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## Decentralization in Wei Te-sheng's Film

Ji Wang

*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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Decentralization in Wei Te-sheng's Film

A Thesis Presented

by

JI WANG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

February 2018

East Asian Languages and Literatures

# Decentralization in Wei Te-sheng's Film

A Thesis Presented

By

JI WANG

Approved as to style and content by:

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Enhua Zhang, Chair

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David K. Schneider, Member

---

Zhongwei Shen, Member

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David K. Schneider, Program Director  
East Asian Languages and Cultures

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William Moebius, Chair  
Department of Languages, Literature and Cultures

## DEDICATION

To my loving parents,  
to the helpful and caring professors  
at University of Massachusetts Amherst

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Enhua Zhang, for her two years of thoughtful guidance and support. The inspiration of the thesis comes from Professor Zhang's course "Modern Chinese Literature and Culture" in Fall 2015. Since then, I started to study the Taiwanese director Wei Tesheng and his films. Several talks with Professor Zhang opened up my mind, and strengthened my confidence in thesis writing. Her knowledge and patience, as well as her elegant temperament left a deep impression on me.

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Last but not least, I thank myself, who never gave up and kept moving forward.

## ABSTRACT

### DECENTRALIZATION IN WEI TE-SHENG'S FILMS

FEBRUARY 2018

JI WANG, B.A., WENZHOU UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Enhua Zhang

As one of the most prominent Taiwanese film director, Wei Te-sheng's films have been the focus of attention from publicity and film prize committees. Most of his film works focus on Japan-Taiwan theme. Based on auteur theory, this thesis examines the colonial and postcolonial relationship between Japanese and Taiwanese by analyzing the Taiwanese film director Wei Te-sheng's three films, *Cape No.7* (2008), *Seediq Bale* (2011), and *Kano* (2014). From the historical view in terms of the colonial relationship between Taiwan and Japan, this thesis reveals the Taiwanese's ambivalence toward its ex-colonizer and explores the reasons behind the particular and complex relationship between Taiwanese and Japanese colonists. Since decentralization is the most noticeable manifestation of such colonial and postcolonial relationship, this thesis also probes into the reason why decentralization evokes nostalgic feelings among Taiwanese.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one analyzes the non-linear narrative, voiceover and the use of allusion in the films from the perspective of auteur theory. Chapter two explores the colonial relationship between Taiwanese characters and Japanese characters (oppressor and oppressed as well as emotional bond). Chapter three reviews the colonial history of Taiwan and Taiwanese writers and filmmakers' search for Taiwan's subjectivity in their works, and clarifies the reasons behind Taiwanese's paradoxical pro-Japan attitude. Chapter four examines decentralization based on deconstruction theory.

Three major films directed by Wei have all set in the rural areas. The praise for the energy and enthusiasm of rural dwellers is indicative of the shift in focus from urban to rural areas. *Cape No.7* and *Kano*, reveal that Taiwanese hold a deep emotional appeal for building warm and harmonious communities in a society constantly shaped by industrialization and urbanization. *Cape No.7* and *Kano*

have brought a familial sense of community back to the audience. On the island's mad rush toward modernization, these two films presented what was lost and sacrificed during this process: harmony with nature, a sense of community, time-honored cultural traditions and local cultures and ways of life. The popularity of the two films reflects the audience's romantic imagination toward the irretrievable rural life, and reveals that they were nostalgic for the close-knit, intimate, direct interpersonal relationships in rural areas. The atomization of existence is associated with the current situation of cities, where each individual human beings is increasingly isolated. Under such circumstances, two films featuring a sense of community evoked a historical retrospection of the urbanization. The seemingly conservative rural areas preserve the precious complex that people aspire to retain, though it might be spotlighted through a reminiscing filter, the close-knit community with intimate, direct and simple interpersonal relationships.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1. WEI TE-SHENG AND HIS AUTEUR FILMS .....	13
2. DECODE THE AMBIVALENT COLONIAL RELATIONSHIP .....	26
3. THE CAUSE OF AMBIVALENT COLONIAL RELATIONSHIP .....	39
4. DECENTRALIZATION IN WEI'S FILMS .....	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	60



## INTRODUCTION

Wei Te-sheng's debut film *Cape No.7* was the biggest hit at the Taiwanese box-office in 2008 Taiwan and brought the film director Wei Te-sheng to the front of the stage, as Wei received many eminent awards and prizes for this film. Since then, Wei has successively directed three films: *Seediq Bale* (2011), *Kano*<sup>1</sup> (2014), and *52Hz I Love You* (2017).

*Cape No.7* revolves around the lives of a group of people in a southernmost town in Taiwan called Hengchun near the end of the Japanese era of Taiwan. The film focuses primarily on Aga, a struggling young band singer who leads a band comprised of locals and later begins a relationship with a Japanese girl Tomoko. This storyline is interwoven with the love story between a Japanese teacher dispatched to Hengchun and a local girl at the end of the World War II. *Seediq Bale* is a 4.5-hour historical epic about a Taiwanese tribe based on the 1930 Wushe Incident in central Taiwan. This Taiwanese historical drama narrates a story of indigenous Seediq people fighting against Japanese colonizers between 1895 and 1930. The full version of the film shown in Taiwan is divided into two parts: part one is called "Tai Yang Qi" (*The Sun Flag*), and part two is called "Cai Hong Qiao" (*The Rainbow Bridge*). The international cut version was cut down into one release, lasting 2.5 hours. The discussion about film *Seediq Bale* in this thesis is based on the uncut version.

The plotline paradigm of *Kano* is similar with that of *Cape No.7*. The former depicts a team composed of members of different ethnicities achieving their goal through collective efforts; the latter tells about a hastily assembled band composed of locals of rather particular

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<sup>1</sup> Film *Kano* was co-directed by Umin Boya and Wei Te-sheng. Some websites, including Wikipedia, records that the director is solely Umin Boya. It is not accurate, because the official crew list at the end of the film clearly states that Boya and Wei are both directors. Wei is also the scriptwriter and producer of this film.

backgrounds performing a highly successful beach concert. *Kano* tells a story of an underdog baseball team from Southern Taiwan reaches the finals at Koshien, where the Japanese national high-school baseball championship took place. The most recent film *52Hz I Love You* is a 2017 Taiwanese musical drama film released on January 26, 2017 in Taiwan. The film comprises four love stories set in modern Taipei City on Valentine's Day, centering on a 30-year-old woman who has never been in a romantic relationship, a singer who has been in a relationship for ten years but experiences a breakup due to some realistic reasons, a middle-aged bachelor who dares not to break the fetters of the secular world and a lesbian couple who loves each other but is not accepted by the mainstream society.

I consider Wei's films as auteur films, because both the cinematic style and the motif of these films exhibit obvious characteristics of auteur. This thesis interprets Wei's films based on auteur theory proposed by a renowned and influential French film critic André Bazin. Influenced by personalism, Bazin believes that film director must be perceived as the chief creator of his or her unique cinematic style. His argument provides a theoretical support for my research on Wei's films from an auteur's perspective. Unlike the Hollywood studio in which films are like industrial products that could be mass produced, directors' individual styles both in cinematic techniques and ideological expressions are respected in Taiwanese films. The wave of Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s has witnessed the emergence of a group of well-known directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee, and Edward Yang. Wei Te-sheng, as an influential director in Taiwan, also has displayed his own unique style in his film works. If Wei's films are viewed as a whole, the director's intention is clear. There are no scenes in Wei's films that are indicative of his inclination for pro-Japanese or anti-Japanese. According to his own commentaries, his aim of shooting these films had nothing to do with embracing or denying Japanese culture; instead, his

intention was to evoke strong memories of the past. Previous studies on Wei's films have mainly focused on Wei's China-Japan complex, colonial nostalgia, poetic sentiments, etc. To date, critics have rarely touched upon the colonial and postcolonial relationship between Japanese and Taiwanese based on auteur theory in his films.

Decentralization is the most noticeable manifestations of such colonial and postcolonial relationship in Wei's films. Decentralization implies a transition from the dominant, single, and central ideology represented by city to the local, diverse, and peripheric sociocultural values embodied in country. According to Meriam-Webster, "decentralization" is defined as "the dispersion or distribution of functions and powers" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). The word "decentralization" was first coined in the 1820s. In the mid-1800s, Alexis de Tocqueville outlined the legislative history of decentralization, stating that it began with the Revolution of 1789: "in the beginning, invariably, a push toward decentralization... in the end, an extension of centralization" (Schmidt 1990). This thesis discusses Japanese colonial impact on Taiwan based on Wei's films from the perspective of decentralization. *Cape No.7*, *Seediq Bale* and *Kano* all evoke a sense of decentralization from city to country. These films are set in rural area as they focus on the colonial history of Japanese occupation when the Taiwanese modernization was at its initial stage. These three films featured simple, direct, and trusting interpersonal relationships in close-knit rural communities, forming a sharp contrast with the estranged, indifferent and tense interpersonal relationships in atomized modern cities. Through careful examination of the ethnically diverse communities portrayed in the films, underneath the surface of collaboration and equally lies the "superior/inferior" or "dominant/submissive" colonial relationships.

### **Critical Reception of *Cape No.7***

When the Taiwanese film industry was mired in recession, the release of *Cape No.7* created much of a stir in Taiwan. With a low budget of approximately 1.6 million US dollars, the film generated about 17 million US dollars (530 million New Taiwanese dollars) in Taiwan's domestic box office. Thus it became Taiwan's highest-grossing domestic film in 2008. It sets the highest box-office record in Taiwanese movie history.

As a huge hit, *Cape No.7* received widespread critical and audience acclaim. Since its release, it has elicited an abundance of reviews and studies. As the film revolves around two romantic relationships between Japanese and Taiwanese people, it has evoked different opinions and arguments from critics. Some critics are concerned about the romanticized colonial relationship revealed in the film, and considered it as the after effect of Japanese colonial culture. Jielin Hsu, head of the Institute of Japanese Studies in Taiwan, criticizes the shadow of Japanese culture traces implied in the film:

A love letter written by a Japanese person, revealed effusively in the Japanese tune, displays a nostalgic feeling for the previously colonized Taiwan. A world-famous song in Japanese is played in the film, even the ending song '*The Wild Rose*'<sup>2</sup> is repeatedly sung in Japanese (Hsu 2008).

Hsu thus draws a conclusion that Taiwan cannot escape the influences of Japanese culture. In his view, a lack of intrinsic philosophical ideas and worldview has made *Cape No.7* become "a mixed cold dish of American and Japanese culture." He even explicitly satirizes the Taiwanese audience as "ones who only look up to the money with their souls lost" (Hsu 2008).

Another critic, I-Chung Chen, an associate researcher of the Research Center for Humanities and Social Science in Taiwan, interprets the romanticized colonial relationship from

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<sup>2</sup> *The Wide Rose* is a Mandarin and Japanese version of Franz Schubert's familiar classic composition "Heiden Roslein" which fuses traditional instrumental composition with the performer's vocals. Extracted from the Soundtrack Review by John Li. (Li n.d.)

a different perspective. The most intriguing part for him is the allegory of “Taiwanese-Japanese reunion” implied in Wei’s films:

Strictly speaking, the motif of *Cape No.7* is not ‘Taiwanese-Japanese reconciliation’ but rather a ‘bitter Taiwanese-Japanese romance,’ because “unhappy couples are reconciled after a quarrel. A couple who breaks up because of external influence would have a lifelong regret, which has nothing to do with reconciliation (I.-C. Chen 2008).

In *Cape No.7*, it is Japan’s defeat in WWII that leads to the repatriation of Japanese colonizers, including the protagonist, a Japanese teacher, who has to be separated from his beloved female Taiwanese student Tomoko. The Japanese teacher and Taiwanese student are separated due to an external force: the KMT<sup>3</sup> government which took over Taiwan. In the article “Memories of the Future”, Chialan Sharon Wang argues that

The movie opens and closes with an epic scene where a ship pulls away from the port with deported Japanese on board, parting from the Taiwanese friends they have come to bond with during their stay. The motif shots of this farewell scene begin and end the film with a deep sense of nostalgia (Wang 2012).

Pam Cook gives a definition to nostalgia, stating that “nostalgia is predicated on a dialectic between longing for something idealized that has been lost, and an acknowledgement that his idealized something can never be retrieved in actuality, and can only be accessed through images” (Church 177). Based on Wang’s argument and Cook’s definition, the beginning and the end of the film set a nostalgic keynote for the film: A Taiwanese woman is longing for the love of a Japanese man, but is unable to realize it in actuality. In the flashback scene, when she is sitting beside the delivered box of love letters, it seems that she could merely reminisce her unfinished romance by reading them. Interestingly, their unfulfilled romance in 1945 was completed by two young adults, the male Taiwanese postman Aga and the female Japanese model Tomoko (the female Taiwanese student was also named Tomoko) after over 60 years. Two interwoven

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<sup>3</sup> KMT is a transliteration of the Nationalist Party of China, or Chinese Nationalist Party, a major political party in the Republic of China.

romantic relationships echo Chen's comment on this film, i.e. a well-designed "Taiwanese-Japanese reunion allegory". Moreover, Chen identifies the cause of the bitter romance between Taiwanese and Japanese, and assumes "a guilty charge against Republic of China/KMT rule" (Chen 2008). Due to the absence of Mainlanders in the film, it seems that the Chinese mainlanders were considered as intruders who obstructed the relationship between the Taiwanese and the Japanese.

As Taiwan's colonial ruler for a half century until 1945, Japan maintains a special relationship with Taiwan. By putting forward "Taiwanese-Japanese reunion allegory," Chen implicitly acknowledges the indelible influence of Japanese colonization on Taiwan.

Interestingly, Japan left a painful legacy in many of its former colonies, including mainland China and the Korean peninsula, whereas it is generally admired in Taiwan. E. Patricia Tsurumi points out Taiwanese and Korean's different reactions toward the Japanese colonizers: "By the end of the Japanese period, Taiwanese of all classes had become enthusiasts for the sports and games introduced along with Japanese education," whereas in Korea "to be educated was to be anti-Japanese" (Tsurumi 1984). Liao Ping-Hui further adds that "to this day, the Korean intellectual scene remains dominated by the attempted purge of Japanese influences" (Liao 2006). Mainland China, as the chief victim of Japan invasion, still cannot escape from the grotesque shadow of Japan's Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, the name given to dignify its occupation of its neighboring countries in the 1930s and 1940s. Anti-Japanese sentiment runs deep in the blood of some Chinese. The statement "Wu Wang Guo Chi" ("勿忘国耻", literally means "never forget national humiliation") presented by Chinese Communist Party leaders all the more whip up the public's resentment against Japan. This is to remind Chinese people of the Japanese invasion. This produce effective results as China's anti-Japan sentiment has surfaced

repeatedly. Anti-Japanese protests are always accompanied with the boycotts of Japanese products in mainland China, especially when there is diplomatic tension between China and Japan. In 2013, Diaoyu Island incident, (also known as “Senkaku Islands incident”) reconfirmed the anti-Japanese sentiment toward the Japanese among Chinese public. When the Japanese government claimed sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, the Chinese government opposed it by asserting that Japan violated the Chinese territorial integrity and sovereignty. Convulsed by anti-Japanese sentiment, some Chinese people even smashed Japanese cars on the street. People who own Japanese cars were very concerned that their cars may suffer the same fate, so they posted a reminder on their cars: “The car is a Japanese car, but the owner’s heart is a Chinese heart.” Some even attached flags to their cars to express their patriotism. According to the polls<sup>4</sup> on views of different countries’ influence released in June 2014, Chinese and South Korean generally harbor negative views of Japan: “In China, between 2013 and 2014, negative ratings have gone up 16 points to an astonishing 90 percent, and positive ratings have dropped from 17 to 5 percent only. In South Korea, negative views have risen 12 points to almost four in five (79%)” (Service 2014). The report indicates that Chinese and South Korean’s negative views toward Japan is at its highest since 2006. Therefore, in terms of colonial relationship, Taiwan is a notable exception standing in sharp contrast with South Korea and mainland China.

### **Japanophile or Japanophobe?**

The box office success of *Cape No.7* fully testifies that the “Taiwanese-Japanese reunion allegory,” or the romantic relationship between the Taiwanese and Japanese has resonated with the Taiwan audiences. Wei of the film *Cape No.7* intentionally creates a powerful emotional

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<sup>4</sup> Polling was conducted for BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country, together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. A total of 24,542 citizens across 24 countries were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone between December 17, 2013 and April 28, 2014.

bond between the colonizer and the colonized; the colonialist oppression is absent in the film. Therefore, some criticize Wei for admiring Japanese culture and beautifying the Japanese colonial period, and thus label him as a Japanophile<sup>5</sup> director. Yet with the release of his another film *Seediq Bale* in 2011, criticism was toned down as the Japanese people in the film are portrayed as brutal intruders who occupied the Taiwan Island. The antagonistic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized was presented in the film *Seediq Bale*. With the panoramic lens, *Seediq Bale* reveals the courage and intelligence of aboriginal people who strive for their tribal dignity in fighting against Japanese colonizers through grand scenes. Nonetheless, the release of *Kano* in 2014 provoked a chorus of critics again.

With the successful release of films *Cape No.7*, *Seediq Bale*, and *Kano*, the views of critics on Wei are seesawing between a Japanophile and a Japanophobia<sup>6</sup>. Obviously, it is not justifiable to determine whether Wei is pro-Japanese or anti-Japanese based on his film works. His purpose of making the three movies bears no relationship with embracing or rejecting Japanese culture. His purpose is to stark retrospection and provoke views to think about the future by reconsidering the past. Wei responded to the questions of “Japanophilia” or “treason” by stating:

The current biggest problem that Taiwanese people face is lacking the sense of existence and confidence. The premise of having a sense of existence and confidence, is having a historical view. What we work on is to transmit a kind of historical view, which enables you to recognize yourself and understand yourself. In this way, the sense of existence emerges (Gang 2016).

The historical view that Wei highlighted in this talk is a Taiwan-centered historical view. In other words, Wei intends to refresh Taiwanese people’s cognition of their existence by

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<sup>5</sup> Japanophile refers to one who especially admires and likes Japan or Japanese ways. (Merriam-Webster n.d.)

<sup>6</sup> Japanophobe refers to one who hates, fears, or dislike Japanese people, culture, or the country. It is opposite to Japanophile.



reconstructing Taiwanese history in his films with a Taiwan-centered historical view. He added, “What I shot is the Taiwanese history with Japanese people in Taiwan, instead of the Japanese history with Japanese people in Taiwan” (Gang 2016). Therefore, Wei interprets Taiwanese history from Taiwan’s perspective, rather than from Japan’s perspective or China-centered perspective. He claims that conflict is the central motif of his films in the first half of twentieth century, with the coexistence of several ethnic groups such as Japanese, Han Chinese and aboriginals in Taiwan cultural reintegration became inevitable. Western culture brought by Japanese people took root in Taiwan. Ubiquitous cultural clashes have been a common theme of feature films. He did nothing but pick out three ethnic groups and cinematize them (Gang 2016). Wei’s claim reconfirms my previous argument that he has neither pro-Japanese sentiments nor anti-Japanese sentiments. It is untenable to label him as a Japanophile or Japanophobe based on his films. There are accusations levelled against Wei: accuse him of being a Japanophile based on a Taiwanese-Japanese unfulfilled romance presented in *Cape No.7*; accuse him of being a Japanophobe based on the antagonistic Taiwanese-Japanese relationship portrayed in *Seediq Bale*; accuse him of being a Japanophile based on the Japanese-language voiceover and dialogue in *Kano*. These are either-or fallacies based on a dangerously simple logic, from which we can sufficiently see on what puerile arguments these accusations are founded. A broader research perspective is need before any definitive conclusions are drawn. If we take Wei’s film works as a whole, coupled with what he said in some interviews, it is not hard to find that he tries to reminisce about the Taiwanese past to reconstruct its identity in contemporary Taiwan. In this regard, he is consistent with the representative director Hou Hsiao-hsien of the New Taiwanese Cinema, as both of them try to find meaning in the past which they believe is key to understand current Taiwanese crises.

Additionally, the conflicts and cooperation among multi-ethnic groups play an essential role in all three films, *Cape No.7*, *Seediq Bale* and *Kano*. It seems that Wei's works focus primarily on the identity issues among multi-ethnic groups. As he said, "Only by understanding each other can we resolve conflicts" (Zeng 2013). Wei believes that only if we understand the positions of different ethnic groups and see the regret caused by time and history, when we trace back to the origin of hatred, can we possibly have no more hatred in the future<sup>7</sup> (Zeng 2013). For this reason, Wei interprets Taiwanese colonial history from a different perspective: In *Cape No.7*, an unfulfilled romantic Taiwanese-Japanese relationship reveals a group of people (called "Wansei") who were born in Taiwan during the colonial period, but were repatriated to Japan after WWII. Wei aims his camera at Wansei, narrating a painful love story. In *Seediq Bale*, Wei interprets the Taiwanese colonial history, especially the 1930 Wushe Incident, from the perspective of a hunter. What is highlighted by the director in the film is the intrinsic spirit of "chasing freedom of the soul in death" manifested in aboriginals. It is a fresh angle, because the history of the Wushe uprising, as a controversial event, is often tied to barbarism and the uncivilized - for the ritual of young men retrieving the head of the enemy in times of battle - especially in Japanese documents and propaganda, or presented by the Han regime as the indigenous people's endorsement of Chinese nationalism against the Japanese invasion (Fu 2015). *Seediq Bale* epically presents the tribal spirit of Seediq who would rather give up personal life to continue the life of the tribe, when facing the foreign invasions. *Kano* narrates a story of how an underdog baseball team from Southern Taiwan reached the finals at Koshien, where the Japanese national high-school baseball championship took place. As the team was composed of Han Chinese, aboriginals and Japanese, it is mocked by a Japanese representative as a "cocktail

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

team” in the film. In response to the mockery, the Japanese coach Kondo spoke out about the idea that baseball has nothing to do with ethnic groups: the aboriginals are fleet of foot, the Han Chinese are strong batters, and the Japanese are good at defense (Wei 2014). The idea of this Japanese coach virtually reflects what Wei values: understanding the situation of different ethnic groups and temper the sense of tragedy brought by colonial history. As Wei said in an interview, “When discussing the problem of ethnic groups, the biggest taboo is the thought of integrating each other” (Wei 2014). When asked how to let go of regret, Wei answered, “View the painful history with a tolerate attitude and continuously learn from it” (Zeng 2013). It can be seen from Wei’s words that he denies homogenization, but embrace diversity. Wei has a preference for featuring minority groups in his films. The latest film directed by him, *52Hz I Love You*, a 2017 Taiwanese musical drama film released on January 26, 2017 in Taiwan is an eloquent proof. The film comprises four love stories set in modern Taipei City on Valentine’s Day, including a 30-year-old woman who has never been in a romantic relationship, a singer who has been in a relationship for ten years but experiences a break-up due to some realistic reasons, a lesbian couple, and a December heartbeat. It can be seen from the plot that Wei aims his camera on minority groups even in romance.

### **Decentralization**

Taiwan’s urbanization over the last several decades is intimately tied to its history of colonization. The Japanese occupational government laid the groundwork for Taiwan’s modernization and established the first urban centers on the island at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In just a few decades, Taiwan has experienced a transformation from agrarian, rural economy to an urban, industrial one. Along with the process of modernization and urbanization, a sociocultural gap between the island’s cities and villages is increasingly widening. Urban cities

such as Taiwan are perceived to be westernized in many aspects of life; while the rural areas of the countryside are regarded as the place where traditional indigenous way of life persists. The dialectic relationship between country and city has been at the core of the modern experience for Taiwan. For those living in the urban area, the word “country” often invokes the feeling of something lost that can never be found again. In the rapidly developing society, people tend to look back on past days with a certain amount of nostalgia, yearning for idealized rural community that could never be retrieved any longer. In response to the rapid industrialization and urbanization that has been transforming the social landscape, a new wave of research interest in rural areas has been set off. The Taiwanese “native soil” (hsiang-t’u) literature thrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Later, the vibrancy of literature promoted the development of filmic adaptation of hsiang-t’u literary works in the 1980s. Two earlier works of Hou Hsiao-hsien, *Summer at Grandpa’s* and *The Boys from Feng Kuei*, reveals the complexity of the ever-changing relationship between the city and the country. In the 1990s, the late period of New Taiwanese Cinema, Edward Yang, to who Wei was apprenticed, centered on the city of Taipei to depict the city dwellers’ emotional life. Yet, in the 2000s, the three influential films of Wei featuring the Taiwanese colonial history, are all set in rural areas or towns. Are there any particular reasons behind? What does the natural and social landscape look like in the films?

Furthermore, how does Wei interpret Taiwanese colonial history from a Taiwanese perspective? What is the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized revealed in the films? How does Wei reconstruct Taiwanese subjectivity through tracing the Taiwanese colonial history?

## Chapter 1

### Wei Te-sheng and His Auteur Films

#### 1.1 Wei Te-sheng and His Road to Becoming a Film Director

Born in 1968, Taiwanese film director Wei Te-sheng grew up in Yongkang District in Tainan, a southwest city on the coast of Taiwan. Wei was born in a Presbyterian family. His parents were devout Christians, who ran a clockmaker's shop (J. Wu 2011). Wei was the eldest son in his family.

Wei studied Electrical Engineering at the Far Eastern Vocational School (Today's Far East University) in Tainan. After this, he served in the military. While in the army, he watched his first Hollywood film, *Once upon a Time in America*, starring Sergio Leone. Wei was deeply fascinated with this film, and thus was determined to work in the film industry.

After fulfilling his military service, Wei went northward to pursue his film dream. Without any professional training, he kept hitting dead ends. To earn a living, he worked as a restaurant waiter, sales person and an extra in acting for almost two years, until he met the famous Taiwanese filmmaker Edward Yang. Yang was the most influential persons in Wei's life. At the age of 26, Wei entered the studio of Edward Yang, serving as a grip assistant. Later, he was promoted to assistant director for the shooting of Yang's "Mahjong" (1996) (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2008).

The deepest impression that Edward Yang left on Wei was of being "very strict". Wei recalled in an interview that Yang "once reprimanded him in front of 100 extras for making noise during a sound recording" (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2008). Even so, Wei still considered Yang as an influential senior in his life, as he said, "He taught me to be a perfectionist and not sacrifice one's

vision, even on a tight budget” (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2008). The memory of Yang’s perseverance offered Wei the courage to continue in spite of financial difficulties.

The book, “Xiao Dao Yan Shi Ye Ri Ji” (*Diary of an Unemployed Unknown Director*) written by Wei from 2001-2002, documents his feelings while writing the script of Taiwanese colonial history. In the preface of the new edition, it says,

This book, as the book title shows, talks about the period many years ago when I was unemployed. Facing the distress and confusion, I was lost under the realistic pressure. But I still kept on writing the script about Taiwanese colonial history, with a belief that may not be understood by others, though I had no idea when the script would be on camera. Meanwhile, I honestly wrote down my feeling during that time (Wei 2009).

It can be seen that before the box office success of *Cape No.7*, Wei had a long dormant period.

Since the release of *Cape No.7* in 2008, his subsequent film works *Seediq Bale*, *Kano* and *52Hz I Love You* attracted an increasingly larger audience.

## 1.2 Auteur

The word auteur is simply the French word for “author.” The essential idea behind auteur theory is that filmmakers exercise an authorship over their works, and this authorship is present in every film they make. The auteur theory was born from 1958-1962, during the French New Wave cinema with a group of French filmmakers led by Francois Truffaut. The French New Wave was considered one of many film movements that sprung up over the world in protest to Hollywood’s monopoly in the post-WWI era (Hathaway 2011).

The Hollywood studio system emerged in the mid 1910s, during and just after the First World War. It was “consolidated at the same time as Henry Ford’s automobile assembly plant, the Hollywood studio also resembled a factory where goods – motion picture entertainments – were manufactured for a mass audience” (Braudy 2004). Under the Hollywood studio system, the film resembles industrial products that could be mass-produced. The film is like a product made collectively by story departments, departments of scenic and costume design, technicians (scenic and make-up craftsmen, camera and lighting crews and actors). Then the finished product, the film, was sent to the cutting and the release departments, until it reached the company’s showrooms (Braudy 2004).

Some American critics argued that the films made under the industrialized studio system were not works of art. They questioned the artistic quality of Hollywood studio films because they believed that a work of art should not result from varied intentions and collective labors. They considered these Hollywood studio films as mere commercial entertainment, which could not be compared with the “art films”.

Nonetheless, an early reply to this argument maintained that “a purely aesthetic intention or the vision of a single artist” is not necessary to create a work of art. Erwin Panofsky has made

a comparison that producing a film resembles building a cathedral: both require collective labor. He defended the Hollywood studio film by claiming that the work of author, an *auteur*, though unnoticed, could be seen in many Hollywood films: “This auteur was the film’s director whose ‘signature’ could be discerned by the sensitive critic”.

The French film critic André Bazin is a typical representative figure in support of the significance of auteur. Bazin is credited with the principal leader of the influential auteur theory, who believes that the director of a film must be perceived as the chief creator of its unique cinematic style (Bazin 2014). This idea had a pivotal importance in the development of the auteur theory. Influenced by André Bazin, Francois Truffaut wrote the article titled “Une Certaine Tendence of Cinema Francaise” (“A Certain Tendency of French Cinema”) in protest of the filmmakers who received acclaim at the time for their literature adaptations:

The war and the post-war years have transformed our cinema. It has evolved through internal pressure and in the place of “poetic realism” – which can be said to have died out, closing behind itself *The Gates of Night (The Portes de la Nuit)* – “psychological realism” represented by Claude Autant-Lara, Jean Delannoy, René Clément, Yves Allgret and Marcel Pagliero, was substituted (Truffaut 1954).

Truffaut condemned the soulless process of literature adaptation not for its lack of technical skill but for a lack of psychological truthfulness. He contends that film deserved storylines and themes that were crafted specifically for visual storytelling. He condemned the tradition of the screenwriter having the great control of the story a film told; he thought the director should have more creative power.

Similar to French New Wave cinema, Taiwan has also experienced a transition from literature adaptation to auteur craft since 1980s Taiwanese New Cinema. After the lifting of martial law in 1987, Taiwanese society had witnessed a significant increase in economic productivity. Accordingly, an increase in cultural productivity was also remarkable: the content



of Taiwanese literature had experienced an expansion in both quality and quantity. The literary impulses held back during the previous forty years had flowed out with vigor and vitality after the lifting of martial law. The subject matter, classified as ideologically forbidden under the KMT government regime, was free for literary creation since then. Therefore, various literary subject matters, such as nationalist literature, indigenous literature, (juancun) literature and gay literature, sprout up in a short time. The Taiwan scholar and critic, Chen Fangming, has characterized literary creation in this period as “a fundamental act of decentering” (F. Chen 2007). With this characteristic, Taiwanese literature, from the 1980s to the present, has often been categorized into postmodernism, yet Chen disagrees with this classification, because the concept of postmodern literature was imported from the West, rather than within Taiwanese society. Chen argues that this borrowed concept is inappropriate to describe the thought and position of Taiwanese writers, but the “postcolonial literature” is more accurately based on Taiwanese specific sociohistorical conditions (F. Chen 2007). Obviously, Chen implicitly acknowledges Taiwanese society as being “colonialized” by the KMT government after 1945, before the lifting of martial law. Putting aside the historical labeling as either “postmodern literature” or “postcolonial literature”, it is beyond doubt that Taiwanese literature showed an eclectic and vital scene following the lifting of martial law.

The vibrancy of the Taiwanese literature has simultaneously promoted the development of Taiwanese films in the 1980s. As Li claimed in his essay “Taiwanese films’ literary personality and decentralization of the landscape”, the box office sensation of the film *The Sandwich Man* has led the trend of Taiwanese literature adaptations in films (Y. Li 2011). This anthology film presents cinematic interpretations of three popular short stories by Hwang Chunming (黄春明) and introduced three more new-comers: Tseng Chuang-hsiang, Wan Jen and

Hou Hsiao-hsien (Yip 2004). In addition to Hwang Chun-ming, literary works by Wang Chen-ho (王祯和), Yang Qing-Chu (杨青矗), Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇), Zhu Tianwen (朱天文), Eileen Chang (张爱玲) and Liao Huiying (廖辉英) were all targets of what the 1980s directors were fighting for. These 1980s directors, mostly born in the late 1940s and the 1950s, were a group of young men and women. They were very different from their predecessors because they freed themselves from the rigid constraints of established studio system. They did not come to filmmaking by following the usual apprenticeship pathways, but on their own terms. The emergence of this group of young directors infused new life into the stagnant Taiwanese local film. *In Our Time* and *His Son's Big Doll* were seen as two watershed films that heralded the birth of Taiwanese New Cinema (Yip 2004). In terms of the most significant contribution of Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s, Li argues that it should be the reconstruction of Taiwanese identity, national history, social culture, and intense literary personality.

The film directors in the 1990s, including Ang Lee (李安), Tsai Ming-liang (蔡明亮), Zhang Zuoji (张作骥), Lin Cheng-sheng (林正盛), inherited the feature of literature adaptation in their filmmaking. However, when it comes to Wei Te-sheng in 2000s, the trend of literature adaptation was substituted by the auteur's distinct craft, especially like Wei acted as both screenwriter and filmmaker. In this case, what distinguished features are manifested in his films in considering him as an auteur?

### **1.3 Auteur's Imprint**

According to the Braudy, Peter Wollen and Andrew Sarris, two American spokesmen for the *auteur* theory, have written essays to illustrate the *auteur* theory (Braudy 2004). For Peter Wollen, *auteur* theory is "a director's 'style' or 'basic motif', can only be discerned by viewing his work as a whole." He affirms that in spite of the differences in script writers,

cinematographers, or performers, each of them carries about the true marks of an *auteur*. Andrew Sarris, suggests “not only that the distinguishable personality of the director is a criterion of value but also that the ‘meaning’ which he is able to impose on the material with which he must work is the ‘ultimate’ glory of the cinema.” On the basis of Wollen’s view, Sarris went a step further, extending the significance of director from a “personal label”, to a “value transmitter”. Subsequently, the author of the book intends to specify the director’s imprint by saying:

This observation raises problems about where exactly the *auteur*’s imprint is most clearly to be found. Is it in style (e.g., the use of deep-focus photography) or in basic motifs (e.g. the elements of a western), or in some undefined combination of the two?

My answer to this question is: the *auteur*’s imprint is to be found both in style and basic motifs. I have summarized three distinguished features of Wei’s films, by examining his three representative films, *Cape No. 7*, *Seediq Bale*, and *Kano*: non-linear narrative, voiceover and the use of allusion.

### **1.3.1 Non-linear Narrative**

The storyline of the film *Cape No.7* constantly jumps back and forth between the current time (2000s) and the Japanese occupation period (1940s). A box of love letters serves as a link connecting two romantic stories. At the very beginning of the film, the Taiwanese musician Aga smashed his guitar to the ground, scolding “fuck it, Taipei”, then rode his motorcycle all the way from the capital city Taipei, back to his hometown Hengchun. This beginning implies that Aga had experienced some setback in Taipei when chasing his musical dream. Shortly afterward, he got a new job, working as a postman in Hengchun. He uncovered a box of love letters that a Japanese teacher wrote for his beloved student, a Taiwanese female. Seven love letters in chronological order run throughout the film in a nostalgic sentiment. The narration of the love letters in Japanese language deepens the sentiment of nostalgia. A profound but unrequited love

lingers among the stanzas, mixed with the anger of being forced to leave, a yearning for past beautiful memories, and the helplessness in facing the reality. Rather than cutting to the past, the camera keeps shooting the scene in the current time set. The murmur of the voiceover allows the audience to imagine the unfinished romance five decades ago. It also symbolizes a “bell” reminding Aga to seize his love, especially after his one-night relationship with Tomoko.

The non-linear narrative also occurs in the film, *Kano*. The beginning of the film was set in the Keelung Port in 1944 when a group of Japanese soldiers are heading to the Philippines, passing Taiwan Island. One Japanese ex-baseball player suggested visiting Chiayi, the birth place of the Kagi<sup>8</sup> Agricultural and Forestry School baseball team. Then the scene cuts to Koshien, the competition area of the Japanese national high-school baseball championship. Meanwhile, during a flashback to 1931, when the 17<sup>th</sup> Japanese national high-school baseball championship took place. When the announcer introduces the Kagi Agricultural and Forestry School baseball team, the players and the coach salute and enter the field. After that, the title of the film appears on the screen: “KANO”, with a blurry and shiny sun in the background. A baseball falls straight forward from the middle of the scene, pulling the time back to two years ago, when a group of high school students were playing on the baseball field. In the first six minutes of the film, the non-linear narrative occurs three times, from 1944 at the Keelung Port in Taiwan, to 1931 at the Koshien in Japan, to 1929 at Kagi in Taiwan.

In the film *Seediq Bale*, the use of non-linear narrative is considerably restrained, compared to the film *Cape No.7* and *Kano*. To me, the reason is that the film *Seediq Bale*, so called an epic film, thoroughly and comprehensively retells the Wushe incident. Although the film adopts a perspective of the Seediq tribe, highlighting their intrinsic spirit and indigenous culture, the portrayals of Japanese colonizers and other aboriginal tribes are also vivid and

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<sup>8</sup> Kagi refers to Chiayi during the Japanese colonial period.

dynamic. The film intends to present each communities' dilemma: the Hanakoa brothers are both Seediq by blood, but they are raised as Japanese, serving as Japanese police to discipline their own tribal people (Fu 2015), thus confronting them with an identity crisis. A group of Seediq females voluntarily commit suicide when facing the choice of either surviving themselves or saving the remaining food for their offspring to fight. Therefore, the overall narrative is relatively fluent, for the sake of performing individual characters' choice and fate in a complicated event. By contrast, the keynote of the films *Cape No.7* and *Kano* are not as heavy as *Seediq Bale*. The film *Cape No.7* and *Kano* share a similar narrative pattern; that a multi-ethnic group makes a concerted effort to achieve success. Manifested in *Cape No.7*, it is putting on a splendid musical performance; manifested in *Kano*, it is winning the second place in the Japanese high-school baseball championship at Koshien. In *Cape No.7*, the non-linear narrative functions as relating the two parallel plotlines; in *Kano*, the non-linear narrative functions as giving the audience a cliff-hanger at the beginning, paving the way for the later narrative. Even so, there still exist some signs of the use of non-linear narrative in the film *Seediq Bale*. In part one, *The Sun Flag*, the Seediq tribe's biggest enemy, a group of Bunun<sup>9</sup>, secretly collaborate with the Japanese military officials, intoxicate the Seediq young men, and ambush them while they are asleep. After some battles, the village of Seediq tribe Mahebu, and other neighboring villages, fall under the control of the Japanese. During the fierce battles between the Japanese and the Seediq, the scene flashes back to Mona Rudao's (the chief of the Seediq tribe) childhood three times when his father tells him what the true man is, what the true woman is, and how to be a true man:

The true men die on the battleground. They walk to the heavenly home of the ancestors, where lies a fertile hunting ground. Only true men are allowed to guard that hunting ground. When they walk to the heavenly home of ancestors, they will pass a beautiful rainbow bridge. The bridge-guard ancestor says, 'Look at your hands' (Wei, *Seediq Bale: The Sun Flag* 2012).

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<sup>9</sup> The Bunun, also historically known as the Vonum, is a group of Taiwanese indigenous people.

Here, the scene cuts from a drunk celebrating group of Japanese military officials to Mona's father, who spread his hands, kindly and patiently talking to the child Mona. "The man spread his hands, on his hands there are indelible blood lines. It certainly is a true man!" (Wei 2012). A close up of Mona's child face, especially his clear and focused eyes, seemingly casts sacredness over his father's words regarding the Seediq's ritual. Then the scene cuts back to the battle, with the continuing voiceover: "Go, go, my hero! Your soul is allowed to enter the heavenly home of the ancestors. Go to guard the forever honored hunting ground! The true women should be good at weaving red military uniforms" (Wei 2012).

Here, the scene cuts to Mona's childhood again. His mother is weaving in the corner, and his father continues to talk: "When she reaches the rainbow bridge, she spreads her hands, on her hands there are indelible calluses. Go, go, you are the true woman" (Wei 2012). Then the scene cuts to the battle. The voiceover continues:

The bridge-guard ancestor says: 'your soul is allowed to enter the heavenly home of the ancestors! Weave a rainbow-like garment for yourself. The men who have never *chuciao*(出草)<sup>10</sup>, retrieving the head of an enemy, and the women who are not good at weaving are not qualified to have a facial tattoo. One day, when their souls are gone, approaching the rainbow bridge to accept the verification, the bridge-guard ancestor looks at them, their clean faces without any tattoo, are they my children? Are you my children? Back, back, go back! You are not the true Seediq! You are not qualified to enter the heavenly home of the ancestors! They suddenly look unkempt. Their souls are lost. They shamefully circumvent the bumpy valley. Their weeping ghosts are badly hurt by the toxic crabs living in the valley (Wei 2012).

Here, the scene cuts from Mona, carrying his injured father on his back, to his childhood, where his father talks to him. "Mona, do you understand what I say? Obey the ancestral laws and norms. Be a true man" (Wei 2012).

This long talk about true manhood and true womanhood given by Mona's father is

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<sup>10</sup> *Chuciao*(出草) is a Taiwanese aboriginals' ritual; that is, to retrieve the head of a slain enemy in times of war.

displayed through the voiceover of the battle, as well as the three flashbacks. The conflict between the Seediq and the Japanese is well-presented by the integration of the Japanese military officials' cruelty presented in the scenes (such as chopping off a Seediq kid's arm because he holds a knife), and the Seediq's spirit narrated by the voiceover, together with the transitory flashbacks. Compared with the manner of expression that merely depends on the vivid pictures or sounds, this mixed splicing approach better delivers the ideological difference between the Seediq and the Japanese, beyond the realistic battle. The highlight of the Seediq's ritual and customs by the voiceover and flashback not only strengthens the tragic atmosphere (by contrast with their badly-hurt images) and intensifies their tragic images. This also rationalizes their savage behaviors and foreshadows the following revolt, the Wushe uprising. The technique of non-linear narrative is naturally integrated in the cinematic narrative.

### **1.3.2 Voiceover**

Voiceover is another narrative technique that is skillfully applied in Wei's films. In the film, *Cape No.7*, the voiceover of reading a box of love letters penetrates the whole film. It functions as the plot's driving force, as well as invoking nostalgic sentiments. In the film *Kano*, the scenes of the baseball pitcher, Akira, going through the hard training is cut with the voiceover of the coach Kondo's words: "one, two, three, attack; one, two, three, wait; you completely dominate his (baseball) will; one, two, three, attack; one, two, three, wait..." (Wei 2014). This cutting highlights the influence of the coach's words about good baseball spirit on these players. In the film *Seediq Bale*, as I have mentioned before, the voiceover of the statement regarding the true Seediq man is repeatedly incorporated with the battle scene.

### **1.3.3 The Use of Allusion**

Wei is a director who likes to use the technique of allusion in his films. A lot of objects in

his film function as metaphors that contribute to the expression of the motif. In *Cape No.7*, on the last rehearsal before the final performance, the Japanese PR Tomoko sent each group member a necklace, including Frog, Old Mao, Rauma, Dada, and Malasun, to express her cordial friendship. The necklaces are “made of glass beads in the aboriginal Pai-wan style”, as Chang addressed; “each necklace is made according to a different pattern symbolizing an auspicious blessing for an individual person’s situation” (I. I.-c. Chang 2010). As Tomoko’s lines in the film states:

Dada, these are the beads of the eyes of the ancestral spirits, to bless you with health; Malasun, these are the beads of chrysalis, to hope that your hard-work brings you a great amount of wealth; Water Frog, these are the beads of hands and feet, to better your craftsmanship; Rauma, these are the beads of peacock, to guard your determined love to your wife; Old Mao, these are the beads of sunlight, symbolizing your honored status (Wei 2008).

On the final performance of the second song, “South of the Border,” Aga pauses in the middle of singing and Rauma gives his beads of peacock back to Tomoko. The beads of the peacock with its symbol of guarding steadfast love alludes to her love with Aga. Another important allusion near the end includes the rainbow, which signifies the hope after the difficulties. The box of love letters can also be seen as a symbol of love between the Japanese and Taiwanese. The critic Chen Yi-Chung interpreted it as the “Japanese-Taiwanese Allegory” (I.-C. Chen 2008).

In the film *Seediq Bale*, the symbol of the rainbow was used much more intensively. As for the Seediq People, the rainbow bridge serves as a pathway to the home of ancestral spirits, which only the true Seediq men and women are able to achieve. In the last part of the film, we see Seediq people walking bravely toward their death with deep faith. Before the chief Mona left, he said, “I will be waiting for you at the other end of the rainbow bridge” (Wei 2011). These words were also spoke by the Seediq women when they sacrifice their own lives to save food for the men and their children. Therefore, for the Seediq people, the image of “their spirits walk



proudly through the rainbow bridge” is functioned as a symbol of their resolution to guard their tradition and identity, performed by the collective suicides (Fu 2015). The rainbow bridge serves as a media that contains the spirit of Seediq tribe to guard their hunting ground, their tradition and identity.

Papaya is one of the most significant images in the film *Kano*. The pitcher Akira has once questioned how an underdog team like themselves with no winning experience could be admitted to the Koshien. The teacher Bintian told them the secret of planting the big and beautiful papayas is driving a nail in the root. Being put in a desperate situation, the papaya will work hard to grow. This metaphor was recalled by Akira in the final competition at Koshien when his finger was injured. He never gave up, but insisted to play until the last minute. The pressure of the upcoming graduation pushed him to exert every effort on the playground. Therefore, the symbol of the papaya alludes to maintaining a fighting spirit, especially in a difficult situation. This is also a common theme in a lot of Japanese sports comics and animations, such as *SlamDunk*, *The Prince of Tennis* and *Captain Tsubasa*. The readers and viewers are easily touched and inspired by the perseverant sport spirit in these works, including the film *Kano*.

It is reasonable to call Wei Te-sheng an auteur, as he has expressed his viewpoints toward the Hollywood film:

Hollywood is such an organized system. There are so many rules, and it's just like a factory. I think I would enjoy less creative freedom, because all the story-telling is done by the writer or actors. The director is just a functional part of a project. I think I wouldn't adapt well, nor do I think the system would accept me (Wei 2011).

As the scriptwriter of the three films *Cape No.7*, *Kano* and *Seediq Bale*, the auteur's imprint is clear to be found either on the cinematic style or the basic motif. A large measure of individual control can be seen in the scripts, shooting and cutting.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Decode the Ambivalent Colonial Relationship**

#### **2.1 Equal Partnership or “Superior-inferior” Colonial Relationship?**

The plotline paradigm of *Kano* resembles that of *Cape No.7*, that a team composed of different ethnic groups achieved their goal through collective efforts. In the process of achieving

a common purpose, the Japanese and Taiwanese characters work together on an equal level, and develop a close, even intimate relationship.

In *Cape No.7*, there is one scene that deeply convinced the audience that Tomoko is drunk. She complained about her life hysterically at Aga's door and after listening to Tomoko's grievance, Aga is touched, holding her in his arms, then having sex with Tomoko upstairs. That night is pivotal to the relationship between Aga and Tomoko, causing them to transition from quarrelers to lovers. Subsequently, the classic scene where Aga hugs Tomoko firmly on the beach and says, "Stay, or I will go with you" pushes the film into a high gear. In the film *Kano*, under a stern appearance in training the team, the Japanese coach also reveals his tenderness when he carefully pulls the quilt over his team members at night, and treats his team member Wu's wounded finger in the final baseball game at Koshien. His relationship with his team grew more intimate as the competition progressed.

However, if we examine the characters' relationship in *Cape No.7* and *Kano*, it is not hard to find that the Japanese characters play the role as instructor in both films.

In *Cape No.7*, the beautiful Japanese model, Tomoko, was assigned to organize a local band to perform at the beginning of the beach concert. She publicly expressed her discontent toward the hastily assembled amateur band a few times. Even though Wei Te-sheng tried to create a diverse team made up of aboriginals (Rauma), Hakkas (Malasun), and Han Chinese (Aga), it is obvious that the Japanese character, Tomoko, is superior to other team members, though they work together on the songs in the opening performance. Although the team members constitute main characters in the film, their endeavor in putting on an opening performance is merely a warm-up for the Japanese pop singer, Kousuke Atari. Therefore, even though the plotline setting has shifted to the present, it still has not broken the barrier of colonial pattern:

The endeavor of the Taiwanese “amateur musicians”, including aboriginals, Hakkas, and Han Chinese, are instructed by a Japanese “professional agent”, for the sake of another Japanese achievement. The colonial pattern is also shown at the end of the film, when Aga sang the song *The Wild Rose*, with the music accompaniment of Old Mao’s Yueqin<sup>11</sup>, in response to the audience’s encore demand. It is noteworthy that, when the Japanese pop singer Kousuke Atari goes on the stage to sing together with Aga in the Japanese language, Aga draws back and intends to leave the stage for Kousuke Atari. This tiny detail demonstrates the central position of the Japanese singer, whereas the Taiwanese band team serves as a foil.

Similar to *Cape No.7*, in the film *Kano*, it is the Japanese coach, Hyotaro Kondo, who guides an underdog baseball team made up of farm boys from southern Taiwan to the finals at Koshien, Japan’s national high-school baseball championship (M. Lee 2014). Even though it is a story about a group of multi-ethnic high school students who experience tough training and finally make it, it is noticeable that the Japanese coach is the one who creates this miracle. His arrival boosts the team’s confidence, providing them with motivation to enter the finals at Koshien by asking every baseball team member to run around downtown Kagi every morning calling out “Koshien” over and over again. His baseball playing experience, together with his indomitable spirit and professional training skills, plays a decisive role in the final success of this ragtag team. Therefore, as an instructor, the position of the Japanese is superior to the Taiwanese, though he makes great efforts together with other Taiwanese people in multi-ethnic groups to chase their baseball dreams.

In *Kano*, as a response to the Japanese official’s challenge about the “cocktail baseball team”, the Japanese coach says, “Let me tell you. Fan people are fleet of foot, Han people are

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<sup>11</sup> Yueqin is a traditional Chinese string instrument. It is also known as the moon guitar for its round and hollow wooden body.

strong batters, the Japanese are good at defense. This is a perfect lineup” (Wei 2014). The word “fan” (番) refers to barbarians in Mandarin, and therefore, the language use of “fan” implicitly reflected his sense of superiority as a colonizer. Similarly, in the film *Seediq Bale*, the Japanese officials have called the Seediq tribal people “sheng fan” (生番), which means “savage”.

The superficial harmonious, or warm-blooded atmosphere, is unable to cover the nature of the colonial relationship in neither *Cape No.7* nor *Kano*. Whether it was during the Japanese occupation period, as in *Kano*, or whether it was set in the present, as in *Cape No.7*, the Japanese always stand in a higher position to look down on the Taiwanese. Why? Is this a coincidence in the fictional stories, or does there exist another intrinsic cause associated with the colonial relationship? What indeed is the colonial relationship between the Japanese people and Taiwanese people?

## **2.2 The Colonial Relationship between the Colonizer and the Colonized**

There are two aspects of the colonial relationship reflected on Wei Te-sheng’s film works, the oppressor and the oppressed, as well as the emotional bond. It seems ridiculous because two contradictory sentiments are evoked simultaneously, but if we analogize it to the “Stockholm syndrome”, it is reasonable.

“Stockholm syndrome” derives from a Stockholm bank robbery, where the hostages developed a psychological alliance with their captors. Based on the conclusions of previous scholars’ interpretations, Celia Jameson claims that

the Stockholm syndrome is explained in part as an unconscious identification, but is also regarded as a conscious coping strategy which can be understood as a form of adaptive behavior, providing hope for the victim in an otherwise hopeless situation (Jameson 2010).

Blackman suggests that “women, the working classes, **colonial subjects** and children were all viewed as more suggestible and amenable to processes of social influence” (Blackman 2008). Tinklenberg has deeply analyzed its psychological mechanism, and claims that

‘coping’ is a deliberate strategy which can occur alongside the unconscious processes of ‘reaction formation’, whereby the victim transforms his/her fear of the terrorist into admiration and ‘identification with the aggressor’, both of which are ‘commonly found in hysterical personalities and younger less stable people than in mature individuals’ (Tinklenberg 1977).

It is certain that the colonial process involves the slaughter, repression, and slavery that intensifies the antagonistic contradiction between the colonizer and the colonized, but as the psychological mechanism of “Stockholm syndrome” states, a group of “less-stable” or “immature” colonized people may consciously or unconsciously develop an identification with the colonizer. Moreover, with an increase of time spent together, the colonizer and the colonized could develop mutual affection, as shown in the film *Seediq Bale*. Therefore, the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, as well as the emotional bond, are both reflected in the colonial relationship.

### **2.2.1 The Oppressor and the Oppressed Relationship**

Osterhammel has defined the word “colonialism” in the following sentences in his book *Colonialism: a theoretical overview* (Osterhammel and Frisch 1997):

Colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule.

As colonizers, they have natural born privilege supported by the colonial system, and their privilege contains two aspects: economic interests and psychological superiority.

At the beginning of the film *Seediq Bale*, the Japanese general Sukenori Kabayama (桦山资纪), followed by his forces, is heading for the newly acquired colony of Taiwan in 1895 due to the failure of the Second Sino-Japanese war<sup>12</sup>. Standing on the warship, with the Japanese imperial flag and mighty fleet in the background, the general's declaration explicitly reveals the Japanese colonial motive:

Once disembarked at Keelung Port, we must sweep the island with force from the north to south thoroughly. We must prevent any disrespect from the people, so as to gain their wholehearted allegiance to our empire of the sun, especially the heartland of Taiwan occupied by the tribal savages. There are ample resources of lumber and mines in the mountains. Endless treasures... (Wei 2012)

From the declaration above, it is quite clear that the Japanese colonizer meant to repress the Taiwanese people, especially the aborigines' rebellion by force, in order to obtain natural resources to supply their domestic needs. In other words, Taiwan functioned as a natural resource provider for Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere colonial project. Nevertheless, the central mountains that are rich in natural resources, especially that of lumber and mines, are home to the Seediq. It means that the Japanese had to fight with the Seediq for the latter's land. Therefore, as the scholar Fu argues, "such a process of territorial enframing can only be initiated by military might, inflicting tremendous bloodshed" (Fu 2015).

Although natural resources and economic pillage are the main driving force of Japanese colonizers, some of them argue that their colonial activities objectively promote the industrialization and modernization process in its colony; it fosters the improvement of native peoples. In the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx specifically discussed the impact of British

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<sup>12</sup> At the end of the second Sino-Japanese War, Chinese government and Japanese government signed an unequal treaty, Treaty of Shimonoseki ("马关条约"), which claims that Qing government should cede Taiwan to Japan.

colonialism in India (Colonialism 2012). As the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy commented,

Marx's analysis of colonialism as a progressive force bringing modernization to a backward feudal society sounds like a transparent rationalization for foreign domination...even though Marx believed that British rule was motivated by greed and exercised through cruelty, he felt it was still the agent of progress. (Colonialism 2012).

According to Marx, the foreign ruler symbolizes a progressive character; even if the foreign ruler should be blamed for the suffering they brought to the colonized Indians, it is a temporary transitional period. In spite of this, Marx's analysis is from the perspective of colonizers, or so called "advanced productive forces". It implicitly contains an ancient Chinese thought - "winner takes all" - that Britain, an industrialized country, represents "superior", while India, a feudal country, represents "inferior". The natural course of history here is that the superior country adopts a certain approach to "help" an inferior country towards a progressive orientation. Is it true that colonization is a way of an "industrialized" or "modernized" country to promote a relative "nonindustrial" or "traditional" country's development?

Memmi, a Tunisian, has indicated the essence of colonists in his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Memmi 1991):

There are neither good nor bad colonists: there are colonialists. Among these, some reject their objective reality. Borne along by the colonialist apparatus, they do every day in reality what they condemn in fantasy, for all their actions contribute to the maintenance of oppression. They will change nothing and will serve no one, but will succeed only in finding moral comfort in malaise.

In explaining the colonial privilege, in addition to acknowledging Marx's idea that the economic aspect of colonialism is fundamental, Memmi claims that the superiority complex is also a part of colonial privilege:

.....deprivations of the colonized are almost direct result of the advantages secured to the colonizer. However, colonial privilege is not solely economic. To observe the life of the colonizer and the colonized is to discover rapidly that the daily humiliation of the



colonized, his objective subjugation, are not merely economic. Even the poorest colonizer thought himself to be – and actually was – superior to the colonized. This too was part of colonial privilege.

The scenes of marching Japanese troops, the fierce Renchihkuan battle, and the brutal conquest of the Seediq clans in the film echoes Memmi's argument. When the Japanese colonizers first arrive at the Taiwan island, they sweep the island with force and arms; the Japanese generals ride on horseback, marching in the middle of the street, with eyes looking down to the native Taiwanese who stand on the side of the streets. Subsequently, the scene cuts to several rebels locked in the patrol wagons, parading through the streets. These scenes portray the Japanese colonizers as oppressive and domineering people. After the Seediq fell into the control of the Japanese, the Seediq men were assigned to carry logs to build the Wushe village. A great conflict broke out between a Japanese officer and the Seediq aboriginals on a rainy day. The Seediq worker, who failed to carry the log, stirred the anger of a Japanese officer. When other Seediq workers explained that the road was muddy, and added that this worker almost fell to his death, the Japanese officer punched the worker in the face in no time, saying, "Do you know how expensive a log can be?" Obviously, from this Japanese officer's perspective, the value of a Seediq aboriginal's life is lower than a log. It betrays the idea of common humanity. According to the philosophical idea of Confucianism, humaneness is considered a central idea, which means "to love the people". Embracing humaneness is an essential prerequisite for being a gentleman. Confucius has presented the concept of humaneness in his behavior in *Analects 10:17*, "The stables caught fire. The Master, on returning from court, asked, 'Was anyone hurt?'" He did not ask about the horses."<sup>13</sup> It can be seen that Confucius showed his concerns and love to people before horses. The people whom Confucius asked about was not merely his family, but also his

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<sup>13</sup> The translation refers to the book *The Sayings of Confucius*, translated by D. C. LAU. This translation first published in 1979, published by the Penguin Group.

servants, who were inferior to Confucius in social standing in the Spring and Autumn Periods. By contrast, the Japanese officer in the film *Seediq Bale* bullied the Seediq aboriginals physically and verbally; his behavior was inhumane, which echoes Memmi's idea about the colonizer and the colonized: "...oppression is the greatest calamity of humanity. It diverts and pollutes the best energies of man – of oppressed and oppressor alike. For if colonization destroys the colonized, it also rots the colonizer" (Memmi 1991). Colonization "endows" the colonizer with a superior standing to oppress the colonizer verbally and physically; at the same time, it rots the humaneness of the colonizer under the brutal colonial regime.

Another supporting instance reflecting the rotten humaneness of the Japanese colonizer is their use of chemical weapons. After the successful Wushe uprising, Japan planned a reprisal against the Seediq tribe, by sending general Yahiko Kamada and more than two thousand ground troops and airplanes to Taiwan, expecting the speedy elimination of the Seediq warriors (Fu 2015). By contrast, there were only approximately 300 Seediq aboriginals who fought against the Japanese troops. As Wei Te-sheng said in an interview with Asia Pacific Arts, "When I heard the story of 300 people with knives fighting against 3000 soldiers who had machine guns and canons, it got my blood pumping" (Wei 2012). Surprisingly, with a good command of the terrain, the Seediq aboriginals defeated their enemies in succession. A young man, named Bawan, even scared the Japanese soldiers because he was spotted in two different places in three days; these two places were hundreds of miles apart. As Fu said, "their guerrilla jungle warfare did serious damage to the Japanese army" (Fu 2015). Confronted with the resourceful and courageous Seediq aboriginals, the general bristled with anger in the meeting with the Japanese officers; "These rude barbarians should have such a meticulous operational plan!" (Wei 2011; My translation) In a fit of rage, the general made a decision to use chemical weapons, saying "I

wanted you to be civilized, but you forced me to be barbaric.” Interestingly, the courage and tactics of the Seediq aboriginals is in sharp contrast to the savagery of the Japanese colonizers, “laying bare the hypocrisy in the colonial thesis of civilization versus barbarity” (Fu 2015). Marx’s analysis of colonialism as a progressive force (Japan), bringing modernization to a backward society (Taiwan), seems ironic in this situation. With relatively advanced productive forces and equipped with advanced weapons, well-trained Japanese troops adopted an inhumane, savage, and brutal approach to defeat the Seediq aboriginals; whereas the latter showed their determination, perseverance, and ready intelligence when facing their powerful enemies. As the Seediq tribal leader Mona Rudao said, “The number of Japanese people is much more than the leaves in the forest and stones in Chou-Shui River, but my determination of resistance is much stronger than Mount Chilai” (Wei 2011; My translation). Japanese colonizers always claimed their “mission” of civilizing the barbaric aboriginals: the film frames Wushe village from the vantage point of a Japanese officer standing on top of the hill, marveling at the “Schools, clinics, grocery stores, post offices, hotels, boarding houses... we’ve managed to civilize all the Wushe savages. It’s not an easy task. Hard to imagine that this was once the most uncivilized heartland there” (Fu 2015). Nonetheless, their ways to achieve “civilization” are accompanied with barbarity. In a series of close-ups capturing the angry face of the Japanese general as he curses his adversary, Mona Rudao, and suggests the use of chemical weapons, as well as the multi-angle shootings of a Japanese officer beating a Seediq worker on a rainy day, the Wei Te-sheng’s cinematic lens discloses the fine line between civilization and barbarity, that when the sugarcoat of civilization is uncovered, the sugar-producing process embodies barbarity. It echoes the insight of Memmi in his book *The colonizer and the colonized* that the exposition of how colonialism denies humanity applies to both who inflict it and those who suffer it (Memmi 1991).

Therefore, in the oppressor and oppressed relationship between the Japanese and the aboriginal Taiwanese, the identity of the oppressing Japanese colonizers is reflected by two aspects: the natural resource and economic pillager, and the humiliator of the colonized aboriginal Taiwanese.

### **2.2.2 Emotional Bond**

According to Tinklenberg's analysis of the psychological mechanism of the "Stockholm syndrome", a group of "less-stable" or "immature" colonized people may consciously or unconsciously develop an identification with the colonizer. The identification problem of the characters Ichiro Hanaoka (花崗一郎) and Jiro Hanaoka (花崗二郎) in the film *Seediq Bale* is a great example to prove this point. They are both Seediq by blood; Dakis Nomin and Dakis Nawi are their tribal names, yet they are raised as Japanese, speaking fluent Japanese and working as Japanese policemen disciplining their own tribal people (Fu 2015). Before the Wushe uprising, a conversation between the chief Mona and Ichiro Hanaoka reflects the identification issue of the colonized aboriginals. Ichiro Hanaoka asks the chief Mona: "Chief, is it so bad to be ruled by the Japanese? We now live a civilized life; we have the education center, post offices. We do not need to be as before, relying on barbaric hunting to survive. Is it so bad to be ruled by the Japanese?" (Wei 2012) Ichiro's statement reveals that he has gradually adopted the value of colonial modernity and perceives his own culture through colonial eyes (Fu 2015). Yet the chief Mona challenges him: "Is it good to be ruled by the Japanese. The men are forced to bend down carrying logs; the women are forced to kneel down serving the Japanese. The deserving money all went into the Japanese's pockets... post offices? Stores? Schools? When do they enhance the Seediq's living condition? On the contrary, the wealth of the Japanese shows them how poor they are" (Wei 2012). Being raised under the Japanese colonial education, the young elite Ichiro

values colonial modernity more than his native culture, but the chief Mona reminds him that, “Seediq Bale can lose his body, but he fights to keep his soul at all cost” (Wei 2012). In the film, Ichiro marries a Japanese woman, and lives a Japanese life. He experiences a huge struggle; whether to persuade the chief Mona to quit the plan of uprising, or to join them himself. As the Seediq Bale are defeated in the end, he kills his wife and commits suicide in the Japanese way: “Hara-kiri<sup>14</sup>”. His action reveals that he has identified with the Japanese colonial culture and values. Even though he looks like a Seediq and is a Seediq by blood, his soul is probably not going to the heavenly home of Seediq ancestors and spirits. Besides Ichiro, marriages between the Seediq and the Japanese are not uncommon in the film. Among these marriages, mostly Japanese men married Seediq women. The film depicts several Japanese men who beat and scold their Seediq wives for no reason. In the film *Seediq Bale*, it seems that the colonized Seediq women are forced to establish an emotional bond with the colonizing Japanese officials.

Meanwhile, there are a group of people who actively establish an emotional bond with their colonizer or colonized counterpoint. The popularity of the film *Cape No.7*, a box-office record breaker, showed the current Taiwanese people’s nostalgia toward the period of Japanese occupation; moreover, it highlighted a group named “Wansei”, who were people born in Taiwan, and were able to use Taiwanese to communicate with the local residents. Their parents were Japanese immigrants who settled in Taiwan during the Japanese occupation period (1895-1946), and married Japanese or Taiwanese people on the island, so that their children were commonly referred to as “Wansei”, which literally means “born in Taiwan” (Chiang 2015). After Japan was defeated in World War II, 470,000 Japanese were repatriated from Taiwan to Japan, only professionals such as technicians, teachers and doctors were allowed to stay on the island. According to J. Fan, some Taiwanese have lived in Taiwan for second or third generations, and

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<sup>14</sup> Hara-kiri is a form of Japanese ritual suicide by disembowelment.

lived harmoniously with the local Taiwanese, causing many Wansei to be reluctant to go back to Taiwan (Chiang 2015). They were unwilling to be separated from their relatives, friends, and loved ones. Also, they faced a dilemma after going back to Japan. According to Yoshifumi, most Wansei “had never even set foot in mainland Japan until then and had to make their way in an unfamiliar environment without local roots or connections. They were often treated as foreigners, particularly in Japan’s provincial towns and cities” (Yoshifumi 2016). Under these circumstances, many of them sorely missed their homes in Taiwan. Historian Takenaka Nobuko, author of a book documenting the lives of Japanese women in colonial Taiwan, puts it: “We Wansei view Taiwan as our beloved homeland. After Japan lost the war, we were set adrift, but our feelings for Taiwan have not diminished on iota” (Yoshifumi 2016).

Despite all of this, it is disappointing that Hsuan-ju Chen, the author of award-winning non-fiction book, *Wansei Back Home*, has confessed to lying about being a descendant of early Japanese settlers. According to the statement, Chen confessed to pretending to be the descendant of Japanese settlers in Taiwan who had arrived during the colonial period before WWII. In an apology statement, Chen said that she was born and raised by her Taiwanese family in Greater Kaohsiung. Chen’s fabrication about her personal identity let a lot of her readers and her audience down, since the documentary *Wansei Back Home* adapted from this book has hit the big screen in October 2015. Chen reiterated that, while her identity was fabricated, the other stories about Japanese settlers and their descendants were true (Hsuan 2017).

In addition to Wansei, the Taiwanese citizens, who were educated under Japanese occupation period, are known as the “Japanese-language generation”, meaning they speak Japanese fluently. A substantial number of the “Japanese-language generation” have “openly embraced the Japanese language as part of their own cultural and linguistic heritage” (Yoshifumi

2016). Shouli Wu, a Taiwanese linguist, has observed the consciousness of language use in Taiwan before and after Taiwan's restoration from Japan. In the article "The side view in the consciousness of language in Taiwan" published in 1946, right after the KMT government took control of Taiwan, he claims that:

Most elderly people could mix Japanese words into their native Taiwanese. Most middle-aged people could speak Japanese fluently and some could even think in Japanese. As for those of the younger generations, some could not speak their mother tongue, Taiwanese (S. Wu 1946).

With a common linguistic background, it is likely that the colonized Taiwanese people and the colonizing Japanese people developed feelings for each other. It also accounts for the Japanese culture mania after the Japanese occupation period.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Cause of Ambivalent Colonial Relationship**

As I have mentioned in the Introduction, compared with other East Asian countries that have been colonized by Japan, Taiwan presents an ambivalent sentiment toward its ex-colonizer Japan. Why do Taiwanese people have such an ambivalent sentiment? Compared with mainland China and the two Koreas, who have shown through major polls a negative sentiment toward

Japanese influence, why does Taiwan not have such a tendency? Unlike China and the two Koreas, why does Taiwan rarely criticize Japan for its colonization?

### 3.1 Exploration of Taiwanese Subjectivity

Although Hsu and Chen have commented on the film *Cape No.7* from different perspectives, both of them addressed a common issue that is Taiwanese subjectivity or Taiwanese identity as some scholars have called it. Hsu argues that *Cape No.7* is a far cry from the subjectivity of artistic creation because “the voiceover of reading loving letters copied a great deal of artistic romance of Haruki Murakami<sup>15</sup>” (Hsu 2008). Chen explores the subjectivity of the Taiwanese through asking questions at the end of his essay: “What exactly is the subject matter of the Taiwanese? Do Taiwanese only play the roles in ‘Orphan of Asia’ who passively wait to be saved?” (I.-C. Chen 2008).

Many scholars at home and abroad devoted much effort in exploring Taiwanese subjectivity. David Wang has attempted to view Taiwanese literature as an autonomous category in his book *Writing Taiwan*<sup>16</sup>. According to the review written by Chiu-Duke, *Writing Taiwan* acknowledges that “Taiwanese literature shares the same space with ‘hegemonic’ Chinese literature”, but insists that from the perspective of world literature, Taiwanese literature establishes itself as “a distinctive and oppositional literary field”, relative to modern Chinese literature. David Wang’s exploration of Taiwanese subjectivity is striving to enable Taiwanese literature to be free from the political power of Japan, the KMT government, and mainland China. Chiu-Duke explicitly specifies these powers as “the Japanese colonial regime, the Nationalist

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<sup>15</sup> Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer and translator of English works. The theme song of *Cape No.7* named “South of the Border”, which corresponds to the book written by Haruki Murakami titled *South of the Border, West of the Sun*.

<sup>16</sup> In the review of Chiu-Duke, “Writing Taiwan is the first study in English to examine the complex, multifaceted development of Taiwanese literature from the early 1930s to the late 1990s”. (Chiu-Duke 2007/2008)



(KMT) dictatorship and its pan-Chinese cultural policy, contemporary China's continuous claim of sovereignty over Taiwan, and the global consumerism in the last two decades" (Chiu-Duke 2007/2008). Chiu-Duke even humorously compares David Wang's "'obsession' with the creation of Taiwanese subjectivity" with "C.T. Hsia's memorable aphorism 'obsession with China'" (Chiu-Duke 2007/2008).

In her book *Tian Ya Hai Jiao: Fu'ermosha Shu Qing Zhi (Ultima Thule: Formosa's lyric record)*, a Taiwanese prose writer, Chen Chien, once traced her family origin. She discovered a lot about her ancient homeland. Chien was born in Wu Han Village on the bank of Dongshan River in Yilan, a county in Northeastern Taiwan. She traced her family roots into Nanjing County, Zhangzhou Prefecture, Fu Jian in Mainland China, and explored Chien family's pioneer enterprise, as well as extending to the hard time of early Hakka immigrants to Taiwan from mainland China, in the chapter Langzi ("Loafter"). She exclaims that "The reason why the island is majestic, lies in that she converged the vagrant story of every clan into a great legend" (Chen 2002). Wei has the same idea expressed in simple words when answering questions in the interview for the film *Kano*, "Taiwan has many different ethnic groups, which constitutes Taiwanese culture. Are we open-minded enough to embrace this greatest value of Taiwan in the next one hundred years?" (Wei 2012). Based on the above citation, it is obvious that both Chien and Wei acknowledged the various ethnic groups' contribution to the peculiarity of Taiwan - injecting energy and vitality to this valuable island. In the chapter "Fuyun" ("Floating Cloud"), Chien recorded the primitive life of aborigines from their perspective, like hunting in the vast plains. Likewise, Wei has adopted the same historical story of aborigines in his self-panned film *Seediq Bale*. Peaceful life was interrupted in 1895 when the Qing empire was defeated in the first Sino-Japanese War, ceding Taiwan to the Japanese government. Chien records this period of

history in the chapter “Zhaolu” (“Morning Dew”), in memory of anti-Japanese heroes in defending Taiwan. Similarly, the film *Cape No.7*, directed by Wei, also involved this historical event. Chen Chien adopts a poetic language and research attitude, from the exploration of her own family roots to the historical evolution of Taiwan, to devote her earnest love for this island. Although Chien has started with seeking her own family roots, her book objectively carries an exploration of Taiwanese subjectivity in examining the vicissitudes of life among different ethnic groups, including aborigines, Hakka immigrants, Han Chinese as well as the ex-colonizer, Japan. This book has been considered a milestone in her writing career for the aesthetic solicitude toward Taiwan’s fate.

In addition to the people who explore this topic in literature, Taiwanese film directors contribute to the exploration of Taiwanese subjectivity as well. Throughout the 1980s, a group of film-makers emerged, including Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, and Ang Lee. Their films are called “Taiwanese New Cinema” or “New Taiwan Cinema” for their contribution in constructing “historical representations of the ‘Taiwan experience’ (Taiwan jingyan) on film” (Yip 1997). According to Yip, 1980s “Taiwanese New Cinema”, or so-called “New Taiwan Cinema”, aimed to “challenge the narrow view of Taiwan’s modern history institutionalized by civic education” (Yip 1997).

Since the end of WWII, the KMT(Kuomintang) government retreated from mainland China to Taiwan and took over the sovereignty of Taiwan from the Japanese government. Afterwards, the president Chiang Kai-shek promoted the civic education by attaching great importance to “the teaching of ‘Chinese History’ and ‘Chinese Geography’” (Johnson 1994). Yip argues that the reason for teaching Chinese history and geography to Taiwanese citizens lies in the attempt of “integrating Taiwan into a larger ‘Chinese’ cultural identity” (Yip 1997). In other

words, the KMT government attempted to “construct spatial and temporal continuity between Taiwan and mainland China”, to make Taiwan become “the rightful heir to China’s five-thousand-year imperial tradition”, but this well-planned remembrance was based on the ignorance of Taiwan’s unique historical experience. Yip defined this ignorance as an “organized forgetting”, which includes the oblivion of the island’s aboriginal past, local history, and Dutch and Japanese colonization, that have shaped modern Taiwanese society. Taiwanese New Cinema unearthed the “organized forgetting” history; they broke the domination for a long time by escapist narratives that rarely face the Taiwanese sociohistorical realities. In elaborating the contribution of Taiwanese New Cinema, Yip states that “...Taiwanese New Cinema has, with increasing attention to geographical and temporal specificity, brought to the screen distinctly Taiwanese stories of social, economic, and political change that had rarely, if ever, received cinematic representation in the past...” (Yip 1997). Take Hou Hsiao-hsien as an example, who is an acknowledged representative film maker among the New Taiwanese Cinema. His films take Taiwanese identity as the theme, examining Taiwan’s past experience and presenting the complicated relationships between Taiwan and China, Japan, as well as the West on the screen. The film *City of Sadness*, one of Hou’s ambitious and important “Taiwan Trilogy”, focuses on the transition period of Taiwanese history between 1945-1949. It depicts the Lin family’s experiences during the February 28 Incident. However, as Hou once said, “I think one day, the film should be made in this way: plain, very simple, accessible to everyone. But the viewer who is able to reach the profound meaning, could achieve it” (Qing 2008). Therefore, the motif of the film *City of Sadness* is beyond the narrative of a family’s experience during a turbulent era; it explored the national identity through depicting “the antagonistic relationship between the government and the people and the continuing tensions between mainlanders and native

Taiwanese” (Yip 1997). Hou articulates the Taiwanese past as a reference to understand current crises in Taiwanese history.

The reason that I refer to the scholar David Wang, the Taiwanese prose writer Chen Chien, and Hou Hsiao-hsien, the representative director of Taiwanese New Cinema above, is because they all, with no exception, conducted an exploration toward Taiwanese subjectivity. Moreover, they adopted the same approach for exploration, that is, to seek the answer in Taiwanese history. As an island, Taiwan has successively been colonized by many countries, and thereby its history predicted the difficulty of defining Taiwanese subjectivity.

### **3.2 Taiwan’s colonial history**

Taiwan did not receive geographical recognition until 1544, the Portuguese sailors gave the island of Taiwan the name “Ilha Formosa”, which literally means “beautiful island”. Today, there is a metro station in Kaohsiung named “Mei Li Tao Chieh Yün Chan” (“Formosa Boulevard Station”, literally means “beautiful island station”). Formosa, or beautiful island, has been an idiomatic term to refer to Taiwan. A Chinese writer, Eileen Chang, who has been highly praised by C.T. Hsia once showed her great appreciation to Taiwan’s natural landscape:

Passed by Taiwan, above the intense blue sea water, floated a green island, like a Chinese landscape painting, that kind of mountains, I never thought, really existed! I stand there still, not dare to move one step, afraid of missing, knowing that I will not see more beautiful scenery in my lifetime (E. Chang 1991).

According to J. Bruce Jacob’s study about Taiwan’s history, this beautiful island witnessed its first colonizer between 1623-24 when the Dutch arrived. At that time, Taiwan was an island of aboriginal peoples without permanent Han Chinese communities (Jacobs 2011). The Dutch ruled Taiwan from 1624-1642. During this period, the Spanish ruled for a time in northern Taiwan simultaneously with the Dutch. In 1662, Chenggong Zheng 郑成功 (Koxinga 国姓爷) defeated the Dutch in Taiwan. The Zheng regime (1662-83) doubled the population of Han

Chinese in Taiwan from 30,000-50,000 at the end of the Dutch period to 50,000-100,000 at the end of the Zheng period (Wills 1999). Then Taiwan was taken by the Qing dynasty from the hand of Chenggong Zheng's grandson in 1683. Jacobs argues that China was one of the colonies of the Manchu Empire, just as India was one of the colonies of the British Empire. This proposition is different from some Chinese historians' perspective, who regard Manchus as an ethnic minority of China, a multi-ethnic country. Jacobs summarizes that "Manchu rule in Taiwan was loose, minimal and partial", as "Emperor Kangxi was quite opposed to making Taiwan a part of his empire because he thought neither gain nor loss was at issue" (Liao 2006). The Manchus ruled Taiwan from 1683-1895, until the Japanese came to Taiwan. The Japanese occupation period (1895-1945) has been emphasized and well-studied by many Western scholars, when "the initial impetus for Taiwan's modernization took place" (Jacobs 2011); "The infrastructure was further developed, and political stability and economic growth accelerated the modernization processes" (Liao 2006). The Japanese regime came to an end with Japan's defeat in WWII. Since then, Kuomintang ruled Taiwan from 1945-88, under Presidents Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo. After Chiang Ching-kuo's death in 1988, Taiwan started a political democratization period with the Nationalist Party and its opposition Democratic Progressive Party alternate to be the ruling party until now.

Reviewing Taiwan's history from the arrival of the Dutch in 1624 until the death of Chiang Ching-kuo in 1988, it is apparent that Taiwan was successively ruled by six foreign regimes: The Dutch, the Spanish, the Zheng family, the Manchus, the Japanese, and the Kuomintang (KMT, the Chinese Nationalist Party). A long colonial history has increased difficulties with Taiwanese national and ethnic identity, and makes the relationships of Taiwan with Japan and China more complicated. As Wu Chuo-liu (吴浊流), an influential Taiwanese

journalist and novelist, has noted in his most famous work *Asia's Orphan*, the Taiwanese were having difficulty developing a distinctive sense of cultural belonging of defining themselves as either Chinese or Japanese (Liao 2006).

### **3.3 Reasons of Paradoxical Pro-Japan Attitude**

The ambivalent cultural belongings were made worse by the disastrous tragedy of the February 28<sup>th</sup> Incident in 1947, when the KMT government used force against the local people. Throughout Taipei in February 1947, “Dogs go, pigs come” was graffitied on the walls. The so-called “dogs”, referring to the Japanese Empire, was driven out of the island in 1945, while the pigs, referring to the KMT government, was clearly no better than the previous ruler. Shortly after the KMT government took over Taiwan, political issues ensued. For instance, the February 28<sup>th</sup> Incident took place, which was marked as the beginning of the White Terror. Throughout the duration of White Terror, according to a report on Taipei Times, around 140,000 Taiwanese were imprisoned from 1949 to 1987, of which about 3,000-4,000 people were executed. In addition to political issues, some economic issues followed: black markets, runaway inflation, and food shortages occurred because of the mismanagement by the KMT government (T.-I. Huang 2005). Numerous commodities were shipped to Mainland China to meet the materials shortage caused by the Civil War. Therefore, the prices of common products, especially daily essentials like rice, soared significantly in a short time. Ultimately, the native Taiwanese residents were disappointed in the KMT government’s backward policies. Chen has pointed out the negative portrayal of the “Chinese Mainlanders” in the film *Cape No.7*: “the KMT military forces’ brief appearance in the opening and closing shots positions them as intruders that break up this Taiwan-Japan romance; moreover, waishengren’s absence throughout the rest of the film indicates a refusal to recognize them as Taiwanese” (I.-C. Chen 2008). In the other two film

works, *Kano* and *Seediq Bale*, Chinese Mainlanders, or waishengren, are completely absent. Through his films, Wei has been trying to explore Taiwanese subjectivity by interpreting Taiwanese colonial history. In spite of this, as I have argued before, KMT government, or the mainlanders, are not considered as a part of this exploration of Taiwanese subjectivity. In conclusion, the ineffectiveness of the KMT government causes the Taiwanese citizens to hold the negative views of Chinese mainlanders.

By contrast, fifty years of Japanese colonial rule was viewed much more positively by the native Taiwanese. According to Huang Chih-huei,

Taiwanese people's resistance to a successor colonialism (that was imposed by the KMT regime) was primarily cause of their seemingly paradoxical pro-Japan attitude... In their comparison, the earlier colonizers turned out to be a better set; this is some sort of comparative politics of the colonized (C.-h. Huang 1999).

The paradoxical pro-Japan attitude arose from the Japanese colonial government, improving the infrastructure of the island, promoting economic growth, as well as acting as the medium for Western modernization:

In order to match the pace of Japan's economic development, the Governor-General of Taiwan began to fervently execute a series of economic reforms and architectural projects... The development of Taiwan's academic studies was started through colonial reforms, so it could be said that the foundations of modern Taiwanese humanities, sciences, and technology were set during this time<sup>17</sup>.

The Japanese government's Assimilation Policies, regarding the colonial education, played an important role in Taiwanese pro-Japan attitude. The Japanese colonial government pursued a policy of integrating the Taiwanese population into the empire through Japanese education (Fung-chiao 1995). According to Lam Peng-Er, the Assimilation Policies included enrolling

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<sup>17</sup> National Institute for Compilation and Translation, ed. "Knowing Taiwan 'History.'" (Taipei: National Institute for Compilation and Translation, 2000), pages 75-9. Cited directly from Li and He 30.

Taiwanese students into Japanese tertiary institutions in Taiwan and universities in Japan. Lam states that:

Almost all Taiwanese of that generation including senior Taiwanese politicians (e.g. Lee Teng-hui, KMT elder Lin Yang-kang, and chairman of the Straits Exchange Foundation Koo Chen-fu), are products of this system of integration through education; many retain the language and a strong cultural affinity for Japan (Lam 2004).

Chen Shui-bian, former president of Taiwan from 2000 to 2008, like most Taiwanese of his generation, does not speak Japanese. His generation was educated in Chinese, when the KMT regime implemented policies to resynthesize Taiwan after more than half a century of Japanization. His wife, Shuchen Wu, took her first vacation to Japan, after President Chen's inauguration. The first lady explained her reason as: "Our families' older generation is used to eating Japanese food and they speak Japanese because they all were educated during Japanese colonial rule" (Lam 2004). A sense of nostalgia for Japanese colonial rule among many older Taiwanese further reinforces the cultural and social bonds between Taiwan and Japan.

Since Taiwanese people, as well as Chinese mainlanders, live in Taiwan, the general attitude toward Japan has complicated due to different historical memories and experience. Many elder Taiwanese, who grew up during Japanese colonization, appreciate Japan because they consider it as a symbol of modernization and progress, despite being treated as second-class citizens (I. I.-c. Chang 2010). Furthermore, these elder Taiwanese still embrace the Japanese linguistics and cultural legacy. On the contrary, the elderly mainlanders who came to Taiwan in 1949 have been filled with anti-Japanese sentiment, due to witnessing Japanese military invasion and massacre during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) in mainland China.

The KMT government's authoritarian rule from 1949-1980s uprooted all signs of Japanese influence. In order to cleanse Taiwan of the Japanese legacy, the KMT government banned Japanese from mass media and strictly controlled the number of imported Japanese



multimedia. Nevertheless, Japanese culture was still spread among citizens (I. I.-c. Chang 2010). According to Lee Ming-Tsung, Japanese culture became popular in the 1970s; at the end of the 1970s, the Japanese multimedia products and TV programs began to enter every household (M.-T. Lee). In the mid-1980s, against the background of rapid globalization, the Japanophilia was trending among Taiwanese youth. Japanophilia trend continues to grow with the abolition of the parts of martial law<sup>18</sup> relating to the media near the end of the 1980s: “In November of 1992, the ban on Japanese media was lifted; and in July of 1993, the cable television law was passed, making it legal for audiences to watch foreign media” (I. I.-c. Chang 2010). Since Japanese culture is more proximal to Taiwanese culture than American culture, Japanese dramas were welcomed more than American programs by Taiwanese households. In 1997, the term “hari” was created, meaning Japanophilia, indicating the obsession with Japanese culture. The younger generation, who was born in 1970-90s in Taiwan, are strong followers of Japanese popular culture.

In conclusion, two generations who have a strong affinity to Japan are the older generation, who was born and educated during the Japanese occupation period, and the newer generation, who was born in 1970-90s. Their attraction is derived from the sentiment that Japan symbolizes modernization, progress, and fashion. Fifty years of Japanese colonial history has left an impression on Taiwanese people that it was the Japanese who modernized Taiwan. In the 1990s, during the acceleration of capitalist globalization, Japan acted as the leading role for Taiwan when it was at a lower level of development. The acknowledgement and appreciation of Japanese culture based on its developed economy and modernization lead to a number of Taiwanese people embracing the pro-Japanese attitude.

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<sup>18</sup> In 1949, the Governor of Taiwan Province and the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China announced the imposition of Taiwan martial law. Since then, Taiwan had been under martial law for more than 38 years until the order was lifted by the President Chiang Ching-kuo in 1987.

## Chapter 4

### Decentralization in Wei's Films

The film *Cape No.7*, a 2008 Taiwanese romantic musical film written and directed by Wei Te-sheng, heralded a new round of Taiwanese films' revival and evoked viewers' reflections on the concepts of decentralization and localism. Prior to that, the city of Taipei and Taipeiness were common motifs in the films shot in the 1990s during the late period of New Taiwanese cinema. For instance, a series of classical film works by Edward Yang, the master who introduced Wei Te-sheng into his career as a movie director, centered on the city dwellers' emotional life in the city of Taipei. The films *Taipei Story*, *The Terrorizers*, *A Brighter Summer*

*Day*, and *A Confucian Confusion*, all directed by Yang, depict the lives of young professionals who live in the dynamic and fast-changing city of Taipei. The films reveal how the socioeconomic changes of the country affect the way people live and interact. As the political and economic center of Taiwan as well as “a place of pilgrimage” for film directors, the city of Taipei was the most representative epitome of a changing Taiwan in the 1990s. The Ximending District houses the headquarters of numerous theaters and film companies and Xinyi View Show Cinema in East Taipei attracts countless film lovers. Nonetheless, though he is apprenticed to Edward Yang, Wei seems to go an opposite direction on the choice of shooting locations – shooting in the inconspicuous southern towns of Taiwan instead of the popular shooting place Taipei.

### **Decentralized Landscape**

*Cape No.7* is set in a township of Hengchun located at the southern tip of Taiwan. According to Wei, Hengchun is a township of striking cultural contrasts: “centuries-old historic monuments and five-star resort hotels; the Taiwanese moon guitar (*yueqin*) and the American bass guitar, and the beach concert starring an international pop musician” (Wang 2012). Different from the city of Taipei, which embraces modernity, the townships experienced difficulties in mediating the conflict between modern and traditional cultures. The sharp contrast between the city and the townships is showed at the very beginning of the film, when Aga rides his motorcycle all the way from Taipei to his hometown, Hengchun. Ju-lung Ma, the Town Council Representative, embodies a typical regionalist under the background of globalization. As a staunch defender of the Hengchun local culture, Ju-lung Ma’s words smack of pungency and sharpness:

I am the Town Council Representative. I’m 170 centimeters tall, I weigh 75 kilos, and I’m 65 years old. My interests are quarreling, fighting, killing, and arson. My biggest

wish is to burn down the whole town of Hengchun, then call back all the young people, rebuild it, be our own bosses, and never again be someone else's subordinates (Wei 2008).

His words show his antipathy towards globalism. As Wang observes, Ju-lung Ma, played by Hong kuo-jung, is portrayed as a "Tai-ke"<sup>19</sup> father figure who is "an embodiment of both a burlesque boor and a guardian of the Taiwanese cultural legacy" (Wang 2012). Another character who defends Taiwan's cultural legacy, Old Mao, is depicted as more than a devoted guardian of tradition. Old Mao embodies the adaptability of "Tai-ke" in keeping pace with globalization. Instead of rejecting modernity and embracing tradition, he allows the two contrasting polarities to talk with one another. He is good at playing moon guitar, a disappearing local musical instrument. In addition to carrying forward the traditional culture, Old Mao eagerly participates in activities with young people, which embodies a new "Tai-ke" image, according to Wang. Old Mao's openness to the youth culture, coupled with his knowledge of Japanese culture and his memories about the Japanese colonial period, makes him a vanguard of cultural reinvention. He actively joins in the rock band consisting of young people and insists on performing traditional music in the concert at the same time, which implies the possibility of coexistence between globalization and localization. Being receptive to modernity, Old Mao reconciles the contrasting binaries he is caught between.

The film *Seediq Bale* is set in a mountainous area in central Taiwan. The opening scene shows the lush forest of Mount Chilai interspersed with narrow paths, giant old trees, ancient trunks, waterfalls and creeks. The Seediq people led an aboriginal life: they hunted for animals, exchanged products with other tribes, retrieved the heads of their enemies, and tattooed their faces as a mark of heroism. Chin-ching Lee interprets the Seediq people's lifestyle from the

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<sup>19</sup> Tai Ke is a derogatory term which was originally used when the *waishengren* in Taiwan held certain discrimination against the Taiwanese people. Today, the term is used to describe behaviors which are considered inappropriate, crude, unethical or those that show disregard to others.

perspective of land ethics proposed by Leopold in the essay “Taiwanese Mountain Area as Place/Landscape Presented in *Seediq Bale*”. Lee claims that Seediq people’s traditional lifestyle echoes Leopold’s idea that human beings are “plain members and citizens” in their natural environment, in which “the intrinsic value of the surroundings is recognized and respected”; the land ethic manifested by Seediq people’s lifestyle reveals a symbiosis between humans and land, between culture and nature (C.-c. Lee 2013). The land witnesses their impressive athleticism of head hunting, internecine tribal rivalries and rebellion for survival and freedom. Therefore, inhabited by the aboriginal Seediq people, the mountainous area is a place with “inherent tribal rootedness, attachment, also diversities and conflicts” (C.-c. Lee 2013). The film constructs a sense of place and cultural rootedness by incorporating reiterative social practices, legends, and language into the narrative: the flashback of the facial tattoos, the legend telling of the rainbow bridge, and the speaking of Seediq language. As Arthur J. Ray pointed out, the narratives of indigenous people’s traditional legends indicate that the land is integral to their past, present and future. Therefore, the tribal privilege is guaranteed as soon as a sense of place is constructed. The natural scenery of the mountain areas and the legends and social practices of the Seediq tribe presented in the film justify the uprising against Japanese colonial exploitation. When the Japanese imperial power attempts to colonize them, the Japanese rationalized their colonial behaviors by declaring their good intentions of civilizing the barbarians. Meanwhile, in order to intrude into the mountainous area, they changed both its natural landscape and social landscape. Row upon row of Japanese style buildings are built, with modernized post-offices, clinics and schools standing in stark contrast with the aboriginal buildings. The Japanese colonizers also exported imperial culture into the mountain area by spreading the Japanese language, yet a sense of roots and belonging to the mountain area helps construct a collective identity among the

Seediq people. Ways of life, sets of rules and common practices all evoke the collective memories of people in the Seediq tribe. Therefore, it is impossible to shift their collective identity from a Seediq to a Japanese by changing the natural and social landscape there. Dakis is a good example. He works for the Japanese colonial government to discipline his tribal people. Nevertheless, he finds himself being an “other,” getting displaced in his hometown and discriminated against in the Japanese colony. He has assimilated into Japanese culture, but still retains his own sense of aboriginal identity. Unable to negotiate between his ethnic identity and his subordination to Japanese colonial power, he experiences a sense of disorientation and displays signs of maladjustment. Hara-kiri (a Japanese approach of suicide) is thus his only way to get out of this ambivalent dilemma. Under the discourse of the colonial rule, two identities and cultures seem to be mutually exclusive. The invasion of Japanese culture threatens the local culture and consolidates the power of the Japanese colonists at the same time. Wei reveals this cultural crisis by highlighting the significance of preserving the indigenous culture. He depicts the tribe as a socio-political group of people with a unique culture, language and lifestyle as well as a collective memory and a sense of place. The tribal people refuse to assimilate into the dominant Japanese culture and embrace their subordinate indigenous aboriginal culture. The transition from yielding to Japanese colonist’s governance to the strengthening of local governing capacity indicates the decentralization of the local people.

The film *Kano* is set in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Kagi, a rural area of Taiwan, during the Japanese colonial period. The film documents a historical sports saga about a rural underdog baseball team which has never won any matches but finally makes its way to Koshien and brings back the runner-up trophy to Taiwan under the guidance of a Spartan Japanese coach Kondo Hyotaro. This brings a sharp turn to the fortunes of the baseball team which was often

marginalized and discriminated against. The experience of this team from trough to crest manifests the power of local vitality. It can be seen as a triumph of rural simplicity and passion. The team is constantly mocked by Japanese officials and journalists as a cocktail team, as it consists of Japanese, Han Chinese and aboriginals, but the flashback at the beginning of this film shows that the Japanese ace player is impressed by the “underdog” team’s performance in Koshien and thus “walks” all the way from Japan to Kagi, from city to rice field, to find out the reason for their success (B.-y. Chang 2016). This act shows the city dwellers’ retrospection on rural areas. This rural baseball team displays a strong team spirit: team members trust and help each other, especially after the pitcher Wu gets injured. Confronted with competitive opponents, they become fearless and unwavering warriors and eventually win the respect and support of both Japanese players and audience. If interpreting this under the framework of colonial relationship, it is interesting to note that the colonizer develops a reverent sentiment toward the colonized. The audience’s long-lasting cheering shows Japanese colonists’ appreciation toward the performance of the Taiwanese rural baseball team. However, since the film is shot from the Taiwanese perspective, the overemphasis of this cheering scene more or less reveals the Taiwanese’s subjective wishes of being acclaimed by the Japanese colonizer. The Taiwanese’s eagerness to approbation reflects their intrinsic lack of self-confidence to some extent. The identity of “the colonized” still casts a shadow over the Taiwanese people during the postcolonial period.

In conclusion, three major films directed by Wei, *Cape No.7*, *Seediq Bale*, and *Kano*, have all set in the rural areas, Hengchun (a southern township), the central mountain area, and Kagi respectively. These rural areas in Wei’s films glorify a sense of pride and unfold remarkable charm in different ways: Hengchun houses a group of undiscovered talented

musicians, the central mountainous area is inhabited by the heroic Seediq tribe, and Kagi witnesses the passion and perseverance of a baseball team. The praise for the energy and enthusiasm of rural dwellers is indicative of the shift in focus from urban to rural areas.

### **Rediscover the Rural Area**

Wei is not the first person who takes note of the city versus countryside dichotomy. In the 1980s, Taiwanese film director Hou Hsiao-hsien has touched upon this topic, discussing growing up and going away in his representative works *The Boys from Feng Kui* and *Dust in the Wind*. The protagonists in *The Boys from Feng Kui* migrate from the remote outer island to the main island of Taiwan; likewise, *Dust in the Wind* depicts two main characters who travel from their rural homes to the capital city of Taipei. Both films highlight the differences between the country and the city, particularly in terms of the spatio-temporal dimension. Yip claims that both films convey the contrasting psychological experiences of living in urban and rural areas: rural areas are dominated by “a sense of stability and harmonious unity” while urban areas are dominated by a sense of estrangement and indifference, so characters experience alienation and displacement when they leave the rural areas for urban areas, where the interpersonal relationships are not as close-knit as in rural communities. The different interpersonal relationship is what Yip considers the greatest contrast between the country and the city.

This psychological discrepancy between the city and country is related to Taiwan’s urbanization over the last several decades. The early urbanization of Taiwan is tied to its colonial pasts when the Japanese colonist established the island’s first urban center and built the infrastructure, such as railroads, highways and networks, laying the groundwork for Taiwan’s modernization. Many rural laborers abandoned villages in search of jobs in cities. Different from Hou Hsiao Hsien, whose films exhibit a transition from the country to the city, cites are



consigned to oblivion in Wei Te-sheng's films. The hustle and bustle of cities is replaced by the quiet and harmony of rural communities. It symbolizes a deeper reflection of the urbanization and colonization. The director glorifies the overlooked indigenous rough culture to stimulate the nerves of urban dwellers, and forces them to rethink the binary relation of "modern" and "tradition", "city" and "country". Does the director intentionally avoid the subject matter of the city in order to highlight the value of countryside? Probably not. The latest musical film directed by Wei, *52Hz I Love You*, released in 2017, is set in Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan. This is what Wei called the "dessert" film, relative to the "main course" of epic films. It comprises several romantic love stories in the city of Taipei on Valentine's Day. The title of the film refers to the loneliest whale in the world, the only whale emitting a whale call at the frequency of 52Hz. It is used as a metaphor for the loneliness of urban residents who yearn for love. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the three films, *Cape No.7*, *Seediq Bale*, and *Kano* are all set in the rural area of Taiwan. This is because the three films are set in the Japanese colonial period when modernization was at its initial stage: the time span of the film *Seediq Bale* and the film *Kano* is 1895-1930 and 1929-1944 respectively.

Tuneful music, high-quality casts, and intriguing plotlines have all contributed to the success and popularity of the films *Cape No.7* and *Kano*. Yet, another indispensable factor is that both films have evoked the nostalgia complex of contemporary Taiwanese for the Japanese colonial period. In the film *Kano*, the picturesque agrarian sceneries, beautiful architectures, harmonious communities, and complete set of infrastructure constitute a glorious view of the Japanese colonial period. Likewise, in the film *Cape No.7*, the melodic songs in the concert, enthusiastic and simple residents, romantic love letters and transnational love stories evoke a sense of warmth, optimism and approachability of small towns. These beautiful scenes of the

rural idyll are imaginary. It glamorizes the situation of Taiwanese people under Japanese colonial rule. Nevertheless, the two films reveal that Taiwanese hold a deep emotional appeal for building warm and harmonious communities in a society constantly shaped by industrialization and urbanization.

During the transition from rural life to urban one, rural dwellers tend to lose a secure sense of place. The modern city is envisioned as an impersonal and alienated place where one separates from everything. The full array of facilities in modern cities enables humans to be self-dependent. By comparison, the familiar organic unities of the rural area are “shattered and irretrievably lost” (Yip 2004). In traditional agrarian societies, the principal way of knowledge transfer is person-to-person. Hwang Chun-ming, a typical Taiwanese hsiang-t’u literary figure, laments the disappearance of the age of “From Confucius Says”, when people learned through direct observation and participation. In the era of mass media, in contrast, personal contact is not necessary any more. Instead, people tend to acquire knowledge and information from books, newspapers, television, and, most importantly, from the Internet. With an internet connection, it seems that we are better connected than our forebears. According to Frigyes Karinthy, a Hungarian author who first proposed the idea of “six degrees of separation”<sup>20</sup> in 1929, due to technological development in communications and travel, friendship networks could be further expanded. Karinthy particularly argued that the modern world was “shrinking” due to this ever-increasing connectedness of human beings. Despite great physical distances between individuals of the globe, the growing density of human networks make the actual social distance far shorter. Technological advances, especially the advances of network technology, have shortened the distance between people, yet at the same time, city dwellers increasingly experience a sense of

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<sup>20</sup> “Six degrees of separation” is the idea that all living things and everything else in the world are six or fewer steps away from each other. It further develops into a chain of “a friend of a friend” statement that any two people is connected in a maximum of six steps.

loneliness. Olivia Liang observes that the online world floods you with loneliness and relieves it at the same time. She admits her obsession with her MacBook in her book *The Lonely City*:

It was the first thing I looked at and the last, this descending scroll from mostly strangers, institutions, friends, this ephemeral community in which I was a disembodied and inconstant presence. Picking through the litany, the domestic and the civic: lens solution, book cover, news of a death, protest picture, art opening, joke about Derrida, refugees in the forests of Macedonia, hashtag shame, hashtag lazy, climate change, lost scarf, joke about Daleks: a stream of information, sentiment and opinion that some days, most days maybe, received more attention than anything actual in my life (Laing 2016).

As Laing acknowledged, an increase in Internet dependence has weakened her sense of reality. Much time and energy is devoted to the information that is irrelevant to her real life, which makes her isolate from her actual community. Hwang holds a pessimistic attitude toward the effects of technological advances on the intimate relationships between people. He argues that the regrettable result of such technological progress is that experience is atomized, and people become both physically and spiritually isolated (Yip 2004).

*Cape No.7* and *Kano* have brought a familial sense of community back to the audience. On the island's mad rush toward modernization, these two films presented what was lost and sacrificed during this process: harmony with nature, a sense of community, time-honored cultural traditions and local cultures and ways of life. The popularity of the two films reflects the audience's romantic imagination toward the irretrievable rural life, and reveals that they were nostalgic for the close-knit, intimate, direct interpersonal relationships in rural areas. In the large modern cities, interpersonal relationships are not based on familiarity and mutual trust. The atomization of existence is associated with the current situation of cities, where each individual human beings is increasingly isolated. Under such circumstances, two films featuring a sense of community evoked a historical retrospection of the urbanization. How should we perceive the country, or the rural area? Do they merely represent a backward, conservative culture that needs

to be eliminated? Are there any valuable qualities that have gone along with the disappearance of rural areas? In the last scene of *Kano*, the Kagi baseball pitcher asks his coach, “Sir, when we get home, will we see a crowd celebrating our return or people with disappointment written all over their faces?” (Wei 2014). The coach replies, “What we will see are boundless fields of gold swaying in the wind” (Wei 2014). The reply of the coach exhibits a wisdom on the basis of agrarian society that is beyond success and failure, beyond the contradictory relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and beyond worldly fame and honor; it is a simple but profound conception of nature that transcends victory, race, and politics. The seemingly conservative rural areas preserve the precious complex that people aspire to retain, though it might be spotlighted through a reminiscing filter, the close-knit community with intimate, direct and simple interpersonal relationships.

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