of Taiwan to Mainland China.

*A Borrowed Life* is one of the most important biographical films that focus on the intergenerational gap of the rural working class as one of the postcolonial effects in postwar Taiwan. First and foremost, there is an intergenerational conflict between Dou-san and his children: in contrast to Dou-san’s nostalgia for Japan, his children’s Chinese identity has been shaped by the KMT’s patriotic education in postwar Taiwan. As Tonglin Lu comments on this film, Dou-san’s identity crisis, “brought about by the rapid transition from the defeated colonial government to the Nationalist Party, perverted the father-son relationship” (2011: 773). This becomes the crucial question
in the fight between the generations.

The postwar young generation, such as Wen-Jian and his younger siblings who grow up within the KMT regime and under its “patriotic” education system, has received greater cultural influence from Mainland China. The KMT education in postwar Taiwan as a political tool, as Edward Vickers notes, was held and strategies of decolonization were aimed at removing Japanese cultural influences and promoting “education for nationalism” (Vickers 2009: 21). Vickers thus suggests that Taiwanese youth were “subjected to a concerted campaign of Chinese nationalist indoctrination,” (Ibid.: 21) in which schooling naturally played a key role of patriotic education. For them, Japan is the preeminent culprit. In addition to the KMT regime’s patriotic education policy, the postwar generation was educated in Mandarin and knew little of the Taiwanese dialects including Hakka, Hoklo, or aboriginal languages. Throughout the film, the language barrier between the two generations can easily lead to misunderstanding. The plot of intergenerational conflict shown in A Borrowed Life expresses the political contention between the two generations caused by different national identifications.

The following two scenes of conflict in the film appear to be a confrontation of
extremely different national identities; however, they also hint at the struggle between
the two forces of colonizing power. In a domestic scene, the younger daughter is sitting
on a bamboo chair. Here, an extreme long shot shows that she is working on her
homework. When the younger daughter asks Dou-san to help her draw the Republic of
China’s flag, he uses red for the sun against the field of blue, like the red sun on the
Republic of China’s flag (Figure 5.3). His young daughter, however, has been taught in
the school that the sun depicted on the Republic of China flag should be white, and so
an argument erupts.

Figure 5.3 The drawing shows a twelve-pinted red sun on a blue background.

The daughter (to Wen-jian): You see, father paints the national flag in such a
way. How can I hand this in?
Dou-san: I am helping you out. How can you complain? If the sun isn’t red, what
colour can it be? Only the devil would see the sun as white.
The daughter: Lu Hau-tang painted it white, originally.
Dou-san: He’s illiterate, and are you as stupid as he is? You are really stupid.
Look closely at the colour of the sun on the Japanese flag. Is it white? Nonsense.
The daughter: For you, everything is Japanese! Are you Wang Jing-wei?
Dou-san: Don’t think that I don’t understand Bagin Huei [Minnan for Mandarin].
The daughter: You are a Han traitor, a running dog. You are Wang Jing-wei.
Dou-san (to Wen-jian): what is she saying now? Bakayaru [a rude Japanese term for “damn you”]

The national flag is a symbol of national identity and belonging. Here, Dou-san might have misunderstood her daughter’s request, because he was educated during the period of Japanese colonization. For him, the national flag of Japan is a white rectangular flag with a large red disk as well as representing the sun in the middle of the sky. For her daughter, however, his father can be regarded as a traitor because he even cannot recognize the national flag of ROC (Figure 5.4). Therefore, the domestic confrontation between father and daughter expresses the national identity crisis of the older generation.

![ROC’s flag (left) and Japan’s flag (right).](image)

Interpreting the dispute between father and daughter in Wu’s *A Borrowed Life*, as Kuan-hsing Chen suggests, “having lived his formative years in the colonial era,
Dou-sang [Dou-san] uses Japanese and takes Japan as a reference point in his daily life, just as his children, who are forced to use Mandarin, necessarily adopt the Republic of China as their point of reference” (Chen 2010: 127). Like many of his generation, Dou-san feels closer to Japanese culture than to that of the Mainland Chinese who took over Taiwan in 1945. For Dou-san, the red sun on the Japanese flag was a clear point of reference in his attempt to correct his daughter’s error. The daughter, not comprehending how different Dou-san’s frame of reference was from her own, refused to concede. Her understanding of modern Chinese history was derived from her education in the KMT school system, as reflected in her negative evaluation of Wang Jingwei and positive references to Lu Hao-tung. These contentious generational differences hint at the greater social changes taking place.

In the next scene, the two younger children and the father are watching a basketball match between Chinese Taipei and Japan on television (Figure 5.5). The boy is cheering for the Taiwanese team, while Dou-san’s support for the Japanese team sparks an argument between them.
Dou-san: Is this a Japanese team? Who are they playing?
The Younger son: Us.
Dou-san: No point in watching. If they play against us, there is no point in watching. If they were not good enough, they would not dare to come. Our team will be killed.
The younger son: You never know…cheer up, cheer up, score, hurry up, hurry up, pass, pass, good, score!
Dou-san: You see, you see, they are a country playing in the Olympic Games. Will they lose to us? If they lose, I will ask each of them to commit suicide. You will see. Eat your damn meal. Don't yell like a devil.
The younger son: Watch, score again, suicide, suicide, suicide.
Wen-Jian: You eat your meal.
The younger son: Two points again, suicide, suicide.
Dou-san: What the hell are you yelling for? Calling a ghost? It is the middle of the night, very late.
Daughter: You do this every time! You, a Han traitor and a running dog!
Dou-san: if I had known you’d be like this, I would have drowned you when you were small.
Mother: where are you going?
The younger brother: To watch the Japanese being killed!

This scene appears similar to the last one. The first conflict was caused by differences.
in the systems of knowledge underlying national identity; in the second conflict, national identity is transformed into rivalry over a basketball match. Commenting on the above scenes, as Koichi Iwasaki notes, Wu “recollected how, as a student who was taught negatively about the Japanese occupation at school, he hated his father’s longing for that period—a longing which was betrayed by the unresponsiveness Japan displayed to Taiwan after the War” (Iwasaki 2002: 125). In postwar Taiwan, these signs of inter-generational conflict over nationalism remained an unresolved problem.

In *A Borrowed Life*, the male figures have lost their patriarchal status. Dealing with his daughter’s negative attitude, Dou-san mutters his dissatisfaction in Taiwanese that is literally translated as “willful wives and wicked children cannot be managed.” Commenting on this “father figure,” Darrell Davis argues that “his idolization is very far from any aestheticized, Orientalist Japanophilia. Dou-san’s identification is a kind of escape; something freely chosen despite the constraints he faces in the 1950s” (2005: 244). One may argue that as a result of Wu’s background, his use of the father figure as a unifying force informs the portrayal of this seeming disintegration of the patriarchal order in *A Borrowed Life*. As Wu himself responded in an interview on *A Borrowed Life* about his choice in dealing with the issue of generation gap, “I wanted to describe
the misunderstandings people have about [the older generation] and how these misunderstandings affect them; it is so sad” (Berry 2005: 310).

The above scene shows that Dou-san strongly desires patriarchal authority, but this desire has never been fully satisfied. Wen-Jian is not only a mediator in the dispute but also a witness to the struggle for national identity between two generations. As indicated by Kuan-hsing Chen, “we can see that it is only through such emotional confrontations that Dou-san’s painful sadness and his Japanese structure of sentiment can be felt, and hence shared with and handed down to the next generation” (Chen 2010: 134). In above scenes, the emotional confrontations between father and his children can be understood as the struggle for cultural identity in postcolonial Taiwan.

After examining these two scenes, we see that Wen-Jian is not only a mediator nor merely a bystander. More importantly, Wu use this character to make the connection between his father’s nostalgic feelings and his national identity, and demonstrates that his father is part of oppressed individuals. In other words, the above scenes bring out the cultural politics in postwar Taiwan to explore the conflict between dominant culture (nationalist authority) and subordinate culture (colonial identity).

Commenting on these scenes, Tonglin Lu suggests that Wu “use[s] different frames to
interpret reality: the past of Japanese colonization and the present of the Nationalist government” (Lu 2011: 771-772). Both conflicts between father and son/daughter result from the educational control of the Nationalist government.

In an interview, Wu explained why he set up the domestic scene in relation to the tension between father and son/daughter, as the “political generation gap” in his film:

My father went through the White Terror in the 1950s and 1960s. For him KMT [Kuomintang; Nationalist Party] was something to be feared. I grew up in the same period, assuming that the KMT ran everything. KMT ideology was the air that everyone breathed then. Even now, in the 1990s, with the emergence of a kind of emotional antagonism against the KMT, this pushed my father and his generation still closer to Japan (Davis 2003: 722).

Thanks to the KMT regime’s successful patriotic education policy in schools for four decades, especially Wen-Jian’s siblings, shared a strong Chinese identity instead of a Japanese or Taiwanese identity. In spite of Japan’s defeat, many older Taiwanese who responded emotionally to Wu’s film cling to colonial-era thinking and even continue to admire Japan (Davis 2005: 237). Wu’s film examines the relationship between father and son/daughter, which became complicated because of the father’s loyalty to Japan.

One of the social ideologies that impacted on education in the postwar period
when Taiwan shifted from Japanese to Chinese rule was the historical project of nation
building, which can be traced to the 19th century European tradition. Commenting the
nation building in combination with imperialism and nationalism, as Ann Heylen
observed:

In colonial Taiwan, this national character was redefined in a ‘Japanese’ setting. The Japanese educational model and its language constituted the foundations of ruling strategies. The 1950s decolonization process did not imply the end of the ‘national’ trope; on the contrary, issues involving national-identity did re-surface (2004: 5-6).

The older generation, who had been educated under Japanese rule, was forced to
identify themselves as “Chinese” during the martial law era. For the older generation,
choosing to identify with Japan became a way of resisting Chinese nationalism.
Throughout the film, the older members in the village tend to speak only Taiwanese
dialect or some Japanese, and always listen to the Japanese radio programs. In other
words, they are either unable or unwilling to speak the official language imposed on
the island. However, they all knew that even though they still identified with Japan,
they were no longer Japanese.

The generational divide between father and son is elucidated in Wu’s film. During
the period of martial law, the nationalist government’s control over education consisted of enacting assimilative “Chinese reunification” education and dislodging any influence from the Japanese colonial period. Therefore, as Leo Ching comments, it is not surprising that Dou-san “exudes a sense of masculine dignity, sadness, and loneliness from the alienation he suffers under the new regime and the longing for a Japan that is no longer in his ‘borrowed life’” (2012: 213).

The collective memory of the older generation is what Wu intends to reconstruct in the film. As Wu said: “I’ve always been struck by how very hard this generation has had it, and really wanted to make a movie [A Borrowed Life] based on them” (Berry 2005: 310). Raymond Williams describes structures of feeling as “social experience in solution.” As Raymond Williams put it in Marxism and Literature, “We also defined a social experience still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies” (Williams 1977:132). While A Borrowed Life sould not be labelled as a project to rewrite national history from the perspective of the former colonizer, it does convey the older generation’s structure of feeling as “social
experience in solution,” the culture of a particular collective experience. By portraying

the nostalgic attachment to the past and a simultaneous inability to discover

self-identity, the above conflicts between father and son/daughter successfully explore

an ambivalent position of national identity.

*A Borrowed Life* shows that Taiwanese people who were educated after World

War II held quite different views of Japan. On the one hand, the film deals with the

nostalgia of the older generation for the Japanese period. On the other hand, this

Japanese nostalgia was fuelled by their intense disappointment over the KMT’s

repressiveness (Liao 1997: 240). At the end of the film, after his father dies, Wen-Jian

dutifully takes a photograph of him to Japan to carry out his wish to “see the royal

palace and Mt. Fuji.” The photographic image is about a Taiwanese man who has long

harboured a dream to visit Japan. More significantly, Dou-san’s dream can be seen “as

a wish on his part to affirm an identity and history which were forged during the

Japanese period but which he was later forced to deny or repress under a

KMT-governed Taiwan” (Iwabuchi 2006: 28). In other words, his nostalgia revolved

around a longing for the characteristics of the former colonizer and negative feelings

towards Chinese nationalism. By contrast, Wen-Jian’s brother and sister were taught
negatively about Japanese colonial rule at school.

**Memory of Time**

As mentioned earlier, the ambiguity towards the Japanese in *A Borrowed Life* has generated multiple perceptions of national identities. Wu utilizes cinematic symbols such as long shot and long take, linking together the Taiwanese prewar generation’s memory, as well as narrative strategy of nostalgia in different ways to question the relationship between past and present, then and now. *A Borrowed Life* employs specific events to produce a kind of meditation on the passage of time, viewed as a lure of the past in the postwar countryside, such as the characters listening to Japanese radio programmes, going with friends to Japanese dining bars, singing Japanese songs, and watching Japanese films in the cinema. Although the events, locations and activities described above are all associated with “Japan,” they are also full of the political ambiguity of postcolonial Taiwan. In this section, I will argue that Dou-san’s colonial nostalgia is determined by a continuous feeling of an unfulfilable loss. The English title of the film “A Borrowed Life” can be considered one of the most important hints for a sense of loss. Dou-san is representative of a generation lost in postwar Taiwan—a
generation for whom Mandarin Chinese is not a native Taiwanese language, a
generation that had grown up under a Japanese school system speaking fluently
Japanese. More significantly, Dou-san’s life is one of borrowings from cultures
colonial and distant—Japanese and Chinese.

Wu’s nostalgic film is not a conventional bildungsroman in which a young man
grows up and flees the nest on a journey of self-discovery. Wu fixes his attention
instead on Dou-san and creates a moving portrait of frustration and tenacity that the
film implies echo the experience of Japanese nostalgia. By addressing a sense of
colonial nostalgia, we will examine a scene set in the cinema and brothel, and question
how nostalgia can be represented. These two settings will appear to have a relatively
close relationship with the colonial legacy. I will argue that the film depicts, through
selected nostalgic settings, how Dou-san’s generation transformed the spectrum of
cultural identity through their nostalgia for Japanese period.

This early scene finds colonial legacy in the tradition of a Taiwanese-language
benshi\(^{10}\) who narrated a Japanese melodrama in a local film house. At the beginning of
the film, Dou-san would like to take his son to the cinema, telling his wife they were

\(^{10}\) Benshi is a crucial role in Japanese silent cinema. As a narrator, benshi is the person who set to the
left of the screen to “explain” and to perform narrative and dialogue (Anderson 1982: 439).
going to catch a film, but his real aim was to go drinking and gambling with his buddies and the hostesses. This was a secret between father and son.

At the beginning of the sequence, Wen-Jian and his father enter the cinema with a group of friends from the older generation. The cinema is showing the Japanese melodrama film without subtitles. The camera cuts to a long shot of the cinema screen from a viewer’s perspective (Figure 5.7). The scene set in a Taiwanese cinema provides a Taiwanese-language *benshi* translating over a Japanese soundtrack.

Commenting on this scene, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis write: “the Japanese-language soundtrack, and the Taiwanese *benshi*’s performance overlap in a hypnotic mélange of sentimental nostalgia” (2005: 71). The *benshi* both narrates the story and impersonates the voices of the Japanese character in Taiwanese language. In addition to the film’s dialogue, moreover, he adds advertising asides and occasional announcements to individual audience members. For the audience today, Wu concentrates on the way in which the Japanese-language melodrama film and the Taiwanese *benshi*’s performance overlap in a touch of sentimental nostalgia.
This opening shot of a local film house in the 1950s conveys a more positive representation of Japan’s colonial legacy. As Michael Baskett argues, Wu’s film is a “powerful, biographical depiction of the lingering influence that the Japanese empire had on the daily lives on an entire generation of Taiwanese” (2008: 20). In the cinema scene, Wu suggests benshi still survived in rural Taiwan in the initial postwar years. According to Lee Daw-Ming, benshi in film exhibition with Taiwanese audiences “held on to their jobs until the end of Japanese rule in 1945, and some even worked well into the 1950s” (Lee 2013: 61). The scene thus shows the overlapping linguistic
and diegetic world, portraying the collective memory of older generation as Japanese colonial residues.

Discussing Stanley Kwan’s *Rouge* (1987), Rey Chow’s analysis of Hong Kong can certainly be applied to the postcolonial condition of Taiwan:

If the expedience of technology means that human separation itself need no longer be mournful because of diminished travel distances, it also means that our relations to the past are drastically altered because of the unprecedented disintegration of stationary places. Nostalgia now appears differently, working by a manipulation of temporality rather than by a simple projection of lack/loss onto space (1993: 61).

The form of nostalgia Chow chooses to analyze in Kwan’s film is characterized by a continuous searching for the object. This notion of nostalgia, she writes, is “(re)collected in compressed forms, forms that are fantasies of time” (1993: 61). In the above scene, the film-watching process with a *benshi* narrator evokes feelings of nostalgia (Figure 5.7). It represents the specific experience of watching a foreign film in earlier 1950s Taiwan. In other words, the *benshi* gives a redundant description of the action, offers an explanation of the motive, and elucidates the setting of the film, putting the film in its foreign context. Instead of adding subtitles on the screen, more
significantly, the *benshi* translates the Japanese dialogue and even contextualize the Japanese melodrama into Taiwanese. Addressing this cinema scene, Yeh and Davis argue that the rural film house “is at once a vessel of silent film, an example of colonial modernity, and a domestication of foreign cultural technology” (2005: 72).

The Taiwanese *benshi*, in particular, almost all trained by the Japanese, emulated the storytelling and tradition of Japan during the Japanese occupation period. As the *benshi* tradition continued into the early 1950s, Taiwanese audience was able to access foreign films.

Even though *benshi* were extinct in Japan in the late 1930s (Yeh and Davis 2005: 71), *benshi* were still an integral part of the film-watching process in 1950s Taiwan. In Wu’s film, this particular way of watching Japanese film also provides collective experiences of Japanese-educated Taiwanese, as the Taiwanese *benshi* uses the local dialect of Hoklo (rather than the official language of Mandarin) to narrate an already “localized” Japanese romance text, because some in the audience understand the Japanese dialogue. Bridging the cultural gap between Chinese and Japanese languages in the cinema, the role of *benshi* can be regarded as a cultural translator both during the Japanese occupation period and in postwar Taiwan.
After the film’s screening, Wen-Jian stays in the film house alone and waits for his father. He is, in fact, abandoned by his father while the father visits the brothel. In the brothel scene, a woman wearing a *qipao* (ancient Chinese cheongsam) comes to take Wen-Jian from the film house to the brothel, as he is unable to locate his father’s whereabouts. Wen-Jian then waits for his father in a hallway of a brothel, doted on by passing hostesses. Hostesses in the brothel are not wearing kimonos but Chinese *qipao* with wooden clogs. The décor of the brothel is fairly Japanese but the hostesses speak in Taiwanese. Wen-Jian is curious about everything he sees. After waiting for a while, he decides to stand up and walk forward to see whether his father is still awake in the middle of the night.

The scene set in the brothel is shown from beginning to end using a single long take (almost 162 seconds). Filmmakers such as Tsai Ming-liang and Wu Nien-jen, as David Bordwell indicates, seem “to compete in creating unmoving single-shot scenes lasting many minutes” (Bordwell 2005: 231). Wu’s camera is here positioned in the corridor of the brothel. Wen-Jian is assigned to sit on a small stool in the hallway, outside a curtained-off resting room (Figure 5.8). When the boy attempts to take a peek at his father’s actions in the curtained room, the camera slowly tracks him (Figure 5.9).
This sequence explores a more spare use of depth and lightness, particular favouring the medium-shot scale.

*Figure 5.8 The beginning of the scene shows a boy sitting on a stool.*

In the brothel scene, Wu keeps the camera at a respectful distance from the characters, literary framing the individual stories against a larger social and historical backdrop. To achieve this, he contributes the aesthetics of long shots in the creation of *A Borrowed Life*. During an interview, he discussed his dislike of close-ups and zoom lenses:

> I really dislike close-ups, especially zoom lenses. It’s so unnatural. When we watch films, we should be active and go in and explore what the image offers. The notion of images that pick out the most important elements in a scene and
presenting them “in your face” is awful. […] If you want to see something more clearly, you have to go, go into that space and check it out. Not wait for somebody to bring a snapshot of it to you. When I order equipment, I always tell them to leave out the zoom lenses, because I hate them. (2003: 725-726)

For Wu, the slow tracking shot is a better reflection of the way humans see and observe things in daily life. He also relies on the long duration of the shot and extreme long shot, extending the depth of field and providing a wider depiction of the interaction between the characters and landscapes in order to evoke a sense of nostalgic atmosphere.

As Hou Hsiao-Hsien has done with films such as City of Sadness and The Puppetmaster, Wu stands at the forefront of the cultural movement to rediscover Taiwan’s forgotten past. A Borrowed Life, however, inaugurates a coming to terms with what the Japanese occupation meant for those who lived through it. The film thus conveys a remarkably vivid sense of nostalgia towards the Japanese as it is comprehended from a child’s point of view. More significantly, a single long take runs throughout the whole scene. At the beginning of the scene, the low camera position places the audience mostly in a distant, observational perspective on the story and the characters. As a result the audience is likely to feel uninvolved. We can only see the
boy sitting on the stool and feeling bored. However, when the boy stands up, there is a shift in distance with the use of the point-of-view shot, the distance further decreased with the camera dollying into the background.

The scene of the brothel can be seen not only as a casual space produced by nostalgia towards the Japanese, but also as representing Dou-san’s sense of hopelessness as he feels separated from the world. He loves his family, but feels isolated from them. In addition to the scene, we can further our understanding of his melancholia through the “peeping shot” of Wen-jian peering into the curtained room. Unlike similar shots of a clandestine nature, this shot shows no half-concealed female form or objectified female gaze; conversely, the scene is shot from Wen-Jian’s perspective and shows a flawed male form. Through the long shot we partake of the scene as it appears to Wen Jian: his father surrounded by brothel hostesses, drinking wine and making merry. However, we cannot actually see Dou-san’s face because there are no close-up shots.

By using a peeping shot, Wu shows that Dou-san’s intoxicated performance is certainly not a positive image of a father, particularly since going to the brothel is an activity forbidden by Wen-Jian’s mother. In fact, one of the reasons the boy
accompanies his father is to help his mother investigate whether Dou-san engages in any disloyal activities. Therefore, this “peeping shot” in the brothel scene is meaningful in at least two ways: firstly, the scene shows the historical setting of nostalgia towards the Japanese in the postwar Taiwan, and secondly, the older generation in this scene seems happy yet somewhat isolated from the rest of society.

The film continually returns to feelings of yearning and nostalgia for bygone times and memories, whether in the director’s reflections on his deceased father, his affection for “Japaneseness”, or his recollections about his hometown. Nostalgia in Wu’s film, however, can distance one from reality. Nostalgia is not only a yearning – albeit unfulfilled – to return to one’s home, but also a journey to explore one’s own identity (Davis 1979: 1). Much of what we know about Dou-san comes from the distant, often obstructed vantage point of Wu’s on-screen surrogate, Wen-Jian. When economic hardship causes mass exodus from his village, Dou-san falls into a gambling habit, leaving his wife to shoulder much of the family’s domestic and financial burdens. However, the film neither passes judgment on Dou-san’s choices nor tries to pass off his sensibility as family melodrama. Instead we see a failed patriarch doomed to stand
on the sidelines of his own life, and a young boy who, understanding this, bears
witness from his own painful remove.

**Conclusion**

When talking about the TNC, Wu Nien-jen, who played an indispensable role in the
movement, is rarely regarded as an auteur but nevertheless his influences are as strong
as other filmmakers’. It wasn’t until almost ten years after the movement began that
did Wu make his directorial debut, *A Borrowed of Life*, the story of his father and his
vision of Taiwan. Through the narration, dialogue and spatial environment of *A
Borrowed Life*, this study analyzed Dou-san’s (and his generation’s) ideology with
regard to Japanese identity. I argue that Wu uses the device of postcolonial nostalgia –
representations of the past, sounds, times, and places – to demonstrate that the local
identity is the result of hybrid cultures, and stages a dialogue with national history.
However, the film’s historical representation successfully rewrites national history
from the Taiwanese point of view. *A Borrowed Life* rescues a hitherto neglected
generational identity from the abyss of official history.

In short, *A Borrowed Life* engages with the notion of colonial nostalgia at work in
TNC. Firstly, the film re-examines the male subject from a male viewpoint; however, it does not follow colonial discourse in establishing a hegemonic representation of the male subject (Lu 2011: 773). Instead, Wu uses the biographical form to reveal the feelings of frustration, displacement, and homelessness experienced by the male characters in the postcolonial environment of Taiwan. The film highlights the tragedy inflicted upon the older generation in Taiwan: under the still strong influence of Japanese colonial culture, they were faced with the KMT’s insistence upon a dominant Chinese culture. Secondly, as a biographical film, the film critically demonstrates that Taiwan has not yet completely moved out of the shadow of colonial culture. Certain elements of Taiwanese cultural identity remain in conflict with the legacy of Japanese colonial culture. With the continuing clash of contrasting ideologies from different generations, the film employs a series of long shots to reveal the complexity of cultural identity in the postwar Taiwan.

I have suggested that the biographical film is a sophisticated form that has the potential to comment on the process of postcolonial reconstruction itself, and that when it does so, it draws on a wide range of skills, knowledge and pleasures in the audience, who are drawn into a complex and self-conscious engagement with nostalgia towards
Japan. I have also argued that we may learn something about the postcolonial anxiety
with the past from Wu’s memories, insofar as they deal with questions such as
representation of the past, and the nature of our emotional investment in images of the
past. Nostalgic objects are already images when they are captured, whether by
directors or audiences, and as images, they have the status of commodities as well as
cultural artifacts—a multilayered identity in which the different functions cannot
necessarily be separated out easily. Rather than offer us historical ‘truth’ or knowledge,
the power of nostalgic film such as A Borrowed Life enables us to understand the
complex memories of these processes of postcolonial reconstruction that are
fundamental to any engagement with the past.
Chapter Seven

Postcolonial Imaginary and Transnational Connections:

Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s Café Lumière and Edward Yang’s Yi Yi

This chapter aims to discuss the impact of transnational practice on TNC by looking at films that touch upon the legacy of Japanese colonialism in the context of the current globalization process, that is, the post-colonial and transnational condition of Taiwan and its ex-colonial master. It proposes that time and space is a dynamic contestation in the representation of border crossing, providing the formation of cultural hybridity and alternative modernity among East Asia countries.

This chapter examines the utilization of space in the city film as symptomatic of how transnationalization and postcoloniality have come into play in the East Asia region. By “city” film, I am referring to films set in urban centres (in this case, Taipei and Tokyo), and where the contours of the city perform an integral function in deciphering the film. In short, the cityscape becomes the crucial feature and context of the film. I am proposing that such cinematic representation of the cityscape is
analogous to the ways in which transnationalism and postcolonialism have configured the body, nation, and region. Nevertheless, it is primarily through a geopolitical axis that one comprehends and apprehends the mapping of the cityscape as such. This means that shifts in space need to be considered through a working grid of transnational geopolitics on the one hand, and on the other, through specific historical and cultural contexts. As there have been many connections made in the relations of transnational and cinematic cityscape, this chapter examines how transnationalism operate within the dynamics of space in the interrelations of the cityscape, memory, and region.

I will begin with a discussion of the operations of space in Taiwan city films, moving into the ways these are manifested at the bodily, postcolonial and transnational levels. In this chapter, I am calling into focus the mapping of East Asia as marked internally by the discourse of its regional construction. Therefore, the chapter emphasizes an internal regional transnationalism, where wealthier economies have moved overseas to generate profits and engage with notions of postcolonial identity and intercultural difference. I will conclude that the East Asian imaginary in cinema can be rethought along the transnational axis that illuminates a regional cinematic and
social formation, and which also provides a way of comprehending postcolonial historical and cultural phenomena.

Spacing of Cityscapes and Transnational Connection

The city film, as James Tweedie and Yomi Braester describe in their edited book, *Cinema at the City’s Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia*, “as a genre of sorts that involves a reconsideration of both urban environment and cinema, has undergone a stunning revival in the last quarter-century, especially in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan” (2010: 07). Taiwanese new wave cinema since the 1980s has been taken as an example in their introduction. Edward Yang, for instance, repeatedly located his films in the changing nature of urban spaces, especially in globalizing Taipei, in films such as *Taipei Story* (1985), *The Terrorizer* (1986), *A Confucian Confusion/Duli shih dai* (1994), *Mahjong* (1996), and *Yi Yi* (2000). Another prominent director is Hou Hsiao-hsien, who began his career with a series of nostalgic films set primarily in Taiwan’s rural past, before the economic development of the 1970s and 1980s made an appearance through urban configurations of space. His later works, such as *Millennium Mambo/Qianxi manbo* (2001), *Café Lumière* (2003) and *Three*
times/Zuihao de shiguang (2005), on the other hand, deal with the deracinated youth of
Taipei and contemporary daily life in urban areas. Yang’s Yi Yi and Hou’s Café
Lumière, particularly, extend this global process of dislocation and displacement, as
these filmmakers “fashion Tokyo as the cinematic and urban imaginary for their
increasingly transnational vision of Taiwan” (Tweedie and Braester 2010: 7).

Border-crossing narrative has privileged the city as the locus of transnational
cinemas. In a variety of formal and ideological registers, as Elizabeth Ezra and Terry
Rowden indicate, transnational cinema “reflects and thematically mediates the shifting
material and ideological conditions that constitute global culture” (2006: 10). In the
two films that I will focus on in this chapter, the image of moving traffic in cities
functions to periodically explore transnational connections. In Café Lumière, the
repetitive shots on moving trains in the city become the punctuation to signal
movement in the story of memories. In Yi Yi, the movement of vehicles is presented
through the repetitive shots of the male protagonist leaving his office. While cars and
trains delivering travellers remain in constant flux, the human bodies’ movements in
the two films are neither assured free access nor are they free from the visible marks of
living in a global city.
While the two city films exteriorize journeys, movements, and visions of national identity, they have also implicated other sites and bodies. Recent developments in East Asian cinemas have particularly implicated Taiwan and its postcolonial history. In addition to the development of East Asian cinemas, the current global trend is also to move towards a notion of the island’s nation-space, a postcolonial imaginary as well as a political and historical construct of the concept of Taiwan as an ex-colony of Japan.

This chapter studies the impact of globalization on contemporary Taiwan cinema, examining how filmmakers imagine their postcolonial society as interconnected with, mutually dependent on, or put under pressure by the global world system.

*Café Lumière: Beyond Transnational Cinema*

The first part of this chapter will discuss Hou’s first foreign-language film *Café Lumière*. This case study seeks to examine the changing nature of the Japanese society, especially focusing on mobility in urban space. The film is about a freelance writer, Yoko, who spends much of her time wandering through Tokyo. I will divide my discussion into three sections. Firstly, I will draw attention to how this film production can be seen as a process of writing back into the canon in terms of postcolonial thought.
The next section deals with the interplay between past and present by examining a transnational journey of the main character, offered by transgression of a border-crossing desire. The final section examines the complexity of postcolonial imagination by looking at two film objects, namely a pocket watch and moving trains.

Directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien in collaboration with his long-time screenwriter Chu Tien-wen and cinematographer Mark Lee Ping-bing, *Café Lumière* is a transnational production in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Yasujiro Ozu’s birth in 2003. The female protagonist Yoko (played by Japanese pop star Yo Hitoto whose mother is Taiwanese and father is Japanese), a freelance writer who has just returned from Taiwan for her research on the life of Jiang Wen-ye, a Taiwanese-born composer who studied and composed music in Japan in the 1930s and once married a Japanese wife. The storyline follows Yoko in her continuing research, and even features an interview with Jiang’s Japanese wife. Yoko interacts with a very restricted number of characters, principally the second-hand bookshop owner Hajime (Tadanobu Asano), and her father and stepmother who live in the rural town of Takasaki. When Yoko travels back to hometown for a few days, she tells her parents that she is pregnant and the father of the child is Taiwanese. Yoko’s parents worry for Yoko’s future as she is without any
financial support, and also for her choice to become a single mother.

*Café Lumière* was commissioned by Shochiku studio, which is the Japanese production company for which Ozu made most of his films. In an interview Hou claimed that *Café Lumière* was inspired by transnational social phenomena:

In one sense, it [*Café Lumière*] is a purely Japanese story, which I made in homage to Yasujirō Ozu on the centenary of his birth. Ozu made films on family themes, for example the predicaments of a father in marrying off a daughter. In Tokyo today, these daughters have now entered into a new state of being, identical to that of many of their contemporaries in Taiwan. So I adapted phenomena in Taiwan with which I’m familiar (2004: 41).

According to his words, Hou attempts to make a sense of transnational filmmaking. As for Hou, there are some parallels with Ozu’s world in *Café Lumière*, but there is also considerable difference, just as there are differences between the films of Ozu and those of Hou. Hou said, “Ozu’s films are based on everyday lives and very clear and well defined, unlike me, who often mess things up under the influence of on-site surroundings” (Lan 2004: 18). He apparently only discovered Ozu in the 1980s—that is, after *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), Hou’s fourth feature and the film that marked a major change in his filmmaking practice. This saw the evolution of Hou’s style,
marked predominantly by a long-shot, long take aesthetic, which reached its first major artistic and critical success with *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985) (Udden 2009: 48). Moreover, in the opening sequence of the film *Good Men, Good Women/Hao nan hao nu* (1995), Hou included a direct homage to the Japanese director, the television in the protagonist’s flat can be seen playing Ozu’s *Late Spring* (1949).

One can argue that *Café Lumière* is true to the connection with Ozu’s works. On the one hand, *Café Lumière* demonstrates that inter-generational family relations in Taiwan and Japan are changing. On the other hands, the film represents Hou’s most considerable exposure of the Taiwanese postcolonial dynamic. As Song Hwee Lim indicates, the film “not only echoes Ozu thematically by dealing with inter-generational familial relations but also weaves the complex (post)colonial relationship between Taiwan and Japan into its narrative” (2010: 16). The film follows Japanese freelance writer and modern-day Tokyo resident Yoko as she travels back and forth from Tokyo to Taipei studying Taiwanese composer Jiang Wenye. Jiang was himself active mainly in Japan and later in China at a time when Taiwan was a colony of Japan. By engaging with the postcolonial and historical meaning of images, *Café Lumière* embodies an alternative view on the colonial past, which it roots in the
Japanese occupation of Taiwan between 1895 and 1945.

As Chris Fujiwara comments on this film, *Café Lumière* is not a purely Japanese story, “but [is] instead a calm acceptance of place, rhythm, historical time” (2008: 47). Although the film is set in contemporary Tokyo, it engages with viewers with melancholy, social alienation, as well as personal transcendence through recollecting Taiwan’s colonial past. As I-Fen Wu suggests, “while Tokyo appears in most contemporary films as a transnational space that looks alienating and threatening with its metropolitan architecture and glittering neon signs, that in *Café Lumière* is apparently different, offering a vision of Japanese urban landscape that is not juxtaposed with the frantic, neon-drenched city” (2008: 173). Hou’s Japanese-language film is concerned with the postcolonial link between Taiwan and Japan, and can be considered as a profound reflection on the postcolonial condition. I argue that the film is Hou’s melancholy rumination on the traditional Japanese family that was already in decline half-a-century ago when Ozu made his most celebrated domestic dramas.

**Production: Writing Back to the Canon**

To deal with issues of de-colonisation or the political and cultural independence of
people formerly subjugated to colonial rule, ‘writing back’, ‘counter-discourse’, ‘oppositional literature’, ‘con-text’ are some of the terms that have been used to identify a body of postcolonial works that take a classic English text as a departure point, especially as a strategy for contesting the authority of the canon of English literature. In his book *Postcolonial Con-text*, John Thieme argues that postcolonial con-text writes back the canon as pre-text which is able to explore a variety of counter-discourses against dominant discourses such as race, class, gender and nation in the postcolonial society (2001: 2-3). From this point of view, Hou’s *Café Lumière* can be read as a postcolonial con-text and Ozu’s *Tokyo Story/Tôkyô monogatari* can be located as a pre-text. In other words, the project of the 100th anniversary of Ozu seems to complete a case of writing back to the canon.

By paying homage to Ozu, *Café Lumière* is set completely in Japan and spoken in Japanese, and it would also seem more and less that this film would refer to Ozu’s debut *Tokyo Story* as well as respecting the canon. As with most of his films, Hou relies on long shots and long takes to let the camera document a changing society in Japan. As mentioned previously, Ozu had been cited as an influence in Hou’s film due to the directors’ shared attention to humanist concerns, for instance, a family’s struggle
in the everyday experience, coping in a modern world, which demands a rethinking of social relationships. Compared to Ozu, the plot in Hou’s films does not drive the drama. Instead, Hou’s films are more understated and narrative meaning is often communicated through detail and visual patterns. In this case, it can be argued that it is less important to compare the film to Ozu’s in terms of style than it is to think of Café Lumière as a tribute to the spirit of Ozu’s work.

The weight of colonial history might have been unbearable for any Taiwanese director other than Hou, who is best known for his elliptical forays into historical subjects, as in City of Sadness (1989), Puppetmaster (1993) and Good Men, Good Women. In particular, City of Sadness is one of the most popular Taiwanese films in Japan. In 1994, there was even a package tour called ‘journey to the places in Hou Hsiao-hsien’s film’ organized by a travel agency, taking Japanese tourists to visit the famous film locations (Yeh 2006: 170). Moreover, Shochiku studio supported Hou’s last chapter of the trilogy, Good Men, Good Women, as well as the following two films, Goodbye, South, Goodbye and Flowers of Shanghai/Hai shang hua (1998). Given Hou’s investment in interrogating national history and cultural identity in his film, his move to Tokyo in Café Lumière comes as a surprise.
However, as Dai Jinhua indicates, “in the few [Hou’s] films where women are the main protagonists, such as *Daughters of the Nile; Good Men, Good Women; Flowers of Shanghai; Millennium Mambo* (2001); and *Café Lumièrè*, female protagonists are all alone in their struggles against the ghostly impact of history and memory in the metropolis” (2008: 247). The above films remind us how important the colonial past can be in Hou’s mind. It is not surprisingly that Hou’s *Café Lumièrè* addresses some of the complexities of the postcolonial situation, in relation to colonial history of Taiwan during the period of Japanese rule.

In terms of writing back the canon, however, as Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim argue, “Hou has used this opportunity not only to pay homage to a Japanese master but also to problematize the historical relation between Japan and Taiwan, albeit in a manner that resolutely refuses resolution and closure, privileging ambiguity and obstruction instead” (2010: 16). *Café Lumièrè* carries over and further elaborates Hou’s motif in the dialectic interplay between the colonial past and the present. While respecting Ozu’s unhurried pace and emphasis on the everyday, Hou is also interested in unearthing historical traces of a Taiwanese musician once residing in Japan.
Remapping Cityscape

This section particularly engages the notion of place and displacement. As Bill Ashcroft argues “it is here [place and displacement] that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (1989: 9). That is, the notion of place and displacement as a critical approach is applicable to analysing the postcolonial film context in order to illuminate an identity politics in-between the self and the other. As I-Fen Wu comments on Café Lumière, “the film’s representation of urban Tokyo is shaped by the director’s concern with history to discuss its connections with memory” (2008: 173). Unlike Edward Yang’s Yi Yi, in which Tokyo becomes synonymous with any global city, Hou’s Tokyo is a place of memory. The Tokyo of Hou’s film, as Shigehiko Hasumi points out, “includes none of the bustle of government and business in the downtown areas, none of the city’s skyscrapers, and none of the neon signs of the entertainment districts” (2008: 193). Following the protagonist’s search for a Taiwanese musician’s past in Tokyo, I would argue that this film presents a nostalgic and border-crossing experience of the city.

In Café Lumière, the opening scene in Yoko’s room underlines one of the most
important thematic structures—the Taiwanese-Japanese relationship. The film begins with a shot of a train crossing the screen, followed by a credit shot and then a scene of Yoko hanging laundry outside the window of her apartment while speaking to a friend on the phone about her recent trip to Taiwan (Figure 6.1). The interior scene presents Yoko’s apartment in Tokyo, which is a private, small and individual space. The sequence is captured in long takes, with a mainly stationary camera. Through the use of long takes, Hou presents Yoko’s everyday actions to the viewers—hanging out washing, answering the phone, answering the side door, and most crucially, the awareness of off-screen space—it portrays a single, independent and urban woman’s life in Tokyo. In the phone conversation, Yoko confirms that she will return to her hometown in Takasaki shortly after visiting her friend Hajime in Tokyo. Meanwhile, Yoko goes to the side door and has a brief conversation with her landlady. With no shot/reverse shots, we cannot see the interaction between the landlady and Yoko on the screen. Through the off-screen sound, however, we realize that Yoko gives her landlady a box of pineapple cakes as a present for looking after the flat while she was away in Taipei.
This aesthetic strategy is replicated in a later scene when Yoko’s parents visit and her stepmother exits the frame to pay for the sushi being delivered at the front door (Figure 6.2). The scene shows Yoko’s parents coming to Tokyo for the funeral of an acquaintance. While eating the stepmother’s potato stew in Yoko’s apartment, the parents tried to have a conversation with Yoko about her pregnancy. Set in the same apartment and shot almost from the same angle, a long shot captures the three characters in their entirety, as well as the small living space. Yoko is unmarried and pregnant, but she does not want to marry the Taiwanese father of the child, which is making her stepmother rather concerned. She describes him as working for his family and being too close to his mother, choosing characteristics that traditionally would be considered exemplary as evidence for what she perceives as his lack of independence. When the family eats lunch in Yoko’s apartment, Yoko’s stepmother keeps pressing
her husband to speak to Yoko about it, but he says nothing. Aware of his daughter’s
pregnancy, the reticent father is even more silent than usual. Yoko’s father does not
give any reprimand, show signs of joy, make suggestion or offer support. He just hangs
his head, drinks his sake and helps himself to more sushi. He only sits beside his
daughter without exchanging a word. According to this domestic scene, there is a
strong awareness of the voiceless father through the film that ties it much of Hou’s
other work, such as *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*.

![Figure 6.2 Yoko’s stepmother exits the frame to pay for the sushi.](image)

Even though Yoko’s private space is essentially a tiny domain that is kept distinct
from other spaces outside, her research activities take place across an extended zone
that is dependent on the railway networks connecting the whole of Tokyo and even
beyond. Urban spaces in *Café Lumière* provide a cultural and historical significance of
Tokyo. On the one hand, the metropolis could be the real protagonist as though Hou is taking literally the title of Ozu’s film, *Tokyo Story*. On the other hand, the film’s metropolitan setting provides a historical reference to trigger Taiwanese colonial memory. As June Yip comments on the bookshop scene, Yoko “is on a historical quest, searching for the places in Tokyo that Jiang Wen-ye frequented and hoping to talk to people whose lives he touched during his years in Japan” (2012: 118). Yoko’s research is the thread of the film, which involves her interviewing others (such as a café owner, a bookshop owner) for their memories of the past, and visiting sites connected with the Taiwanese musician.

In *Café Lumière*, Yoko is attempting to retrace Jiang’s steps and reclaim parts of his existence. With the help of her friend Hajime, Yoko visits the Tomaru Bookshop, where the volumes are piled high and the staff work quietly but efficiently. Yoko asks the manager if he knows anything about the musician, who was a frequent visitor to the shop sixty or seventy years ago, but he cannot help her. Exiting the bookshop, Yoko eventually takes a picture of a particular site as homage to Taiwanese musician Jiang (Figure 6.3).
In the film, Yoko’s private life is often shot through riding trains or waiting for them, or napping on a train or meeting her friend at a particular station. More significantly, the dominance of these repeated visual and aural elements of trains, bookshops and cafes suggests that these public urban spaces have become extensions of the private home. Her search for the Dat Café frequented by the Taiwanese musician in the 1930s is significant to her because it represents places where writers and musicians meet. She interviews people who knew him, and searches with her friend Hajime for the Dat Café (Figure 6.4).
Another crucial outdoor setting in the film is the original site of Dat Café that connects to a historical significance. As mentioned previously, *Café Lumière* tracks Yoko’s quest to find information on Jiang Wen-Ye. Now Yoko could only see a modern building on the site of the café. For Yoko, interrogating the past proves difficult in the never-ending flux of metropolitan life. Antiquated maps point to roads either re-routed or entirely renamed. Official city maps have not shown the changes in land ownership. Thus, when Yoko seeks out Jiang’s former haunts, she needs to rely on the unofficial verbal history handed down by coffee owners. Antiquated maps, found by Hajime that record the location of the Dat café in the 1930s, as I-Fen Wu argues, are “indicative of history and topography, mapping the historical as much as spatial, which functions as a historical text that makes sense of the past” (2008: 178).

According to the location shot (Figure 6.4), the camera movement with a long take slightly shifts from a low angle but tilting upwards to show the building. The given cinematic function marks an aspect of reconstruction in the cityscape as well as articulating not only the history of pre-war Japan but also a colonial history of Taiwan. In other words, Yoko’s research as remapping the colonial past is a way of re-writing popular history.
Images of Memory

Focused on the ambivalent nature of Taiwanese postcoloniality, Hou’s \textit{Café Lumière}, as Ping-hui Liao indicates, “traces the winding paths of colonial yearning between young Taiwanese and Japanese subjects” (2007: xiv). Taiwan was a Japanese colony for fifty years until 1945, only two years before Hou’s family arrived in Taiwan, and Japanese culture undoubtedly had had a lingering effect on many aspects of Taiwanese life. \textit{Café Lumière} is not only a tribute film to Ozu and his work, but also asks for a reflective engagement with colonial memory that is conscious of representation as a means of record and of remembering, so that colonial memory’s losses and absence as well as its presences are encountered. In this section, however, I will argue that the film not only tangles together cultural identity, history, and fragile relationships with family and friends, but also recalls an even deeper colonial memory.

Hou’s cinematic approach is indirect, examining the details and margins of the characters. Early in the film, for instance, Yoko buys Hajime a pocket watch, which commemorates the 116th anniversary of the founding of Taiwan’s railways. A scene set on a train in Tokyo, Hou shows Yoko incidentally finding out the connection between
the pocket watch she bought and the one in the train driver’s cabin (Figure 6.4). Cut to
the next shot and, in a medium close-up, we can see that the conductor’s watch is
similar to Yoko’s one she purchased in Taiwan (Figure 6.5). Focused on the pocket
watch, the sequence may evoke a historical reference for the viewers in relation to the
Japanese occupation of Taiwan. What is left unsaid in this scene is that the Taiwanese
railway was built by the Japanese during the years when they occupied Taiwan. In
other words, the train motif also plays a key role in tracing the ambivalent relationship
between colonial Taiwan and imperial Japan.

*Figure 6.4 The vision of a pocket watch sets against the front windshield of a moving train.*

*Figure 6.5 A Tokyo train conductor’s watch is similar to the one Yoko purchased in Taiwan.*
The pocket watch thus can be seen as a notable film object that offers a strong awareness of postcoloniality running through the film. When Yoko visits his friend Hajime, she gives him the pocket watch as a present from Taiwan. The scene consists of a single long take, looking down the narrow corridor between bookshelves in the bookshop, with Hajime behind the small table at the end. Yoko brings back from Taiwan a present that has both appeal for Hajime, who has a strong interest in trains, and considerable historical association. The memorial pocket watch invites us to consider the association between Taiwan’s colonial history and institutions of modernity. During the period of martial law, the official historiography of Japanese occupation, as Shota Ogawa notes, had been constructed by KMT government as “a ‘dark age’ or simply a period of interruption between Qing’s rule and the KMT’s arrival” (Ogawa 2009: 165). The Japanese colonial period was, indeed, a troublesome period for the KMT government’s rhetoric that sought to “integrate Taiwan into a larger ‘Chinese’ cultural identity and to weave a seamless narrative of Chinese nationhood that ignores differences that could in any way separate the island from the Mainland” (Yip 1997: 139). Such wholesale repression of the colonial history that
evolved through the fifty years of Japanese rule leaves no space for intellectual figures such as Jiang Wen-ye who trained and worked as a musician in Japan.

Another reference made in Hou’s film is a well-known piece of music, *Formosa Dance*, composed by Jiang Wen-ye that marks a specifically colonial articulation of difference and hybridity. As Song Hwee Lim indicates, “[t]he invitation by Shochiku Studio has allowed Hou to reflect upon another chapter in Taiwan’s history and to demonstrate that the triangulated relations between China, Taiwan, and Japan throughout the twentieth century up until today are as complex as Jiang Wenye’s multiple identities and transitional career” (2011: 20). In 1936, for his *Formosa Dance*, his first masterpiece on the theme of Taiwan, he was honourably mentioned at the Olympic Games in Berlin, which won him an international reputation. Invited to teach composition at Beijing Normal University in 1938, Jiang left his first Japanese wife and daughter for China and remained there until his death in 1983. After the end of the Second World War, he suffered many ordeals in China while, at the same time, his works were banned in Taiwan (King 2012: 281). As a result, he became obscure and unknown to young people in his place of birth, Taiwan.

*Formosa Dance* was a hybrid of Taiwanese, Chinese, Japanese and European cultural
influence. More significantly, the tides of political disturbance tore his allegiance to his homeland, and relegated his music to historical obscurity. This strong awareness of history is a trademark that runs through many of Hou’s works. When Yoko visits every single site, Jiang’s soundtrack plays again during the long takes. One of the significant moments in the film is when Yoko finds Jiang’s aged wife. Jiang’s wife talks about her husband’s enthusiasm when he came to Tokyo to study music, his love of poetry, and his pet name for her. At the end of the interview, the camera lingers on the black and white photo of Jiang’s young, confident and artistic self in a study room and her youthful, smiley and perky face adorned with a gorgeous kimono leaning on a wooden chair (Figure 6.6). Hou had used photography’s link to absence and memory in *A City of Sadness* (Ma 2008: 58). In *Café Lumière*, the photography serves to capture an image from a vanishing present and to preserve a visual record of the relationship between Jiang and his Japanese wife.

*Figure 6.6 A sweet couple enjoying life in Jiang’s study room.*
In *Café Lumière*, Jiang Wenye seems to be a dramatic exilic figure in the modern history of East Asia. Yoko’s search for Jiang Wen-ye explores the struggle for postcolonial understanding of identity behind the invisible images of Taiwan. In other words, his life experience and music pieces both made a more expressive implication of identity politics. It can be argued that Hou’s focus has now shifted from a national collective history to a post-national, individual history, which crosses borders and develops an alternative way of re-writing the colonial history of Taiwan. As I-Fen Wu indicates, very little about Jiang is known in Taiwan and Hou’s *Café Lumière* sheds light on this hidden corner and tries to articulate what has not been remembered about him” (2008: 176). Even though *Café Lumière* is his first foreign-language film, Hou has successfully rescued colonial/native history from his historical awareness.

**Yi Yi: A Tale of Two Cities**

In spite of the fact that he was awarded the best director at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000, *Yi Yi*, Edward Yang’s last film, has never been screened commercially in Taiwan. *Yi Yi* was financed by the Y2K project, organized by the Japanese company Pony
Canyon. The Y2K project comprises *The Island Tale* (dir. Stanley Kwan, Hong Kong, 2000), *All About Lili Chou-Chou* (dir. Iwai Shinji, Japan, 2001) and *Yi Yi*. In addition, the Y2K project encouraged collaboration in filmmaking between Japan and other Asian nations. As Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh comment, these films reflect “a conscious intent to represent ‘Asia’ to the West as well as to Asian viewers” (Davis and Yeh 2008: 91). Focusing on the theme of identity in pan-Asian culture, the project consists of works by both Japanese and foreign directors representing a wide range of urban environments such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tokyo. In this section, I would argue that the border-crossing network within pan-Asian culture is not only a way of exporting potential outside the region but also an extraordinary narration which is developed by social, cultural, historical and even postcolonial perspectives.

Regarding the transnational cinematic flows, Yang’s co-production belongs to the catalogue of Taiwan art films and possesses an inherent tendency toward globalization. More precisely, the Taiwan art film market has received financial support from some European or Japanese studios. For instance, Shochiku Studio supported Hou Hsiao-hsien’s several works, including *Goodbye, South, Goodbye, Flower of Shanghai*
and Café Lumière. This trend is particularly true in the case of TNC over the last two decades. As film scholar Wei Ti points out, this phenomenon represents “the international consumerism and production in art film” (2004: 78). Yang’s Yi Yi is not an exception in the global cinematic landscape.

Yang’s Yi Yi can be understood on a much more global level for it also addresses questions of transnational significance. The story of Yi Yi focuses on the life of the Jian family, and the film is carefully plotted around a series of family occasions, beginning with a wedding banquet, reaching its centre at a party for a new baby, and ending with a grandmother’s funeral. NJ, who is an engineer at an electronics company, is married to Min-Min, and they have two children: a teenage girl named Ting-Ting and a younger boy called Yang-Yang. At the beginning of the film, two events happen that force changes to the lives of NJ and his family. The first event is a chance meeting between NJ and his first love, Sherry. It has been thirty years since they have last seen each other, but the attraction between them has not diminished. The second event is that Min-Min’s mother has suffered a stroke that leaves her in a coma.

Yi Yi is a look at upper-middle-class Taiwanese, presented as a multi-generational family’s emotional turmoil and ultimate survival. It also portrays the family members’
interactions with neighbours, schoolmates, teachers, Japanese businessman, the border-crossing urban city space and the global landscape of media. In this section, I would argue that Yang has shaped the postcolonial imagination in a significant way, including the use of crosscutting to depict characters overwhelmed by two metropolises, and the use of reflections convey self-identity and transnational melancholy.

Building a Transnational Urban Space

Fredric Jameson is one of the first scholars to relate spatial images to urbanism in connection with Edward Yang’s films. In his analysis of *Terrorizer/Kongbu fenzi* (1986), he points out that it is through spatiality that “the individual space and the city as a whole” can establish a kind of relationship (Jameson 1994: 147). His analysis of the enclosed spaces, gas tank, and the street from the point of view of the balcony explores the postmodern imagination in Taiwan urban film. For Jameson, *Terrorizer* can be seen as “a film about urban space in general” (ibid.). Jameson’s statement does in some way enlighten our reading of Yang’s film; however, it should be noted that he is only placing Taipei in the context of Western postmodernity. As suggested by
Rolando Tolentino, Jameson fails to relate Taipei in *Terrorizer* to the social and historical situations of Taiwan in the 1980s. Hence, what Jameson creates in his work is not a version of “Taiwanese local postmodernism.” Rather, Taipei is constructed by the illusions and fantasies of the first world and the West in order to conceptualize third world cinema (Tolentino 2001: 135). In other words, there is a need to localize the experience of the (post-)modern city in specific ways and spaces. I will thus attempt to relate Taipei in Yang’s films to the local urban condition, as this is a key to the question of why Yang represents a certain spatial image at a particular time.

Yang is particularly interested in the representation of urban space in his oeuvre. From this point of view, we may consider the ways in which the city acts as a conditioning factor on the fiction precisely by its invisibility and its inability to be subordinated to the demands of the narrative in his films. According to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s definition, city film used to be “made in the silent period, art-film documentaries with a limited admixture of staged or quasi-fictional elements, which generally portray the city and urban life in a more or less celebratory mode” (2001: 104). This comment reveals that the city film can be read as a positive response to political or social needs. Citing examples such as Roberto Rossellini’s three post-war
films, namely *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisa* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (1948), Nowell-Smith argues that “each in a different way homes in on war-devastated urban environments which provide the conditions of life for the films’ character and which are effective because absolutely authentic” (ibid: 105).

Identifying dystopian images of the modern city in the TNC, Yang’s films resonate in particular with the legacy of Italian neo-realism. Yomi Braester and James Tweedie argue that “Edward Yang repeatedly located his films in the urban environments of a modernizing then globalizing Taiwan” (2010: 7). In particular, his second feature film, *Taipei Story*, clearly indicates how Taipei faced the transformations of modernization in the 1980s. As I-Fen Wu comments, Yang’s work “offers another dimension of viewing Taiwan’s high-tech, capitalist society, as a contrast with Hou’s approach to the American cultural impact on modern Taiwan” (2006: 384). Indeed, most of Yang’s films are not only set in Taipei city but also focus on the city’s landscapes, buildings and streets.

Among Yang’s early films, *Terrorizer* stands out as the most profound depiction of the cultural conflicts that Taiwanese society has confronted since the urbanization in the 1980s. As an example of East Asian cinema, *Yi Yi* is about the transnational social
experience, and the film attempts to capture the manifestations of global flows in the visual representation of metropolitan landscape and technological environment that negotiate the cross-cultural relationships between Taiwan and Japan.

The city, as Tonglin Lu has indicated, “has almost been endowed with a multi-layered personality in Yang’s works, [and] constantly offers surprises through its close relations with technology, industrialization, and modernization” (2002: 153). Following Yang’s cinematic mapping of Taipei since Terrorizer, Yi Yi integrates the essential loneliness of individual human beings living in the topography of metropolitan areas with the transnational movement of characters. My key research question relating to this film is to ask how transnational cinema such as Yi Yi represents the global connection as well as expresses a feeling of postcolonial anxiety, and how does it illuminate the cultural legacy of colonialism? This analysis is thus divided into three sections, focussing on metropolitan areas in different countries connected by the two aspects of transnationalization in East Asia: parallel modernities and transnational melancholy.

Parallel Modernities: Crosscutting between Two Metropolises
In this section, in order to explore the East-Asia urban connections, I will particularly focus on a crosscutting scene that presents a love story between two relevant couples. 

*Yi Yi* is not only constructed by a chronological narrative, but also shows parallel plots as well as settings in modern cities, namely Taipei and Tokyo. Significantly, crosscutting here presents a border-crossing temporal simultaneity. As a component of transnational cinema, two different time-zones and love stories are linked in the film through crosscutting. In Tokyo, NJ and Sherry, who used to be high school classmates and first lovers, are reunited after thirty years. While they are chatting on the train platform or walking around the streets in Tokyo, NJ’s daughter, Ting-Ting, is having a first date with a boy called Fatty in Taipei city.

In Tokyo, the sequence begins with an aerial shot of a railway station where several trains pass by in relatively warm light. According to voice-off, we can realize that the dialogue refers to the conversation between NJ and Sherry. Their conversation is about the memory of their first date. In particular, the empty shot of a train passing by the railway represents collective memory as relating to personal experience. When they recall the past, Yang’s frame tends to show trains passing by NJ and Sherry. In the second shot set on the train platform with still camera and long distance, NJ and Sherry,
while waiting for another train, are chatting about their own children. When the train passes through the frame, we do not see their bodies but only hear the voice-off. The third shot is set in Taipei city, with a high-angle medium shot of a film poster, and then of Fatty and Ting-Ting walking through the skybridge. In the beginning of the third shot, the sound consists of the off-scene conversation between NJ and Sherry in Tokyo and traffic noises in Taipei. When the conversation (between NJ and Sherry) was almost ended, there is a cut to the fourth shot in Taipei where Ting-Ting asks Fatty “What time is it?”, to which Fatty answers, “Nine o’clock.” After the conversation (between Ting-Ting and Fatty), Sherry’s voice-off comes in the fourth shot: “Oh, it is nearly ten o’clock.” Using voice-off to link two related shots on the street, the crosscutting and sound editing creates a transnational connection between two different locales (Tokyo and Taipei) at the same time.

In *Yi Yi*, the sound editing here gradually develops into a border-crossing narrative between sound and image, between present and past, between Tokyo and Taipei. Following the conversation between Fatty and Ting-Ting, the next shot shows the dialogue of the couple in Tokyo. Sherry says “It is eight o’clock in Chicago,” and NJ answers, “It is nine o’clock in Taipei.” Above all, the interwoven group of shots
generates more time zones and more than one location, extending an urban space from
the local to the global, from East to West.

*Figure 6.7 NJ and Sherry are waiting for the train to pass by.*

*Figure 6.8 Ting-Ting and Fatty are crossing the street.*

In *Yi Yi*, the crosscutting concerns with multiple modernities beyond and across
nation-states. NJ and Sherry together invoke the memory of youth when they are
waiting for a train to pass by a level crossing in Tokyo (Figure 6.7). After the train has
passed, they hold hands like lovers while crossing the road. The next shot seems to
similar to the last shot but in Taipei, Fatty and Ting-Ting are waiting for the traffic
light to turns green before they cross the street (Figure 6.8). More significantly, the
nostalgic dialogue between NJ and Sherry in Tokyo is juxtaposed with NJ’s daughter’s
first romantic explorations.

Sherry: Look, this is like the crossing near our school.
NJ: Exactly. But that is gone now. I remember that the first time I held your hand. We were at a railroad crossing, going to the films. I reached for you, ashamed of my sweaty palm. Now, I’m holding your hand again. Only it’s a different place, a different time, and a different age.
Sherry: But the same sweaty palm.

To put two similar frames together, Yang provides border-crossers of transnational imaginary. As For NJ and Sherry, the presence of the level crossing reminds them of a memory they shared when living in Taipei in the 1960s. Exploring the cultural terrain of several major East Asian societies in transcultural East Asia, namely mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan, Jenny Kwok Wah Lau argues that “the new Asia that is currently in formation will consist of not one uniform modernity but multiple modernities that defy both the prescriptions of the globalist/universalists and the descriptions of the localist/indigenists” (Lau 2003: 3). The concept of “multiple modernities” refers to the specific modernities in each locality rather than assuming that Asian or East Asian modernity follows a uniform path in resistance to or in compliance with that of the West.
I want to demonstrate how crosscutting creates the connections between two cities. Firstly, this sequence visually embodies the intertwining of the two cities, with distance shots of NJ walking with his ex-girlfriend in Tokyo, and his daughter Ting-Ting walking with her boyfriend in Taipei. NJ may be far away in Japan with his ex-girlfriend Sherry, but he is in a kind of transnational connection with his daughter as she goes on her first date. Yang thus not only seems to be drawing connections between lovers but also between members of the same family. He creates connections between his characters of separate generations who experience similar relationships. NJ and Sherry recapture their youth by exploring Tokyo with the train moving and unfamiliar language.

Secondly, Yang offers a variety of moving-images, such as vehicles passing by and moving trains, as a representation of personal memory and transnational imagination. Reviewing the same sequence, David Leiwei Li states that “in his cinematic correlation of romance across separate international time zones, different generations and varied speeds of motion, Yang signifies both generational distinctions and identity” (2008: 269). That is to say, the parallel narratives engage multiple modernities, which seem to encounter the unchanging life cycle of the generations and
global cultural flows. Within the sequence of nostalgic trip, the landscape of Tokyo in
Yang’s Yi Yi ultimately describes a familiar geographic imagination and cities in
transition in relation to Taipei.

Transnational Melancholy: Two Cities in Reflection

Beyond the romantic tales set in the two cities, Yang recreates a familiar visual
connection between Tokyo and Taipei. Yang remaps East Asian cultures and blurring
boundaries by using a variety of glass reflections in metropolitan architecture. As
Leiwei Li suggests, “unlike masonry walls, glass panes mark space without total
delimitation, suggesting permeability, liquidity and flexibility, typical of the age of
transnational capitalism or reflexive modernity” (2008: 267). Following his point, the
use of glass reflection mainly provides a metaphor for the landscape of global cities.
Yang frequently shoots through glass, engaging reflections to show the audience what
is both in front of and behind the glass at the same time. In most of the shots in Yi Yi,
we can find some sort of interference involved with the line of vision. As Shohini
Chaudhuri comments on the film, “glass reflections convey the permeability of
space—space without borders appropriate to the age of transnational capitalism” (2005:
101). Through the image of reflection, Yang’s demonstrates why his characters always have to struggle with the dispersal of capital and subjectivity in any global urban space. I will argue that at least two sequences with distance shots of glass reflection entirely share the transnational connections within two metropolises.

The first sequence is about Min-Min whose health collapsed due to pressure from her mother’s illness. Min-Min’s mother has slipped into a coma for months. The doctors tell NJ and Min-Min that she is aware of their presence and that they should talk to her every day. One evening Min-Min feels upset and breaks down. NJ returns home after a business meeting to find his wife in tears. The following shot is taken from outside the building, turning their bedroom window into a black mirror reflecting the heavy traffic below. In addition to this shot, Yang uses sound to project a sense of urban anxiety and alienation. While Min-Min cries, there is another sound coming from the next-door couple who are quarrelling. This shot therefore indicates that their story is but one of millions in the city.

The reflections show that the urban space is a vaster landscape than any one perspective can reach. In another sequence, A-Di (who is NJ’s younger brother) and his ex-girlfriend Yun-Yun meet up and discuss their relationship in a coffee shop after
his wedding. By using still framing with an extremely long take, we can see them through the glass window of the coffee shop with the camera shooting from outside and the characters inside. The reflection on a huge window in Taipei captures a variety of moving images, such as cars moving and people walking, presenting a vibrant and mobile urban space. Furthermore, the image of reflection does not only describe the anxiety of modern life in Taipei but also explore a transnational connection between two female characters, Min-Min and Sherry. Sherry is NJ’s ex-girlfriend who is now married to a successful American born Taiwanese businessman and they have no children. She also is a professional, confident, and self-sufficient female figure. Min-Min is NJ’s wife and mother of two children, Yang-Yang and Ting-Ting, and is an office worker. Both female characters experience anxieties on their own. On one level, they could not stay within their current relationship because their partners do not give them enough emotional support. I suggest that Yang attempts to rethink modern women’s life in a global era.

Yang’s city film not only reveals the reflected cityscape but is also culturally connected to the body. As Elizabeth Grosz states, “the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, “citified,”
urbanized distinctively as a metropolitan body” (1992: 242). Employing the image of reflection, Yang uses these two female figures to provide an extending urban space from the national to the transnational, as well as a metaphor for homogeneity, flexibility, and hybridity in the global framework. Two sequences show a parallel between Min-Min and Sherry, and between women’s bodies and urban cities.

The corporeality of the body in the metropolis is inscribed in two sequences set in dimly-lit rooms. At the end of their reunion trip, NJ and Sherry stay in the same hotel but in separate rooms on their last night in Tokyo. NJ eventually confesses to Sherry that he had never loved anyone but her. After hearing his confession, Sherry has nothing to say to NJ and closes the door to her room. The following interior shot is still, capturing Sherry’s body on the window, she cries despondently in her hotel room (Figure 6.9). Her body is barely visible, almost enveloped by the reflected image of a hotel room, its desk and bed, and the background exterior of the Tokyo Tower at night. The scene is shot in one take, exploring the blurred boundaries between a woman’s body and urban space, ambivalent signifiers of location and alienation.
In another scene set in Taipei with an extreme long shot from outside the building, Min-Min is experiencing the feeling of alienation in her office. She looks very upset about the relationship between herself and her family. The shot shows Min-Min keeping silent, standing still in front of the window before her colleague comes in (Figure 6.10). Here, the use of glass reflection shows us what is both in front of and behind the window at the same time. Most importantly, the overlapping image of reflection shows the continuing flash of a red streetlight positioned precisely at the centre of her chest as if it is her heartbeat. As Chanjen Chen contends, “Yang’s technique here is not unlike a collage formed of layers of overlapping twilight that
seems to collapse spatial planes in a mimesis of Min-Min’s own descent into despair and mental confusion” (2001: 128).

Taken together with the other scene of Sherry in a Tokyo hotel, both images and figures provide a transnational connection. Whether in the films of Tsai Ming-liang, Hou Hsiao-hsien or Edward Yang, the long distance of the shots confers a sense of alienation, thus acting as a foil to the dramatization which often takes place outside the frame. Yang uses the distant shot here, providing a metaphor for Min-min’s confusion of identity by filming the reflection of her face superimposed on the window that she is contemplating. This technique fragments human characters and lets us see their interior confusion through this formal shattering. Like Sherry’s dramatic crying, here Yang uses the overlapping image with a distance shot to represent a woman’s body as a tiny component of the city, creating a sense of isolation and unspeakable sadness.

**Between Postcolonial and Transnational**

According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, ‘post-colonial’ can be contended “to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (1989: 2). *Café Lumière* is not simply a homage to
Ozu’s birth but a complex exploration of the very act of looking back to the colonial past. Compared to Café Lumière, Yi Yi also marks Yang’s departure from Taipei, the default location for most of his films. The second part of the chapter has shown that Yi Yi is not only a city film but also links transnational urban spaces between Taipei and Tokyo. Yang’s aesthetic strategy provides self-reflection on identity crises and uncertainty in a global community.

Throughout the film, Yang makes liberal use of extreme long shots of the bustling cityscape of Taipei and Tokyo, and projects reflections of glass surfaces between two metropolises. Yang use of extreme long shots carries its transnational motif when applied to each protagonist. In the case of NJ, the extreme long shots are used to suggest the changing economic climate of modern Taipei. Moreover, NJ is a responsible businessman who adheres strongly to the principles of human connection and treating clients with fairness. As a father NJ is struggling to balance his traditional role with the demanding nature of transnational capitalism, and the use of extreme long shots conveys to the viewer this sense of capitalist domination in a more visual sense. The skyscrapers of glass and concrete, a symbol of aggressive capitalism, become intricately tied to the fabric of two metropolises in Yang’s film, and help to support the
transnational narrative of the father on a business trip.

To sum up, this chapter has demonstrated the central importance of postcolonial imaginary and transnational connections. Even though the concept of the transnational also problematizes ‘postcolonialism’ as an attempt to maintain and legitimize conventional notions of cultural authenticity (Ezra and Rowden 2006: 5), this chapter has given an account of and the needs for the critical use of the term “postcolonial” in transnational East-Asia cinema. By examining the object and space in the film, this study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of transnational cinema. This chapter indicates that filmmaking across national boundaries can provide transnational connections between Taiwan and Japan.
Conclusion

The thesis departs from the model of national cinema by accentuating the intercultural links between Taiwanese filmmaking and the Chinese, American and Japanese cultural legacies. Due to the colonial and postcolonial circumstance of Taiwan, TNC is about films made by different Taiwanese directors, whether they have been financed by Japanese, Chinese, and even European. Cultural hybridity is much more than the simple mixing of different cinematic elements. TNC’s director creates a new type of cultural space. It is really about the creation of a unique cultural sphere reflecting local values and through the process of fusion. Hou Hsiao-hsien, for example, some critics have tried to understand his style through the aesthetic theories of traditional Chinese painting. Hou also admits that the novels of the Chinese realist Shen Cong-wen haven been a source of inspiration for him (Mon 2000: 32). However, one cannot fully appreciate Hou’s films without situating them within the movement of TNC. Ang Lee is known mostly for his cinematic diversity whereby each film is an entirely different genre and subject from the previous one. Nevertheless, every genre he makes further refines his singular exploration of the relationship between American film culture and
traditional cultural value. Known as Taiwan’s Antonioni, Edward Yang also inherits the spirit of European New Wave Cinema and adopts a modernist aesthetic, minimalist style, and coming-of-age sentiment to explore various facets of contemporary Taiwanese society.

Several Taiwan new wave films corporations have adopted hybrid strategies, resulting in the creation of films such as *Pushing Hands* (1992), *Café Lumiere* (2004), *Yi Yi* (2000), *I don’t Want to Sleep Alone* (2006) and *Visage* (2009). They utilized a style that fused indigenous cultural elements with more art-house influences. By combining European art-house style with Taiwanese experience, TNC created a very unique new film style that has met with critical acclaim at global film festivals. Many new wave films have reflected those cross-cultural themes displayed in other hybrid domestic films, such as the ideological conflict between Mainland China and Taiwan, everyday urban life, and specific socio-cultural issues.

I suggest the notion of border crossing as a useful tool for analyzing the complexities of the film culture in Taiwan. Rather than tracing how Taiwan New Cinema signifies a “singular” national identity in post-war Taiwan, the thesis has showed how the new cinematic language and innovative filmmaking contribute to the
ideas of historiography, popular narrative form and the postcolonial imaginary. Taiwan New Cinema was nearly invisible on the global art cinema map since the 1980s, when the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang and other Taiwan New Cinema directors gained recognition at international film festival. Taiwan New Cinema was the first conscious attempt to build a serious film culture in Taiwan, and the themes of the films opened up a discourse about a history that had been ignored for a long time.

Chapter 1, Everyday Exile, has examined how the history of everyday life is portrayed in two films. These films demonstrate the malfunction in a society where familial order and social authorities are no longer respected by the younger generation. In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hou illustrates how, in the everyday lives of the younger generation, the youths spend more time acting tough than taking care of their elders and their devotion to the family is replaced by those to their group of friends. Chang Tso-chi’s *The Best of Times* is a colourful portrayal of the Ah-Wei’s journey from the everyday life of their suburban community to the dark reaches of the gangster underworld. Both films share the narrative of everyday life and represent the vibrant and imaginative landscape of ethnic-group affiliation in Taiwan. In order to evoke the history of everyday life, both directors draw on a collection of daily phenomena,
including objects, activities, social network, and familial interaction.

Chapter 2, *Traumatic Body*, has argued that Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day* not only concerns itself with the representation of youth culture in the 1960s but also questions the formation of national identity in Taiwan. *A Brighter Summer Day* is a Coming age/bildungsroman film, offering a nostalgic memory of his childhood and young adulthood. Yang’s film, depicts youth gangs as a manifestation of young people’s insecurity as a result of their *waishengren* parents’ own displacement and anxiety in their exilic experience on the island. It suggests that, by the 1960s, a second generation of *waishengren* whose only sense of security was admission to a prestigious high school or alliance with a street gang had emerged.

Chapter 3, *Political Satire*, has argued that Wan Jen’s *The Taste of Apples* (1983) and Wu Nien-Jen’s *Buddha Bless America* (1994) can be considered as political satire, a popular genre that features sarcasm, ridicule, and irony. In addition, the two films present a satire on the nature of Cold War politics. “*The Taste of Apple*,” the third episode of *The Sandwich Man* (1983), employs a satiric narrative and melodramatic techniques in order to evoke the tragicomic nature of the story. More significantly, the short film goes beyond not only satirizing the 1960s fascination with American culture.
On the other hand, *Buddha Bless America*, Wu Nien-jen’s second feature film, which makes extensive references to American neocolonialism in Cold War Taiwan.

Chapter 4, *Between Family Melodrama and Accented Cinema*, has argued that Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands* (1992) not only combines the popular genres of melodrama and kung fu, but is also concerned with the relationship between diasporic identity and cross-cultural negotiation. In his first feature film, *Pushing Hands*, Ang Lee attempts to tell a story of the Chinese diaspora in the United States. Lee produces his film for a global market and deploys domestic themes and cinematic techniques from world culture.

Chapter 5, *Postcolonial Nostalgia*, examines Wu Nien-Jen’s film, *A Borrowed Life*, which takes Taiwan’s postcolonial identity as its main subject, has revisited the vexed question of identity politics in the colonial and postcolonial era. In *A Borrowed Life* Wu probes the Taiwanese experience of the older generation and explores it with turbulent memories of the Japanese, who surround the protagonist like so many wandering ghosts. However, his film does not lose its bearing in the turmoil. Wu’s approach evokes significant details, such as the film house use of *Benshi*, highlights the dialectic of identity formation.
Chapter 6, *Postcolonial Imaginary and Transnational Connections*, aims to explore those aspects of globalization and displacement that are connected with postcoloniality in East Asian cinemas. I conclude that *Yi Yi* and *Café Lumière* respond to the new identity politics to promote and reflect a ‘cultural diversity’ by bringing into question patterns of duality and antagonism and refashioning them into more nuanced and ambivalent composites. The chapter thus reveals Taiwan New Cinema as located at the intersection between the national and the transnational, demonstrating transnational narrative spaces as a type of filmmaking that operates outside the national cinema.

As I have shown throughout the thesis, Taiwan New Cinema has historically demonstrated Taiwan’s ambivalence toward cultural hybridity. This thesis thus concludes that studies of national cinema need to be more conscious of the submerged or hidden heterogeneity within that culture, as well as between it and other cultures. Since then, many other Taiwan directors have also become a significant part of global art cinema, such as Ang Lee, Chang Tso-chi and Tsai Ming-liang. The new millennium of Taiwan Cinema, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, might be described as a gradual intercultural filmmaking practice. The films *Café Lumière* and *Yi Yi*, while reflecting
the many problems that cultural hybridity entails, posit a hope for a hybridized future.

The transnational movement of the Taiwanese in East Asia cinema can be read as analogous to the operation of transnationalism in the region. It is through greater knowledge that cultural exchange and tolerance prevail.
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