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A revision and expansion of the article is underway.

Exploring Society and History: New Taiwan Cinema in the 1980s***

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From the early 1980s to the present, Taiwanese filmmakers have produced an excellent series of films that explore social tensions and problems in cinematically compelling and often original ways, blending social realism with modernist innovation. Out of this cinematic production, several world-class directors have emerged including Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Ang Lee, and a series of films now exist that are worthy of attention throughout the world. This development is surprising since prior to the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema suffered heavy repression and was constructed as a highly propagandistic and/or commercial cinema with few distinctive products or directors.[1]

The recent Taiwan cinema is "new" in that it carries out a rebellion against previous genre cinema (its own and Hollywood) and attempts to produce a new cycle of films appropriate to explore the realities and problems of contemporary Taiwan society. It may be an exaggeration to claim with Fredric Jameson that the films of the Taiwan cinema constitute "a kind of linked cycle more satisfying for the viewer than any national cinema I know (save perhaps the French productions of the 20s and 30s)."[2] And yet as a cycle of national cinema, the new Taiwan cinema has produced an impressive succession of films comprising a distinctive national cinema, one increasingly visible in the international arena.

In this study, I shall discuss new Taiwan cinema as a linked set of probings of Taiwanese history, society, and identity that explore the conflicts between tradition and modernity and that deal with the specific conflicts and concerns of the present moment -- a conjuncture fraught with problems and perils, but also possibilities. I have adopted the term "new Taiwan cinema" rather than the standard term "Taiwanese new wave" because the cycle of films of 1982-3 to the late 1980s, standardly described as "new wave," has generally been said to have come to an end.[3] But -- as I argue -- this cycle of 1980 films described as "new wave" has produced the preconditions to develop a new Taiwanese cinema, which transcends the parameters of the earlier "new wave" films, a cinema that is highly visible in the 1990s and is rich with possibilities that transcend the earlier movement.

I also resist the term "new wave" to describe the objects under scrutiny because there are problems with the very concept of the "new wave," a term which originated in France with the Cahiers du cinema promotion of a set of French films of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Henceforth, "new wave" has become a marketing term to delineate a new set of artifacts, allegedly worthy of consumption, becoming, as Peter Wollen suggests,[4] a term used to promote fresh entries into the international cultural market. Yet while some Taiwanese directors -- most notably Ang Lee

-- produce films for a global market and deploy themes and cinematic techniques from world culture, the best of the new Taiwan cinema are distinctively Taiwanese, dealing with the realities and problems of contemporary Taiwanese life. This new Taiwan cinema developed a shared style and set of concerns and themes. It attempted to develop a new type of national Taiwanese cinema which sought to define a Taiwanese history and identity and would deal with current social realities and problems previously ignored, or suppressed, in its cinema and culture at large. Finally, the metaphor of "wave" itself is ambiguous, signifying a sudden eruption of a natural oceanic phenomenon, that reaches a crescendo, makes its splash, and then fades away without leaving a trace. Such an image surely provides a dubious metaphor for cinematic production and history.

Rather than seeing post-1980s Taiwanese films simply as a "new wave," as artifacts in film history, we should understand them as cultural and political interventions, as probings of Taiwanese society and history, as attempts to create a distinctly national cinema. My focus will accordingly be on what now appears as the "heroic" period of the new Taiwan cinema, the 1980s, when filmmakers received expanded freedom to make films and explore cinematic form and social problems, and produced a new type of political cinema distinctly focused on Taiwanese problems and identity. During the 1980s, its major filmmakers, as I argue in this study, shared certain themes and concerns, sometimes collaborated, and produced a body of work of lasting significance. It appears, however, that audiences tired of its themes, style, and complex and challenging work, and that a more heterogeneous and hybridized cinema emerged in the 1990s, influenced both by the most popular forms of global culture and postmodernism, which itself emerged as a global phenomenon.[5]

Yet rather than seeing the new Taiwan cinema of the 1980s as an exhausted failure, I prefer to see it as a productive body of work that opened the way for a variety and diversity of Taiwanese films that in turn became part of a new global film culture in the 1990s. It is my conviction that new Taiwanese cinema of the 1980s is an important cinematic movement that deserves to be studied and experienced. Many of the films that I discuss are of high aesthetic and political quality, and Taiwanese films are increasingly recognized as an important development within world cinema. Moreover, the films under inquiry in this study helped create a new more open and democratic Taiwanese public sphere, providing a cultural forum to discuss its problems and challenges, and are thus of interest for the politics of culture and thinking how film can promote progressive social transformation.

Taiwanese Cinema

It is important to note that there was no native cinema in Taiwan before its liberation from Japan at the end of World War Two. Taiwan had been dominated by China for some centuries before the Sino-Japanese war and after the Chinese defeat Japan colonized Taiwan from 1895 until 1945, the year of Japan's surrender in World War Two. For the first half of the century, Japan therefore controlled Taiwanese cultural production, including cinema, and did not allow an indigenous national cinema to flourish. Most films exhibited were from Japan, China, or the United States and these films and any other that might include Taiwanese participation in production were

tightly controlled by Japanese censors.[6]

After Japan's defeat, China assumed control once again of Taiwan, and it was subject to cultural domination by Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government, the Kuomintang (KMT). National cinemas, like national literature and culture, are a factor in constituting national identity. Colonized countries, like Taiwan, traditionally did not create a national cinema, but were a market for the export of the products of colonizing countries. Taiwan -- under the hegemony of China and Japan in the twentieth century -- thus did not create a national cinema until the Chinese Nationalist government, the Kuomintang, under Chiang Kai-shek established Taiwan as the Republic of China in 1949, the China in waiting for the overthrow of the People's Republic, the China that would preserve the heritage of the past (entombed in the National Museum of Taipei that held all the national treasures looted from the mainland and carried to Taiwan along with the armies of Chiang Kai-shek). This political ideology militated against creation of a specifically Taiwanese cinema, that dealt with Taiwan's past and present problems and conflicts, since Taiwan was seen by the KMT as part of greater China, as the real China.

For its first several decades, the dominant postwar Taiwanese cinema was exclusively government-financed and controlled, used by Chiang Kai-shek's regime as a propaganda vehicle or as harmless diversion, churning out either propaganda pieces or innocuous comedies, melodramas, Kung Fu films and other genre artifacts. On the whole, Taiwanese culture suffered from the heavy-handed repression of the Nationalist Party Government, which exerted rigorous censorship and which was not friendly to either aesthetic innovation or probing of Taiwan's history or current social problems and tensions. The result was a largely escapist cinema dedicated to political propaganda and entertainment and escapism of a rather banal sort.

Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975 and his son who succeeded him began to allow more liberalized cultural expression, such as is evident in the new Taiwan cinema. Until the new cinema of the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema was primarily a genre cinema, utilizing traditional generic codes without any specific national identity or distinctive style or creative innovations. The success of the Hong Kong cinema led the Taiwanese government to promote its film industry in the early 1980s, which also helped produce a renaissance of Taiwanese cinema. During the 1980s, a group of Taiwanese directors made a series of socially critical films that probed Taiwan's history and its current socio-political and economic tensions. The general climate for cultural expression was improving during the reign of Chiang's son who allowed the formation of an opposition party in 1986 and terminated the forty-year old martial law in 1987. Following his death in 1988, liberalization continued and there is currently a struggle underway for greater democratization and freedom -- tendencies visible in its film culture inaugurated, I am arguing, by the cycle of films of the 1980s which I examine below.

Early examples of new Taiwan cinema were also government-financed, but exhibited a freedom of expression and social criticism not evident before the thaw of the 1980s. Nonetheless, the creators of the new Taiwan cinema needed to take account of possible government censorship, or the lack of funding, and so operated within limited parameters of social criticism and opposition.

In the following discussion, I shall examine several key films and directors of the new Taiwan cinema in order to discuss the construction of a national cinema and how cinema can serve as a cultural forum to explore the issue of national identity and deal with the pressing political and social problems of the present. Moreover, we shall see that Taiwanese films of the 1980s are particularly interesting because Taiwan presents something of a test case from which to explore the tensions between tradition and modernity, and its key films of the decade negotiate this transition, just as many films of the 1990s deal with the tensions between the modern and postmodern eras.

The New Taiwan Cinema

What became referred to as the Taiwanese "new wave" first presented itself as a coherent movement in two anthology films that investigated contemporary Taiwanese society and aspects of its recent history. In Our Time (1982) featured four short films by directors who would later distinguish themselves, including one by Edward Yang, who would emerge as a major figure in the new Taiwan cinema. This inaugural film was followed by the anthology The Sandwich Man (1983) which went much further in probing beneath the surface of Taiwanese life and which constituted something of a breakthrough for the Taiwanese cinema, utilizing innovative cinematic techniques to explore contemporary problems. Based on stories by author Chun-ming Huang, the films are influenced by the rural literature movement that was becoming a force in Taiwanese culture and which deeply influenced some of the figures in the emerging Taiwanese cinematic new wave. The rural literature movement wished to preserve stories from Taiwan's agrarian past and to chart the ways that the move toward life in the city and urbanization was impacting on Taiwanese society. Some of the directors of the new Taiwan cinema, such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, were deeply attracted to rural stories and ambiences, which they used to capture the uniqueness and specificity of the Taiwan experience, as well as aspects of their own life-history.

The three short films in The Sandwich Man anthology explored the development of Taiwanese society in the 1960s, depicting allegorically the island's rise to economic progress and the human and social costs involved in the project. They also dealt critically with Taiwan's current problems and combined a critical realism with modernist aesthetic techniques, attempting to use cinema to explore social problems and to develop a new type of cinema and cinematic style to do so. The short films constituting The Sandwich Man are thus important markers in the development of a new Taiwan cinema and constitute something of a "national allegory" of a certain stage of Taiwan's history.[7] Such allegories require at least a certain degree of critical "social realism" in Lukacs' sense which portrays typical characters in typical social situations so as to delineate the existing class, gender, and social structure, as well as forces of domination and oppression, existing problems, conflicts, and struggles, and historical development.[8] Yet such critical realism need not, as I argue throughout this study, preclude modernist aesthetic innovation which seeks new forms, languages and styles to express the specificity of national experience and problems.

The first episode, "Son's Big Doll," directed by and starring Hou Hsiao-Hsien, is set in 1962 and shows poor folks who migrated to the city from rural situations struggling for economic survival. The main character, played by Hou himself, lives in a shanty-town with his wife and is

employed as "a sandwich man," who dresses as a clown and carries a billboard advertising movie features for a local cinema. Flashbacks show him hustling the job and his wife getting birth control help, because they cannot afford to have a child. In the film's narrative present, however, they now possess a child who loves to play with his clown-dressed father. Yet others ridicule the "sandwich man" and he is obviously tired of his job; moreover, his boss is dubious whether it is worth the money to employ him.

Ever hustling, the character persuades his boss to let him ride a bicycle with a large sign advertising the film, on the grounds that it would attract more customers, that more people would see the advertisement. The boss reluctantly agrees and the man is happy that he no longer has to wear his clown uniform and make-up. But his son no longer recognizes his father and cries when he sees him out of uniform. To please his son, the man puts back on his clown uniform, thus becoming "Son's Big Doll," and the child is again happy.

The episode deploys Hou's trademark of a static camera and long shots held steady throughout entire scenes to explore the characters and social environment under scrutiny. The shots depict the sandwich man in relation to his underclass surroundings, often showing him isolated and sad, the tragic clown struggling for survival in a hostile world. Other times the long shots depict the intimacy between husband and wife, and parents and children, and their attempts to achieve dignity and happiness in a poor urban environment. All of the characters in the slum have migrated from rural conditions to try to make it in the city and form something of a community in the absence of any stable social structures and institutions.

"Son's Big Doll" shows the scarcity conditions and struggle for economic survival in Taiwan in the early 1960s. When a doctor provides some birth control pills to his wife, who wishes to postpone birth until they can afford a child, we see the sort of appropriation of modernization that helped Taiwan master its poverty. In the energies of the father/clown to earn money to produce and support a family, we see the forces that will make possible Taiwan's economic miracle. And in the loving scenes between husband and wife, father and son, Hou exhibits the stable familial structure that will help enable Taiwan's economic boom over the next decades. The episode is thus part of a national allegory of Taiwan's economic development in its touching and sweet story.

The next episode, "Vicki's Hat," directed by Zeng Zhuan-Xiang, shows two young salesmen travelling from village to village, selling a Japanese-made pressure cooker. This episode depicts the stage of 60s Taiwanese development when Japanese products, sales techniques, and corporate structures dominated the Taiwanese economic imaginary. The salesmen meet resistance everywhere, from village people who wish to stick to traditional ways of cooking and who are suspicious of new modern commodities. Although they are not happy selling the Japanese product, the salesmen are pressured into trying to increase their sales and discuss ways of overcoming the resistance to their product, following Japanese sales techniques.

Their sales efforts and drive depicts allegorically the energies that were to enable Taiwan to achieve a high level of economic development from the 1960s to the present. But "Vicki's Hat" also

presents the costs of that development. One salesman befriends a young girl named Vicki who is always wearing the same hat. One day he takes off her hat which reveals underneath an ugly-red tumor on her hairless head. At the same moment, there is a cut to a scene showing the pressure-cooker exploding and critically-injuring his partner. The story thus allegorically presents the destructiveness of a developing society that forces individuals to exploit other people and to themselves risk losing their innocence and humanity -- and life! -- in the process.

Indeed, Zeng represents the force of economic determinism in the film, depicting the characters overpowered by economic forces. The story allegorizes unrestrained Taiwanese capitalism's triumph by showing the consequences of its destructive effects. Likewise, in his later film, A Woman of Wrath (1987), Zeng shows a woman overpowered by the twin forces of patriarchy and tradition, struggling to control her environment, but victimized by powerful social and cultural forces.

The first two episodes in The Sandwich Man depict conformity to the pressures of economic modernization and the struggle for survival in a developing economy, while the third episode, "A Taste of Apple," directed by Wan Jen, satirizes the fascination with American culture near the end of the 1960s. The opening black and white scenes depicts crowds and the American embassy, perhaps reminding audiences of an attack on the embassy during that period. But the focus shifts from newsreel footage to a slow-motion sequence in which a Taiwanese worker is hit by a car driven by a U.S. military figure. As the camera slowly pulls back, the scene turns into color, depicting the blood and the injury to his body from the accident.

The rest of the film depicts contrasts between the Americans and the Taiwanese and the gradual process through which the worker's family comes to accept his injury -- especially when they learn that the Americans' will handsomely compensate the family. The contrast appears through a play of visual images: the large and mysterious Americans and the shorter Taiwanese; the crowded and poor slums and the open-spaces of the U.S. embassy and hospital; the darkness of Taiwanese urban scenes vs. the shining white light and white decor of the American hospital spaces.

The final scene shows the family of the injured man enjoying an American apple in the hospital room -- a symbol of American luxury and of Taiwanese fascination with American products and culture during the period. Conservative critics complained that the episode presented the Taiwanese too negatively and the resulting uproar even led to the cutting of the crucial concluding scene where the children taste the American apple.[9] This controversy highlighted the relative daringness of the new Taiwan cinema which was willing to present its society in a critical and even satirical light and to dissect its problems and tensions in a fashion not previously visible in the escapist and conservative Taiwanese cinema.

The three episodes cumulatively present something of a national allegory of Taiwanese economic development in the 1960s, showing the progress through stages of hustle for survival, to the appropriation of Japanese products and business techniques, to the fascination with American

culture and dependency on the United States by the end of the decade. The stories deal allegorically with stages of economic development and the ways that Taiwan society adapted itself to a modern capitalist world economic system. Yet the films used innovative cinematic techniques to tell stories that were realistic slices of Taiwanese life, showing audiences real people dealing with real problems, a cinema far-removed from the costume dramas, kung fu spectacles, banal comedies, and "health realism" (which attempted to present the present from the perspective of a "healthy" realism)[10] that had ruled Taiwanese cinematic culture. Thus, The Sandwich Man was rightly seen as part of a "new wave" of Taiwanese films that broke with its previous genre cinema as well as the dominant forms of Hollywood film.

There is something of a shared style in new Taiwan cinema and an attempt to develop a distinct cinematic language appropriate for a national cinema. Several directors, especially Hou, Zeng, and Edward Yang, use a fractured narrative style with very fragmentary scenes, unconventional episodic narrative cuts, and often a complex and challenging story that forces the viewer to construct the narrative, to put the pieces together, to produce a reading of the film. There is rarely a conventional beginning, middle, and end to the films or standard Hollywood pacing; sometimes scenes are extremely long and in Hou's case employ a static camera; in Yang's case, often the characters are at the margins of the frame, or even off-frame and dialogue is often overlapping and not always correlated to the images. Both Hou and Yang in their feature-length films engage in temporal jolts, cutting from a dramatic scene to an evolved situation months or even years in the future, where the audience is forced to construct what has happened in the meanwhile, to figure out what produced the changes portrayed. Hou's and Zeng's episodes in The Sandwich Man both deploy flashbacks that show the characters making the transition to their new socio-economic situations. Many of the films of the new Taiwan cinema therefore require an active viewer in what Barthes (1975) calls a writerly text, that unlike the "readerly" texts of conventional literature and the Hollywood cinema offer up meanings predigested and easily consumable.

New Taiwan cinema favored outdoor locations over studio ones, and thus utilized natural rather than artificial lighting and explored the real living and working spaces of ordinary people. Long-take and deep focus shots aid in the exploration of a social environment not familiar to many audiences, or rarely seen before in the cinema. Often non-professional actors were used and language is extremely important, in which the dialect used points to the regional and class location of the speakers. Problems of the underclass, of women, of youth, and various marginalized and oppressed groups not dealt with in previous Taiwanese films were of importance, as were the problems of the transition from rural to urban environments and the peculiar problems of Taiwanese national identity.

The films tend to combine social realist with modernist aesthetics. As in Lukacs' concept of realism, socially typical characters were portrayed who represented specific social classes, regions, or groupings. Real locations were used, evoking a sense of social reality, and the actual problems and conflicts of the era were explored in a critical and realistic fashion. Yet modernist aesthetic innovation was also important with sound and image juxtapositions, fragmented narratives, flashbacks and temporal dislocations, and open-ended, often puzzling endings which forced the

spectators to construct both narrative and hermeneutical-political meanings of the films. Indeed, this cinema, which combines realist portrayal with modernist aesthetic innovation, reveals the artificiality of Lukacs' juxtaposition of realism and modernism as alleging different and competing aesthetic styles, as an amalgam of both are present in new Taiwan cinema -- as well as Brecht, Fassbinder, Altman, and many other major directors.

For instance, in The Sandwich Man, both Hou and Zeng used deep focus shots and a fixed camera, with characters coming in and out of the frame, while Wan Jen used a detached fixed camera to capture the interaction between the Americans and the Taiwanese and to explore the world of the urban poor in juxtaposition to the modern antiseptic American hospital. In his feature films, Edward Yang constructs highly complex images where characters are often at opposite sides of the frame, separated by objects, and sometimes glide out of the frame while speaking, pointing to the alienation of individuals from each other, how people are becoming like objects in alienated urban environments, and that a determining social reality exists outside the frame, helping to constitute the actions and characters depicted.

Language is important as identity markers for the characters and as a sign of the hybridized and contested cultural identity of the island. In "A Taste of Apple" differences in language and culture are signalled in a scene where an American, a Mandarin-speaking policeman from the mainland, and two Taiwanese women speaking the local Fukka dialect try to converse during a driving rain, highlighting the cultural differences at play in Taiwan -- and the obstacles to forging something like a Taiwanese national identity. The wife of the injured man does not speak Mandarin and her daughter must translate for her, showing the profound cultural differences among inhabitants of the island.

The films of the new Taiwan cinema are also highly personal and exhibit a high degree of collaboration and solidarity, pointing to shared parameters and ideologies of a cinematic movement. The highly-respected Taiwanese film historian and critic Hsiung-ping Chiao notes that Hou Hsiao-hsien's "A Time to Live and the Time to Die was based on Hou Hsiao-hsien's own life; Summer at Grandpa's (1984) on the film's writer Chu Tien-wen, and Dust in the Wind on the screenplay writer Wu Nien-chen."[11] As noted, the major directors produced film anthologies together and Hou performed the major male role in Edward Yang's Taipei Story (1985) and mortgaged his house to finance and produce Yang's The Terrorizer (1986).

The anthology films In Our Time and The Sandwich Man and subsequent key films of the new Taiwan cinema present some of the defining hybrid elements in the Taiwanese national experiences and the components of -- and obstacles to -- forging a national identity. By the 1980s, Taiwan was a unique amalgam of a modern and traditional society, that had undergone rapid modernization, and which contained a native Taiwanese and various generations and strata of Chinese mainland culture. Thus, different languages and in some cases cultural forms competed for the population's loyalty and created a conflicted and contested hybridized form of national identity. Taiwan had been a colonial country, occupied by Japan for the first half of the century, and by factions from mainland China during the second half of the century, as well as before the Japanese

occupation. Yet Taiwan also opened itself in the 1950s to globalization, to an international consumer culture, and particularly to American culture which permeated the island during the 1950s and 1960s when the U.S. sent troops, provided loans which helped enable its economy to boom, and imposed American culture and products on Taiwanese society.

This unique national situation required cinematic exploration, but until the 1980s there was little freedom of expression to articulate the political and historical realities of the turbulent past and the complex situation of the present. Thus, Taiwanese cinema -- and the culture at large -- needed to confront both its past history and its present social situation to try to produce an identity and even clarify the contemporary moment and its historical origins, as the country careened into an uncertain future. The new Taiwan cinema was soon to provide a major national epic director in Hou Hsiao-Hsien and several other cineastes who would produce an impressive body of work dealing with the problems of contemporary Taiwan and its unique historical experience in original and compelling ways.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Epic Dramas of Everyday Life

Beginning with a 1982 co-directed feature Green Green Grass of Home, his work on The Sandwich Man in 1983, The Boys from Feng Kuei, Summer at Grandpa's (1984), A Time to Live and A Time to Die (1985), Dust in the Wind (1986), Daughter of the Nile (1987), City of Sadness (1989) and The Puppetmaster (1993), Hou Hsiao-Hsien produced a series of slice-of-life melodramas and historical epics which probed the personal histories of Taiwanese citizens and which provided materials for a national history and cinema. His intense focus on everyday life provides an epic quality to the lives of ordinary people, who represent and embody the turbulent history, social problems, and conflicts of the Taiwanese people.

Hou developed a personal cinematic style that combines realist focus on everyday life with modernist cinematic innovations and a distinctly individual vision. His stylistic devices involve long shots and long takes, often with deep focus, that explore personal relationships and the relationship between individuals, their culture, and their environment. His focus is on the epic dramas of everyday life, of typical Taiwanese characters, who exemplify the broader dimensions of the Taiwanese experience, and who dramatically experience the external dynamics of Taiwanese history. Hou is thus probably the major figure in the effort to develop a distinctly Taiwanese cinema with its own style, subject-matter, and themes. Thus, while he is clearly an auteur, with distinctly individual style and vision, his work contributes to developing a specifically Taiwanese national cinema with its own themes, aesthetics, and styles.

In fact, particular national cinemas define themselves against the dominant cinema and attempt to evolve their own cinematic languages and thematics. While Hollywood film deploys quick editing, alternating long, middle, and close-up shots, as well as shot/reverse shots which explore, usually in close-up, characters' reaction to the scenes, Hou uses few edits and few close-up, preferring long shots which take their time to explore the situation. Although he probes specific family histories, including his own and his collaborators, his films allegorically present the

changing conditions of Taiwanese society and its rich and complex history. He is both the most prolific and one of the best known Taiwanese directors internationally, winning several major film prizes in festivals throughout the world during the 1980s.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien's films The Boys from Feng Kuei (1984) and Summer at Grandpa's (1984), deal with growing up in Taiwan, as do many of his later films. A Time to Live and A Time to Die (1985; hereafter Time) deals with the director's own childhood. Born on mainland China in 1947 in the Hakka community of Guangdong, which speaks a unique dialect and which has its own distinct traditions, Hou emigrated with his family at an early age to Taiwan, where his father became a government official. The film explores a family in a small town coming to terms with its environment, defining itself culturally, and dealing with the hardships of sickness and death and the pains of growing up.

The story focuses on Ah Hao-ku and his relationships to his grandmother, his parents, his siblings, and his Taiwanese friends. Opening scenes use long shots and takes to explore the modest family house and the relationships between the boy and his family. The grandmother especially dotes on the boy because a fortune-teller told her that he would grow up to be an important person. The sister is bitter because although she studied hard and did very well on a difficult high school entrance exam, she is forced to go to a preparatory school for teaching college, while her brother is able to prepare for entrance to high school and the University. Later the mother tells the daughter of how unhappy the father was with his first born, a girl, who was sickly and died young. Obviously, the male children are privileged and are the pets of their parents. Thus, the film subtly presents striking images of the subordination of women in a continuing highly patriarchal traditional Chinese society.

The use of language is one of the interesting features of this film. The family speaks the Hakka dialect within the house, while the boys largely speak the Taiwanese dialect with their native island friends. The children all speak Mandarin Chinese in school and the daughter often speaks Mandarin in the family. The local Taiwanese merchants cannot even understand the grandmother's Hakka dialect. In particular, the choice of speaking the Taiwanese dialect on behalf of the boy Ah Hao-ku indicates his identification with Taiwanese culture and indifference to mainland Chinese culture. He is often shown singing native Taiwanese songs and has no interest in Chinese nationalist politics -- depicting the integration of a younger generation into contemporary Taiwan society, uninterested in the Chinese mainland, the return to which obsessed the Nationalist Party and many of the mainlanders who came with the Nationalists.

The father generally explains to the children the significance of the political events played on the radio, but the children don't really care. In one scene, the death of a famous Nationalist general is announced on the radio and the next day a memorial for him is being broadcast while Ah Hao-ku and his friends are playing billiards in a pool hall. An old nationalist soldier tells them that they should quit playing and show their respects to the general, and Ah Hao-ku insults him and a fight breaks out. Obviously, the younger generation shows no interest or respect for the Nationalist Party (KMT) past and identifies with the Taiwanese present. The schoolboys joke about the

nationalist myth of "recovering the homeland" and immerse themselves in the present rather than dreaming of future glories or the Chinese mainland past -- which obsesses some of the older generation, such as Ah Hao-ku's grandmother, who is shown wanting to return to her old village.

The older generation is depicted in the film as more focused on China and out of touch with life on Taiwan. An autobiographical diary written by the father is discovered after the mother's death and the daughter reads it out loud to her siblings. The father had intended to only settle in Taiwan for a short time, fully expecting to return to China. He accordingly only bought cheap furniture and refused to buy a sewing machine for his wife because he thought that they would be leaving soon -- though he eventually relented. He closely followed nationalist politics and never really identified with the Taiwanese environment, whereas the experience of his children was, as I have noted, quite opposite.

Thus, Time unfolds the conflicting cultural experiences and traditions which inform contemporary Taiwanese experience and indicate the complexity of forming a national identity out of competing traditions, as exemplified in the different languages and cultural forms evident in Hou's films. Taiwanese culture is genuinely hybridized, containing an amalgam of many different cultures, ranging from various Chinese traditions, Japanese, European colonizers, and American and global culture. The cultural experience is also disaporic, with Chinese from the mainland periodically emigrating to the island and island residents often returning to the mainland, other Chinese enclaves throughout the world, or the United States. This experience has produced much dislocation, suffering, and tragedies, evident in Hou's films.

Time is largely a family tragedy with first the father dying of tuberculosis during a power blackout and then the mother dying of cancer some years later. The children must come to terms with their parents' deaths and assume personal responsibility for their lives at an early age. The senile old grandmother frequently gets lost, wishing to "cross the next bridge" to her old village in China and the film ends with her death: during the later scenes she is shown sleeping on the floor in the midst of activity and she eventually passes away, dead for days in the middle of the house before her death is discovered, her body partly decomposed. This tragic figure presents allegorically the discarded older generation from China, who never assimilated themselves to the island and who were always out of place and not at home.

But the film primarily focuses on the growth and coming to maturity of the boy Ah Hao-ku, so it can be read as a bildungsroman, a tale of coming to age, in the Taiwan of the 1950s and 1960s. The boy has his first sexual initiation with a prostitute, who has to pay him because it was his first experience. He has a crush on a local girl, but she tells him that he should focus his attention instead on his University entrance exam -- which he does. The boy joins a gang and they often find themselves in violent clashes with an opposing gang.

Thus, Time shows the generation who emigrated from the mainland becoming part of Taiwanese culture, becoming assimilated into a Taiwanese identity. Time also shows the forces of modernity transforming the island. An early scene shows electricity wires being set up and the

children grab a piece of metal discarded from the apparatus as a piece of magic -- though they sell it the next day to the scrap metal man. In several scenes, the electrical wires are focused on and the film uses the radio to broadcast the key political events of the era. In particular, one radio report notes that the Taiwanese have shot down two Chinese communist Migs, referring to the constant political tensions between Taiwan and mainland China -- tensions that could at any time explode into catastrophe for Taiwan.

In general, the radio in Hou's films is the voice of the Nationalist Chinese KMT colonizers and frequently is the voice of doom, bringing outside events and tragedy that impinge on inhabitants of the island. The radio is thus a force of modernity, bringing modern mass communication into a traditional society, but it is also the voice of the dominant powers, as broadcasting was tightly controlled by the Chinese Nationalist regime until a democratization movement in the 1980s. Indeed, it is my argument that precisely the films of the new Taiwan cinema began this democratization movement by beginning to criticize the Nationalist hegemony over the island and to produce more critical versions of Taiwan's troubled history.

The railroad is another icon of modernity, frequently used in the film to portray modern modes of transportation. Indeed, one sees transportation change in Time from the bicycle-drawn buggies dominant in the 1950s to motorbikes, with a few cars in the background. The railroad tracks, frequently shown in Hou's films, represent the passage way from the rural to the modern and the binding together of Taiwan into a modern industrial society, with modern modes of transportation and communication. Hou's episode in The Sandwich Man deployed a flashback that showed the main character and his wife on the train coming from the countryside to their new destination in the city.

Hou's Dust in the Wind (1986) opens with long-takes of trains winding through the countryside and passing through tunnels, symbols of the mobility in modern societies from country to city, and perhaps in the case of this film being thrown into the dark night of the soul and personal tragedy. The film focuses on a young boy and his childhood sweetheart who leave their village to seek their fortunes in the city. The grandfather is always lecturing the boy and parents try to discipline their children, but tradition is shown to be ineffectual in the face of the urban and social modernity that seems to be the fate of Taiwan.

The boy finds work in the city, first in a printing establishment, that also runs a cinema, two signs of modern mass communication, while the girl works in a garment factory, making clothes. The girl cuts her hand in an industrial accident and cannot afford a doctor to care for her, although the boy loans her money to address the problem. The boy quits his job and gains work as a messenger, but his motorbike is stolen and his prospects are bleak, almost driving him to theft, but he is dissuaded by the girl.

Both return to their small towns to visit their families and the differences between urban and small-town rural life are depicted. The boy leaves for his obligatory military service and during this stint, the girl marries, breaking the boy's heart. Once again, it is means of communication that bring

to bear the tragedy: His unopened letters to her are returned, but he receives a letter saying that his longtime girlfriend is married and he breaks down and cries. Once his military service is over, the boy returns to his village alone where he encounters his grandfather in the field, complaining about this year's crop and engaging in the same conversations. The scene points to an unchanging but disappearing tradition in the face of life in Taiwan's shifting fortunes and uncertainty brought on by a modern and complex social order, as well as the younger generation's alienation from both tradition and modernity..

Despite the inherent drama of the situations in Time and Dust, Hou's pace is slow and probing, delicately using his camera to explore the protagonists' environment and the high drama is downplayed. The focus instead is on the mundane details of everyday life, the typical pains of growing up, and the subtly of family and interpersonal relationships. While the experiences of the families and figures portrayed were particularly painful, in a sense, their sufferings, mundane as they were, serve as exemplars of the suffering of the Taiwanese people as a whole -- national suffering and tragedy that would be at the center of Hou's later films as well.

Hou's unique camera and editing style has elicited spirited debate concerning its progressive versus reactionary features. The long takes and long shots, often with deep focus, allow him to explore in depth the social environment and can be interpreted as the creation of a democratic cinematic language which allows the spectator to interpret the events, reflect on the characters and actions, and to construct their own meanings. His cinema thus eschews the manipulative style of Hollywood with its rapid cutting, fast pace, ideologically-loaded scenarios, and high tech special effects.[12]

Yet Hou's style might be said to naturalize traditional Taiwanese society and culture making its conventions seem natural and good. His films focus intensely on family life and could be read as an ideological defense of the ancestral family and traditional Taiwanese culture in the face of an ever-encroaching and corrosive modernity. Yet his films are neither celebratory nor critical, and are rarely judgmental, forcing the audience to reflect on the images and scenes and construct their own readings. Summer at Grandpa's, for instance, opens with a scene of high school girls in identical uniforms, singing typical songs. The images and scene could be read as a critique of the authoritarianism and conformity of the Taiwanese educational system, or simply as a sympathetic naturalistic evocation of customary high school days.

Likewise, one could read his films both as critical of traditional family and authority, as well as critical of contemporary culture. In Dust in the Wind, the grandfather's homilies to his grandson reproducing traditional values are often shown as ineffectual in the light of the boy's failed job experiences in Taiwan and collapse of his love affair when serving in the military. In Summer at Grandpa's, the grandfather is harshly authoritarian and the contrast between the urban and the rural, the traditional and the modern, which is at the center of Hou's films, is rather non-judgmental, forcing the audience to view the contrasts and to render its own reflections and judgements on the characters, situations, and events portrayed. There is, arguably, no defense of tradition or patriarchy in Hou's films such as one might find in Ang Lee's "Life with Father" trilogy that I briefly discuss in

the concluding section, although there is also no critique of patriarchy as is found in Wan Jen's Ah Feh and Zeng's Woman of Wrath.

On the whole, Hou's films present critical explorations of Taiwanese experience and history. Using his own experiences and those of his collaborators as material, Hou depicts the materialist and social context in which his generation came to maturity. Both the style and the subject matter mark his films as distinctly Taiwanese and Hou's work thus serves as an emblem of a new Taiwanese cinema attempting to produce a cinema appropriate to the island's history and problems which could serve as a national cinema providing a public forum of discussion and debate.

Hou's historical drama City of Sadness (1989) used as a backdrop for another family drama the Nationalist government's (KMT) slaughter of native Taiwanese in February 1947 -- a topic previously taboo. The film deals with the origins of the KMT's oppression of the people of Taiwan, showing Chinese Nationalist officials and various Chinese groups replacing the Japanese as the hegemonic economic and political forces after World War Two. The background to the action shows the beginning of Chinese Nationalist attempts to take-over control of the economy and society after the departure of the Japanese and how these process effected different strata of the Taiwanese people. Many Taiwanese attempted to profit from the changes, either by allying themselves with the Chinese nationalists and their cronies, as do some characters in Hou's film, or by engaging in crime or black market businesses, as do other characters in City. In the infamous, February 28 incident, government agents attempted to arrest an old woman selling black market cigarettes in order to enforce a government monopoly and a crowd of people rushed to her defense; the agent shot into the crowd, killing at least one bystander. The next morning, an angry crowd demonstrated in front of Taipei's government building and troops fired on the crowd killing many individuals and setting off island-wide revolt that lasted for months, leading to further repression).[13]

The film is perhaps his most striking exploration of Taiwanese history and is probably his best-known film, both domestically and internationally, winning many prizes at international film festivals and much recognition domestically and internationally. Focusing on the destinies of a Taiwanese family from 1945 to 1949, City probes the forbidden history of Chinese Nationalist brutality against the Taiwanese in the years following their "liberation" from Japan. Whereas the drama of Time was internal, with disease and death coming from within the family, the suffering and tragedy comes from outside in City, from the fateful historical and political events which victimized families and citizens who could not avoid the turmoil of the period.

City of Sadness opens in 1945 at the time of the defeat of Japan and Taiwan's reunification with China. The family patriarch, old Lin, has four sons and their sufferings will constitute the focus of the film. The eldest, Wen-heung, is a businessman-gangster who runs a local nightclub and a shipping company. The second son was drafted by the Japanese and is missing in action in the Philippines; although the family believes he is dead and will not return, his wife continues to run his clinic and believes that someday he will come back. The third son, Wen-Leung, had been sent by the Japanese to serve as an interpreter in Shanghai and is branded a collaborator after the war, tortured, and driven insane. He is shown being strapped down in the hospital in early scenes and in

later scenes appears as a voiceless figure of suffering. The youngest son, Wen-ching, was rendered deaf as a result of a childhood accident and communicates through the means of a note-pad. A photographer, he eventually renounces this occupation when he is overpowered with suffering.

The early scenes show the Japanese leaving the island and sympathetically portray them as individuals, some of whom are decent and sympathetic. Chinese mainland businessmen begin to arrive to exploit the new markets and economic possibilities, and Hou realistically depicts the corruption that has permeated Taiwan's economic life to the present. In one striking scene, shot in a long take with his trade-mark static camera, a group of businessmen, from different parts of China, converse in three different languages, with two interpreters. The eldest son, Wen-heung, does not speak Mandarin and the Chinese do not speak the local Taiwanese dialect. Thus, the differences between the groups are encoded in linguistic oppositions, which subvert the Nationalist ideology that Taiwan is naturally part of China.

Mandarin became the official language of Taiwan, imposed by the nationalist government, and throughout the film newscasts in Mandarin from the radio, or the voices of Mandarin-speaking Chinese soldiers arresting or threatening the native Taiwanese, announce suffering and tragedy for the islanders. In particular, the previously taboo February 28, 1947 incident comes to the family through the radio with the KMT Chinese nationalist dictator, General Chen Yi, first announcing that a few conspirators and communists had begun a riot and were suppressed. The scene is framed in a long shot, devoid of characters, of an empty window looking out on a dark night, with sinister clouds and lightning foretelling a coming storm. Obviously, Hou is utilizing symbol and allegory to portray the coming tragedy of the Taiwanese people, but does so from the perspective of radio serving as the voice of doom, bringing the disturbing political news into quiet, rural small town settings, creating cities of sadness throughout the island.

Hou has been criticized for not depicting in a fuller and more gripping fashion the events of the February 28 incident, but he does present many pieces of the historical situation which the viewer must assemble.[14] Indeed, the discussion concerning the film and what was previously known by many as "unofficial knowledge" of the events provided something of a history lesson for the Taiwanese people, albeit one that they must construct for themselves, using the film to promote better historical understanding. Thus, like the avant-garde works of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet, Hou's history lessons require an active audience, able to put together the pieces of the narrative into an account of the events of historical events and to produce their own interpretations of the era.

Since the Nationalists have not released crucial documents concerning the event, the evidence is not really accessible, so Hou's indirect method of narrative is faithful to the actual situation, in which it is still not clear what happened in the 1947 slaughter of the Taiwanese by the Chinese Nationalist government of Chen Yi (Chiang Kai-shek was still in China battling Mao-Tse Tung and the communists at the time). Hou does have a character express dismay early in the film that the Nationalists had chosen a "bandit" like Chen Yi to govern and a character also expresses the native Taiwanese sentiment that the island has suffered from successive Japanese and Chinese

occupation, both of which were experienced as imperialist invasions. Another character notes that Taiwan is becoming a company and not a government, alluding to increased control of the economy by the KMT and their cronies. In fact, City presents several discussions of the Chinese nationalist monopoly of sugar, tea, and cigarettes and the fact that sugar and tea were more scarce than under the Japanese, thus signalling the cause of the February 28 events that erupted when Chinese nationalist authorities arrested a woman selling black market cigarettes.

A later radio broadcast alludes to the subsequent events with Chen Yi promising leniacy to those who would surrender and announcing a curfew for the whole of Taiwan. The scene, once again, is an empty house with a window looking out to the dark night; this time there are more clouds and lightening and distant thunder signals the political storm unfolding. Subsequent scenes show the Chinese troops breaking into houses and arresting citizens, searching for and arresting guerilla fighters in the mountains, and executing young Taiwanese incarcerated in prisons. The official number killed in the episodes is set between 18,000-28,000 dead, though the figures could be much higher and many more were imprisoned for long sentences.[15] In addition, state terrorism involving imprisonment and execution of dissidents after the episode continued for some time, as Hou's film dramatically indicated.

Hou is thus the first to deal with a previously forbidden topic of Taiwanese history, involving massive slaughter of the Taiwan people by the Chinese Nationalist government. His strategy is to focus on the fate of one family and to multiply their sufferings as an allegory of the tragedies of the Taiwanese people as a whole in the early days of the Nationalist rule. In addition in the images and scenes described above, the deaf son, Wen-Chen, conveys his observations of the slaughter in Taipei, which he experienced in a visit to the city, and describes his experiences in prison through notes written and shown on the screen in large calligraphic characters set against a dark background, interrupting the drama with messages of fate, or history lessons, almost in the mode of silent-film intertitles. The deaf son, Wen-Chen, symbolizes the difficulty of expressing such painful experiences and his anguish symbolizes that of the Taiwanese people as a whole -- unable to communicate their sufferings and feelings and experiences of oppression.

By the end of the film, the eldest son has been subjected to endless suffering and is finally killed as a result of a fight with a Taiwanese who was collaborating with the Nationalists. The deaf son is arrested near the end, after marrying and having a child, and the final scene ends with the old patriarch Lin, his now silent and mad son, and the female members of the family preparing a dinner. The scene, shot as usual in static long-shot frame, reveals the devastation of the family, subjected to endless suffering, and yet their resiliency and carrying on of everyday life, despite their tragedies.

City of Sadness presents an intricate view of the Taiwan family and their society that attempts to convey the full complexity of the situation. While the sufferings inflicted by the mainland Nationalist Chinese on the Taiwanese are dramatically depicted or elicited, the film also shows Taiwanese mobs hunting and beating mainland Chinese. In one scene, a long deep-focus shot depicts several people beating and kicking a man, with one of them yelling: "So you think you Chinese have come to Taiwan to become emperors!" In another scene, the deaf son, Wen-ching, is

entering a train and is accosted by a group of Taiwanese thugs, who question him about his identity; he is unable to answer, because he is deaf, and the group assumes that he is a mainland Chinese and are about to beat him, when a friend shows up to explain that he is deaf and doesn't understand them -- and is Taiwanese.

Such scenes show the Chinese as victims of Taiwanese hatred and violence, depicting the dual victimization of the historical situation, leading some to criticize Hou for justifying the immense repression by the Nationalists and reducing unequal violence and oppression to the same level. In fact, Hou is subtly critical of the Taiwanese resistance. In an important early scene, he depicts in detail a haiku written by a young Japanese girl who committed suicide, because she believed that life should stop at its highest point, as when a cherry blossom drops to the ground after completing its maturity. The young Taiwanese seem impressed by the haiku, suggesting, in retrospect, that Taiwanese youth who joined the resistance were victims of Japanese death fetishism.

Other scenes depict Wen-ching and his intellectual friends who join the Taiwanese resistance movement as naive idealists, living in a world of illusion. One young man is reading Marx while others champion grandiose ideals of Taiwanese independence, or integration with "greater China," visions that can be read as depicting the youthful resistors as living in a world of fantasy and ideology, blind to the structures and forces of power. In these and other ways, Hou thus presents a rather negative image of the Taiwanese resistance to Nationalist oppression.

Yet in his defense, one could argue that Hou on the whole distances himself from partisan positions on the passionately debated and contested Taiwanese history depicted in City, and that his camera simply explores and depicts the events of the era from a detached point of view. Obviously, there was only so far Hou could go in criticizing the Nationalist KMT regime in the late 1980s when there was still government control of films and continued dangers of censorship. Moreover, his complex cinema would preclude a one-sided propaganda effort that solely presented one point of view or interpretation. His characters and the events depicted represent different perspectives, differing opinions are articulated, and the spectators are forced to produce an interpretation of the events and the film themselves. Hou thus offers what might be described as a multiperspectivist cinema, showing the events of February 1947 and their aftermath from a variety of perspectives, so that the spectator can grasp the complexity of the events and the ways that they effected different individuals and groups in distinctive ways -- though one could, of course, argue that Hou's choice of images in telling the story disclose a certain partisanship and authorial point of view.

On the whole, Hou's static camera, long shots and deep focus shots, often held for an entire scene, patiently explore the environment and events without partisan commentary. In one striking scene, he depicts young Taiwanese partisans being taken from prison to be shot; the camera, though, stays with the deaf son, Wen-ching, in his prison cell; the spectators hear the shots while, of course, Wen-ching cannot. The guards then come and take Wen-ching away; an extremely long-shot with static camera and deep-focus follows Wen-ching as he slowly goes down the corridor, perhaps to his execution. Such a scene is excruciating for the spectator who fears the worse, though

eventually it is revealed that the elder brother was able to get Wen-ching freed and the long trek down the corridor leads to his release.

Hou's static camera and long shots might be contrasted with the Japanese director Ozu's camera-style. While there are some formal similarities, the aesthetics and effects are quite dissimilar. The camera work of both is free of optical effects with both using a static camera, long takes, rarely panning, and seldom fading in or out, or using dissolves. Ozu, however, evokes a still, quiet dignity to consecrate tradition and everyday life, lovingly lingering on the details and rituals of tradition and deeply personalizing his characters. Ozu's long-takes evoke a stability, a harmony, and a veneration for family, tradition, and ritual. Ozu often shoots traditional Japanese family scenes with the camera on their eye-level, which elevates family members often sitting on the floor to almost epic grandeur and dignity. The stillness of his scenes betray a predilection for the personal, for the detail, and for a balanced and secure traditional life. He juxtaposes personal family life with impersonal urban life, the private sphere with the public sphere, the stable rituals of tradition with the dynamism of modernity, to the benefit of the former. For Ozu, family life, tradition, and personal relationships are concrete, while urban modernity is abstract, portrayed by distanced images of smoke-stacks and factories, railroads and cities, and masses in motion.

Ozu's still camera and long-takes with a horizontal camera memorializing tradition and everyday life can be contrasted with Hou's more dramatic and critical use of a set camera and long-takes. Hou's frames contain much more dramatic action, including violence, creating highly dynamic situations, which explore the familial or personal exploding into violence, or shows destructive external forces intruding into the private sphere. He depicts tradition and the personal to be often furiously invaded by external social forces, with everyday life a site of disorder and contestation. Often action spills out of the frame as characters suddenly leave the spectator's vision and shortly thereafter reappear, sometimes bloodied or hurt, while other individuals or violent acts often also break into the frame, with the static camera capturing the shifts and mutations. Eschewing Ozu's quiet stillness and harmony, Hou shows a radically disharmonious environment. His cinema thus provides critical visions of Taiwanese life and society that provokes discussion of its history, its transformations, and current problems, thus helping to produce a national cinema and democratic public sphere in which cinema serves as a vehicle of cultural and political debate.

From Tradition to Modernity and Beyond: Vicissitudes of the New Taiwan Cinema

A distinctively national cinema thus requires development of a specific national style and type of film with its own problematics, themes, and effects. Film form is as important as content in this project and different types of films point to different forms of society and ideology. As has been frequently noted, the close-ups and shot-reverse shots of the classic Hollywood cinema articulate the ideology of individualism central to capitalism and the American ideology, while the uses of the masses, dynamic montage editing, and stories focused on social transformation in the early Soviet cinema articulated communist ideology and a vision of a dynamic Soviet society undergoing progressive change. As we have seen, the New Taiwanese Cinema has revealed a society in turmoil, undergoing dramatic transition from tradition to modernity, involved in a dramatic struggle for a

Taiwanese identity and culture, and threatened by internal and external forces.

The genesis and trajectory of the new Taiwan cinema in the 1980s thus provides an interesting example of the development of a national cinema that dealt with specific Taiwanese problems of the transition from tradition to modernity with its attendant tensions, conflicts, and problems in an aesthetically engaging and innovative fashion. Many directors contributed to this project and in this section I will discuss some further examples. While Hou Hsiao-Hsien presents epics of everyday Taiwanese life, often focusing on the private sphere with a distinctly rural focus, Wan Jen is especially adept in exploring contemporary urban tensions and the conflicts confronted by those who migrate from rural to urban life. The startling contrast between the old and new Taiwan is the subject of Wan Jen's 1983 epic Ah Fei, or Rape Seed. Wan Jen's film depicts traditional culture and identities coming into conflict with an urban modernity and the consequent problems and adjustments, with a specific focus on the situation of women.

The downside of Taiwan's economic boom is portrayed in Wan Jen's films Super Citizen (1986) and Farewell Coast (1987). In the former, a young man from the country comes to Taipei to search for his sister from whom he has heard nothing during the past year. Beginning in a tenement slum, the young man travels through the lowlife of the city where street hustlers sell fake Rolex watches and other contraband, gangs fight each other, and the ubiquitous sex businesses ply their trade. The young man befriends a rich young teenage girl and a young prostitute as he and a hustler who knew his sister search for her through a trail of clues leading to restaurants, dance joints, and brothels. Told that there are over 2,000 sex establishments in the city, the young man abandons his pursuit and decides to leave the city -- though the final scene shows him getting off of the train at the last minute to pursue the joys of city life.

Wan Jen uses modernist techniques to capture the vitality and neon glitter of Taipei, through quick cuts, a fluid camera, and explorations of previously unseen elements of Taiwan society, like its sex industry, thus exposing its underside to critical scrutiny. His next film Farewell Coast (1987) presents an even more critical and pessimistic look at Taipei's underworld of sex and crime. A young man is pulled into crime and then murder. He falls in love with a beautiful young prostitute who sells herself to a brothel to pay off debts from the failure of a crime syndicate that the young man willynilly affiliated himself with. When the young man tries to buy her contract from the brothel owner, he kills one of the bosses' thugs in a fight. On the run from both criminal assassins and the police, the star-crossed lovers flee through Taiwan. The girl begins to suffer from cervical cancer, caused by multiple sex partners, and dies on the beach. A powerful morality tale, the film exposes the dangers of the underworld economy and ubiquity of crime and violence on the island.

These films of Wan Jen are reminiscent of Oshima's films which explored the dramas of youth in urban and underclass environments. Farewell Coast also recalls Godard's star-crossed lovers in some of his early new wave films, al though Wan Jen's romanticism and melodrama is far more extreme, almost to parody. Yet Wan Jen uses the conventions of French new wave romanticism to explore the tensions and underside of his own Taiwanese society and his films

together constitute an impressive attempt to deal with aspects of the contemporary Taiwan urban experience that had been hitherto neglected.

Other new Taiwanese cinema directors also explore the conflicts between the traditional and the modern in the Taiwanese experience and the particular problems of the present. The films of Lu Kang-Ping, like those of Wan Jen, also explore the tensions of contemporary Taiwanese society from the standpoint of outsiders, of those who do not share in the Taiwanese affluence and economic boom, but who live the life of the city as marginal characters who usually suffer their small indignities and deprivations silently, fatalistically accepting their lot in life.

In Myth of a City (1985), Lu Kang-Ping presents a group of workers in a kindergarten caught up in an adventure which reveals the poverty of their usual everyday lives and which presents the director an opportunity for taking some sly digs at contemporary Taiwanese society. It is a school bus driver's last day at work and on a whim, he drives off to the seashore with the school's cook, a young teacher, and a bus load of children. Facing an unhappy retirement, he seeks one great moment of happiness, which he finds on the road with the children. They encounter an Aboriginal family who invite them in for a feast and then some youth motorcycle riders, with whom they camp by the sea. It is as if only the outsiders can maintain their humanity in the urban industrial society and the moments with these communities present utopian images of communal happiness in the midst of a harshly competitive, individualistic, and asocial contemporary society.

Lu Kang-Ping's Two Artists (1990) focus on two sign-painters who are requested to cover over the giant bare breasts of a woman they painted on a billboard. In black-and-white flashbacks, one painter reflects on his youth and failure to make it as a serious artist. The younger signboard painter reflects on his aboriginal heritage and in hallucinatory color images relives his childhood past and people's myths. Documentary-like footage of Aboriginal rights rallies at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial plaza highlights the issue of the treatment and rights of the Aboriginal people -- who are often neglected in Taiwanese culture and are a generally oppressed minority, like indigenous peoples in the Americas and elsewhere.

Chang Yi's 1984 film Jade Love and his 1985 Kuei-mei, A Woman explore the situation of women in Taiwanese society, using melodrama to depict problems of women and personal relationships. These and other Taiwanese films that focus on the changing situation of women are not explicitly feminist in their ideologies, but they explore the positions of women in traditional Chinese and contemporary Taiwanese society in a critical fashion. They show modernity as slightly improving the position of women but show that the heavy traditional constraints on women's freedom and independence still exist and may take new forms. The changing situation of men and women in contemporary urban modernity is the focus of one of Taiwan's major filmmakers Edward Yang, who has produced perhaps the most consequent investigations of the triumph of urban modernity in Taiwan.

Whereas in the films of Hou Hsiao-Hsein, Wan Jen, Lu Kang-Ping, and other directors of the new Taiwan cinema, there are conflicts between traditional and modern, or rural and urban,

culture, Edward Yang presents the hegemony of urban modernity and the new forms of identity and culture now dominant in Taiwanese society. While Hou's films are primarily rural in focus, with Yang we witness the dominance of urban modernity, with tradition and rural life but cultural signs in a modern commodity culture. Thus, the cumulative national allegory that we are depicting in our study reaches its culmination in the films of Edward Yang which uses rigorously modernist aesthetic techniques to present his vision of Taiwanese modernity in films with a highly unique style, look, and feel.

Yang's film That Day on the Beach provides a highly enigmatic and complex narrative dealing with the suicide or disappearance of a woman's husband "that day on the beach." Two women meet in a modern city restaurant and reminisce about the past. The one woman tells of her tragic marriage and loss of her husband. The film jumps back and forth between past and present, exploring social relations, the transition into a modern global society, and its effect on individuals. Yang's narrative structure is highly experimental and his juxtapositions between past and present provide a sense of the discontinuities and novelties of the current situation, just as his modernist style points to a new kind of cinema and cultural text in Taiwan.

His succeeding Taipei Story (1985) depicts the capital city of Taipei undergoing rapid urbanization and modernization and its impact on individuals and society. As Yang put it: "My purpose is very straightforward -- using film to make a portrait of Taipei. I am going to explore the changes occurring in Taipei in recent years, and how those changes affect every citizen of Taipei."[16] The story focuses on the relationship between Lon, a cloth merchant who lives in the old-town of Taipei, played by Hou Hsiao-Hsein, and Chin, a career woman who works in a corporation located in the new town and who moves into a modern apartment. In the opening scene, Chin is moving into her apartment and is asking Lon's opinion concerning the arrangement of furniture and so on, but Lon is lost in his private fantasies, replaying the Little League baseball game which he participated in when Taiwan won the world championship.

Taipei Story shows the difficulties of Lon and Chin, and their families and friends, adapting to urban modernity and in particular shows Lon's inability to come to terms with the new Taipei. Using Antonionesque long shots and tracking shots of the urban environment, Yang presents images of a city where buildings and objects take over, dwarfing human life which seems drained of its significance. His characters are frequently framed by the bars of windows, blinds, or architectural structures, presenting an image of individuals trapped in an urban modernity, imprisoned in a constructed and artificial environment.

The Terrorizer (1986) is perhaps Yang's most highly developed and acclaimed depiction of urban modernity. The film was awarded a prize at the Locarno Film Festival in 1986, was pronounced the "most original film of the year" at the London Film Festival in 1987, while receiving Taiwan's Golden Horse award as best picture the same year. The film is probably the most original and relentlessly modernist of all of the films that we have reviewed and is surely the most akin to the European art film which obviously influenced its complex aesthetic -- Antonioni, for instance, being an obvious and admitted influence.

The plot is highly convoluted with several overlapping plot lines and a highly ambiguous narrative. To the question "who is the terrorizer" of the film's (English) title, it could be any number of the film's protagonists, or the city itself, as the site of urban modernity, which is the terrorizer. Throughout the film, Yang inserts images of a giant eggshaped gas tank, as if the city itself could explode at any minute. The ending is open-ended and gives rise to a number of interpretations.[17] Jameson argues that the indeterminancy of the ending is a sign of a postmodern rejection of depth models of interpretation and an indication that the film could be read as a pure play of signs without any meaning or depth. He reads the resulting clash of this postmodern reading with Yang's obvious modernism as evidence of the undecidability of interpretation and style in a situation whereby we inhabit an indeterminate space between the modern and the postmodern.

While I have some sympathy with this reading, I find Yang to be so strikingly modernist that I prefer the more modernist reading and have found few signs of postmodern aesthetic strategies in any of the Taiwanese films or directors in the new Taiwan cinema of the 1980s. On my reading, The Terrorizer adopts a modernist style that requires an active reader to process the events of the film and to produce their meaning. Yang's cinematic style itself is distanced, cold and detached, as he analytically dissects the character's lives, interactions, and environment. Yang frequently mismatches images and sound, cutting from one character and scene to another without warning and seemingly without motivation. This device replicates the fragmentation of the character's own lives and the accidental connections between them that will only become more evident as the narrative progresses.

Properly speaking, I would argue, it is not until the 1990s with the films of Ang Lee and a wave of young Taiwanese directors that postmodernism enters the Taiwanese cinema. Ang Lee's 1990s films, for instance, produce representations of a more hybridized and postmodernized identity, negotiating not only the complexities of Chinese/Taiwanese identity, but the disaporic global identity of Westernized Taiwanese, such as the Taiwan-American characters of Lee's Pushing Hands (1991) and A Wedding Banquet (1993), or the Westernized daughters in Eat Drink Man Woman (1995). These films posit conflicts between younger Westernized children and their patriarchal and traditional father. In his "Life with Father" trilogy, Lee clearly sides with the father, arguably reconstructs the patriarchical order, with younger men and women coming to accept and revere the old patriarch, to renegotiate the tensions between tradition and (post)modernity in such a way to valorize the father. It appears in each of the three films that the old traditional ways and patriarchical order are obsolete, superseded, and rejected by the younger representatives of the new (post)modern generation who seem to accept Western contemporary values, roles, institutions, and the like. In each case, the old Father is seen to be irrelevant to this order and, especially in the first two films, obsolete and slightly comic. In each film, however, the patriarch redeems himself, becomes extremely sympathetic and human, and eventually re-establishes the patriarchal order.

The drama of Lee's films is thus ultimately to reinscribe patriarchy in the contemporary moment, to renegotiate the tensions between tradition and modernity to the benefit of tradition, or at least to preserve patriarchal authority and domination, and thus to create, if one wishes, a

postmodernity that combines premodern, traditional and patriarchal codes with contemporary modern and now postmodern, global cultural forms. The "Life with Father" films thus become the Triumph of the Father, the redemption of the old patriarchy in the face of gay and women's liberation, modern commercial values, and a hybridized and global postmodern economy and culture.

Yang's The Terrorizer, by contrast, depicts a life where atoms of urban alienation are accidentally thrown together and in which various permutations and combinations of the interacting atoms may produce destruction and violence. He figures an urbanscape without community, without tradition, without vitality, and without hope of individual or social transcendence -- figures which can be read to represent a Taiwan frozen in the grips of urban modernity, or more broadly urban modernity itself. It thus presents a much more highly critical vision of contemporary Taiwanese society than the more redemptive films of Ang Lee, thus Yang's work more aptly highlights the critical and politically radical project of the new Taiwan cinema.

Concluding Reflections

Critics generally agree that the new Taiwan cinema reached its end by the 1990s. Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Zeng Shuan-xiang, and other directors had investigated Taiwanese history and probed their own lives and experiences for insight into the larger parameters of the Taiwan experience. A variety of directors had explored the tensions between tradition and modernity, the urban and the rural, and the specific conflicts and problems of contemporary Taiwanese life. And contemporary problems in Taiwan's urban modernity had been thoroughly depicted in the films of Edward Yang, Wan Jen, Lu Kang-Ping, and others. Yet Taiwanese audiences have not fully embraced the new cinema. Audiences continued to largely turn to the escapism of genre films which Hollywood, Hong Kong, and its own film industry are happy to produce and distribute. Ang Lee's films remain highly popular, attracting much larger audiences than Hou's and Yang's films. Younger viewers are eager to see their own contemporary youth cultures and identity politics portrayed rather than viewing biographical explorations of Taiwan experience or contemporary social conflicts. Clashes of tradition and modernity have been thoroughly explored and young viewers seem to be no longer interested in the erosion of tradition or past history.

Nonetheless, the new Taiwan cinema has become an international success with its directors' winning many prestigious international awards, and especially Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang becoming internationally famous. A government wishing to promote Taiwanese culture and profit from exports has remained willing to help finance products by the directors of the new Taiwan cinema so as the 1990s progressed, the major directors were again able to find financing after a temporary lull in the early 1990s when new directors and voices were appearing, some of whom achieved international and local success.

In retrospect, we should recognize the important contribution of the new Taiwan cinema in creating a world class cinema and helping to create a Taiwanese public sphere where critical questions could be raised about Taiwanese society. Yet the new Taiwan cinema had political

limitations. Because of continuing censorship and funding problems through the now heroic period of the 1980s, there were limits as to how far the filmmakers could go in criticizing the Nationalist government, as Hou found out when his City of Sadness was subjected to government censorship, but then released only when it won international acclaim. No films have, to my knowledge, dealt with the complex and problematic relation between the United States and Taiwan, although many have depicted the impact of Americanization on the island.

Moreover, no major film of the new Taiwan cinema dealt with the problems of the industrial working class, or of conflicts between labor and capital, though certainly sharp criticisms appear in the films of Yang and others against the capitalist corporation, an icon of an alienating urban modernity in many films of the 1980s. While some films dealt with the oppression of women, few women directors emerged in the 1980s as figures in the new Taiwan cinema, and feminist and other alternative film cultures are only emerging now in the 1990s. Moreover, as far as I know, Ang Lee's Wedding Banquet was the first film to deal with the plight of gays and the only film I discovered that dealt with the question of Taiwanese aboriginal people is Lu Kang-Ping's Two Artists (1990). There were thus omissions and silences in the new Taiwan cinema as well as previous cinema in Taiwan. Nonetheless, the 1980s cinema has opened the way for critical explorations of marginalized groups and has established a politically and socially critical national Taiwanese cinema that continues to develop and evolve in response to the current challenges of Taiwan society and the global economic and political order.

Notes

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1. On the political economy of Asian film, see John Lent, editor, The Asian Film Industry (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) and on the history of the Taiwanese film industry, see Ru-Shou Robert Chen, Dispersion, Ambivalence and Hybridity: A Cultural-Historical Investigation of Film Experience in Taiwan in the 1980s; Ph.D dissertation, University of Southern California, 1993.

2. Fredric Jameson, The Geopolitical Aesthetic (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1992), p. 120.

3. See The Death of New Cinema (Taipei: Tang Shang Publishing Company, 1991) and Chen, op. cit.

4. Cited in Jameson, op. cit., pp 119-120.

5. On postmodernism as a global cultural phenomenon, see Fredric Jameson Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) and Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations (London and New York: MacMillan and Guilford Press, 1991); The Postmodern Turn (New York: Guilford Press, 1997) and The Postmodern Adventure (New York: Guilford Press, forthcoming).

6. In this section, I am drawing on Chen, op. cit.

7. The term "national allegory" has been introduced by Fredric Jameson in his article "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" Social Text 15 (Fall 1986), pp. 65-88 and is utilized in The Geopolitical Aesthetic, op. cit. The concept refers, as I am adopting it, to narratives that capture allegorically typical characters, situations, and events that present the life of a nation as a quest for national identity. National allegories chart the impact of modernity on tradition in developing countries and the production of new types of society where the traditional and the modern exist in conflictual and evolving configurations. I will make clear the relevance of the concept for reading Taiwanese film in the course of this study.

8. See Georg Lukacs, Studies in European Realism (London: Merlin Press, 1972); Essays on Realism (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1980) and Realism in Our Time (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964). I will argue below, however, against Lukacs' opposition between realism and modernism.

9. Chen, op. cit., p. 124.

10. The term was introduced in 1963 by the manager of the government-sponsored Central Motion Picture Company, Kung Hung, who promoted the concept of "health realism" as a guideline for film-making which was to "reveal the bright side of social reality" and "to promote the good qualities of humanity such as sympathy, care, forgiveness, consideration and altruism" (cited in Chen, op. cit. p. 66). The term was supposed to distinguish a positive and "healthy" cinema from the lurid naturalism of a social realism that dwelt on the negative and unhealthy aspects of experience. Interestingly, the term "social realism" was used later to promote films, mostly set in underworld milieux, which featured explicit sex and violence (see Chen, p. 71). I, by contrast, am using the term "social realism" in Lukacs' sense to describe films that address existing problems, issues, and conflicts with typical characters and forms of behavior in familiar social environments.

11. Hsiung-ping Chiao, "The Emergence of the New Cinema of Taiwan," Asian Cinema, Vol. 5, no. 1 (March 1990: 9).

12. On The Classic Hollywood Cinema, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Krista Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). On the contemporary Hollywood cinema, see Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988).

13. For a historical account of the February 28 events and their aftermath, see George Kerr, Formosa Betrayed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965) and the documents assembled in Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, The 228 Incident: A Documentary Collection, Vol. 1 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1992).

14. Critical views of the film are found in Mi-Zou and Liang Xing-Hua, editors, op. cit. and are discussed in Chen, op. cit, pp. 133-141.

15. See Chen, op. cit., 112f.

16. Chiao-Hao Chang, "An Interview with Yang De-chang," World Cinema Weekly 254 (March 1985): p. 60.

17. See, for instance, Jameson's reading in The Geopolitical Aesthetic, op. cit., 114ff.