

Fragile National Identity in Taiwanese Historical Film

A Narrative Analysis of Selected Case Studies from the 1980s to 2010s

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Abstract This paper aims to redefine and negotiate the boundaries of Taiwan's identity through an examination of historical films, delving into its complexity and fragility. It begins by providing a contextualisation of Taiwanese historical films. It then proceeds to compare narrative styles between the 1980s Taiwan New Cinema and 2010s films, tracing the transition from one historical interpretation to another. Lastly, it argues for a distinct narrative style in the 2010s, citing examples from feature films and documentaries. This study contributes to the understanding of Taiwan's multifaceted national identity and the role of cinema in shaping it.

Keywords Taiwan cinema. Taiwanese identity. National cinema. Historical narrative. New historicism. Literature and Cinema.

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Taiwan cinema is best understood by treating the 'nation' as a nexus of internal and external contentions.

Hong Guo-juin
Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen, 2011-19

1 Introduction

1.1 Taiwan Cinema Studies

The national identity of Taiwan's cinema covers an ambiguous, complex, and even paradoxical reality, in relation to the multiple traumatic experiences of domination to which the island was subjected in its history. The present research on Taiwanese cinema is based on two axes: on the one hand, the analysis of the aesthetics in the filmography of major film-makers from 1982 to 1987, and on the other hand, the portrayal of the emergence of a collective consciousness through Taiwanese cinema, considering cinema as a witness or a vehicle for the formation and spreading of a national identity (Kolatte 2019, 13).

The first axis focuses on the most famous film movement in Taiwan's film history, Taiwan New Cinema or TNC (*Taiwan xin dianying* 台灣新電影). This movement was characterised by the emergence of talented film-makers who created their own signature styles, which brought international acclaim to Taiwanese cinema, contributing to the development of Taiwanese cinema as a respected art form on the global stage (e.g. Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, and its second wave, namely Ang Lee, Tsai Ming-liang and others). The major achievement of TNC is represented not only by its artistic contribution, but also by its portrayal of the complexity of Taiwanese identity. At that time, on the eve of the lifting of the martial law, this group of film-makers touched on taboo issues, bringing to light Taiwan's history that had been concealed in the past. Among these films are Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Taiwan Trilogy",¹ Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* 牯嶺街少年殺人事件 (1991), Wang Tong's "Modern History Trilogy",² Wan Ren's *Super Citizen Ko* 超級大國民 (1994); the second wave includes Lin Cheng-sheng's *March of Happiness* 天馬茶房 (1997), among others.

The second axis considers the historical and social context of the Republic of China (ROC)/Taiwan. Taiwan was colonised by authoritarian regimes throughout its twentieth-century history. In 1895, the island became one of Japan's colonies and the Japanese domination

1 Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Taiwan Trilogy" consists of: *City of Sadness* (*Beiqing chengshi* 悲情城市, 1989), *The Puppetmaster* (*Xi meng rensheng* 戲夢人生, 1993), and *Good Men, Good Women* (*Hao nan hao nü* 好男好女, 1995).

2 Wang Tong's "Modern History Trilogy" includes: *Strawman* (*Daocaoren* 稻草人, 1987), *Banana Paradise* (*Xiangjiao tiantang* 香蕉天堂, 1989), and *Hill of No Return* (*Wuy-an de shanqiu* 無言的山丘, 1992).

lasted for fifty years. After Taiwan's handover to the Republic of China in 1945, Kuomintang practiced an authoritarian system for almost forty years.³ Since the end of the 1980s, the island has experienced rapid democratisation in politics as well as a move towards globalisation in economic trade.⁴ Since 2000, Taiwan has faced different circumstances from that of the past. While the island has undergone several peaceful transitions of power and a gradual democratisation process, it has also encountered the ascent of China as a major world power, leading to increasing geopolitical threats. In this context, Taiwanese films from different periods are particularly capable of expressing this complexity: the plurality and evolution of identities.

1.2 Nation, History and Cinema

How to define the 'national' cinema of the island? A cinema produced by the stated-owned studio or a cinema capable of projecting 'an imagined community'? The attempt to define a national cinema must be aware of the historical events characterising Taiwanese history, as the history of the island and its multiple colonial experiences have shaped its national identity. Hayden White's neologism 'historiophoty' is composed of the roots 'historio-' (history) and 'phot-' (light) and defined as "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse" (White 1988, 1193), which also indicates that cinema often reflects a community's imagination of itself while portraying history.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Taiwan has faced a number of contemporary problems, including cultural crises, economic exploitation, and environmental pollution, all of which have been accelerated by globalisation and neoliberal influences.⁵ Additionally, Taiwan has experienced political and economic oppression due to the rise of People's Republic of China (PRC), which continues to impact the national identity of Taiwan today. This complex set of

³ Initially on the Chinese mainland and then in Taiwan. From 1949 to 1987, Taiwan underwent 38 years of martial law, which was qualified as "the second longest imposition of martial law by a regime anywhere in the world" (Chung 2017).

⁴ During the 1990s, on the political front, Kuomintang enacted a series of democratic reforms, such as the abolition of temporary provisions against the 1991 communist rebellion, the 1994 constitutional amendment, and the direct elections for the president, vice president, and Assembly in 1996. On the economic front, Taiwan also began to actively participate in international trade organisations, joining the GATT in 1993 and the WTO in 2002.

⁵ For instance, *Cape No. 7* is a film that presents the face of contemporary Taiwanese society under the influence of globalisation. Ivy Chang considers *Cape No. 7* a national parable of contemporary Taiwan, and the film's plot demonstrates the paradox of transnational cultures interacting in a post-modern time-space environment (Chang 2019, 97).

issues is reflected in the cinema of the 2010s, which projects an alternative national imagination compared to the 1980s one. The revival of Taiwanese cinema during this period has led to a significant increase in film productions. These diverse works offer an opportunity to delve into the current national imagination from different viewpoints. In parallel, the 2010s Taiwanese films inherit the *Zeitgeist* of TNC, with a renewed emphasis on historical themes. However, the interpretation of history diverges from that of TNC, reflecting a transition of national consciousness of modern Taiwanese history. Therefore, based on the concept of 'historiophoty', this article seeks to elucidate the national imagination of the 2010s Taiwanese historical films by approaching the issue on three distinct levels.

Firstly, the different narrative styles of Taiwanese historical films will be discussed. By examining the various styles of interpreting history in different periods, we can gain insight into the instability and fragility of Taiwanese nationality in its cinema history since the beginning. Secondly, since the 1980s, TNC have exhibited a spontaneous expression of national consciousness without state intervention. Therefore, the different narrative styles between TNC and 2010s Taiwanese cinema in terms of historical interpretation will be further analysed. By comparing the narratives, the transformation of national imagination in modern Taiwanese history can be illustrated. Lastly, the article will focus on the analysis of 2010s Taiwanese historical films by reviewing a range of feature films and documentaries, and will explore the interpretation of history and narrative styles employed in the historical films of the 2010s.

2 Narrative Style of Taiwanese Historical Films

Taiwanese cinema from different periods projects different ideologies. Before the 1980s, Taiwanese films were often produced by the state studio or under state control, which means the films had to conform to the spirit of the ruling government's political propaganda. However, this approach contributed to the creation of a paradoxical reality where the identity represented in these films did not always reflect the national imaginations of the islanders, in a context where the histories of the different ethnic communities and social classes were quite varied. For instance, *Sayon's Bell* (*Sayon no Kane* サヨンの鐘, 1943) is a propaganda film promoting the Japanisation (*Kōminka* 皇民化) during Japanese rule in Taiwan (1895-1945).⁶ After

⁶ 'Japanisation' or 'imperialisation' refers to a policy in which Japanese culture dominates, assimilates, or influences other cultures. During World War II, the Japanese government imposed its culture on the people of Taiwan through various measures, such as

the regime was handed over to Kuomintang, it began focusing on film production through the state-owned Central Motion Pictures Corporation 中央電影公司 (CMPC) in the 1960s.⁷ For nearly two decades, CMPC dominated Taiwan's major production companies and specially created a film-making genre named the 'Healthy Realism Genre' (*jiankang xieshi dianying* 健康寫實電影). Healthy Realism focused on showing the positive image of Taiwanese society and traditional Chinese values. The genre was used by the Kuomintang regime under martial law as a form of propaganda, with productions such as *Oyster Girl* (*Ke nyu* 蚵女, 1964) and *Beautiful Duckling* (*Yang ya renjia* 養鴨人家, 1965) being typical examples.

It was only in 1982 that Taiwanese cinema underwent a significant transformation with the emergence of the TNC movement. In the 1980s, influenced by the Taiwan nativist literature (*Hsiang-t'u Wenxue* 鄉土文學) of the 1970s, that activated film-makers' national consciousness, TNC broke through the restrictions of the authoritarian government and was able to narrate Taiwan's history authentically without any ideological control, and examined officially concealed history of the past. The TNC, as the cinema movement with the most far-reaching influence in Taiwan, successfully led Taiwanese films to international recognition due to its artistic achievements. But most of all, TNC demonstrated spontaneous representations of national consciousness, conveyed through its historical interpretation by filmic discourse.

However, from the end of the 1990s, after TNC (1982-7) and its second wave (1990s), Taiwan cinema faced a structural crisis. In 2002, in order to join the WTO, Taiwan lifted the deregulation on the import of foreign films, which was tantamount to opening up the film market to full trade liberalisation, allowing foreign films to be screened in Taiwan at will (Jane 2017). In the absence of a sound policy to protect the domestic film industry, the domestic film market was dominated by foreign films - especially Hollywood films -, resulting in the gradual collapse of the already fragile film industry. Production budgets were cut due to poor box office, which in turn affected the scale and quality of films, leading to a vicious cycle of film production.⁸ For nearly two decades, the domestic film industry had been in such a long slump. Only in 2008 was Wei Te-sheng's debut, *Cape No. 7*, accompanied by a boom at the box office and became a

mandating the use of the Japanese language and encouraging the adoption of Japanese names, with the aim of making Taiwanese people subjects of the emperor.

⁷ CMPC was established in 1954. Source: <https://www.movie.com.tw/about>.

⁸ Between 1995 and 2009, the average production of feature films was only around 18 films per year. The market share of national films was only 1-2% (Yeh, Davis 2008, 18, tab. 1.1.).

cultural phenomenon.⁹ Its reception aroused the public's interest in Taiwanese films and drove the revival of the 2010s Taiwanese films.¹⁰ Although TNC and the 2010s Taiwanese films seem to have different orientations – one authorial and artistic, the other commercial and genre-cinema –, one thing that is closely related is the focus of both on historical themes. In other words, although Taiwanese cinema in the 2010s has shifted away from the art-film style of the 1980s, it has not completely abandoned the *Zeitgeist* of TNC but has instead adopted a different narrative approach to interpret its concern for Taiwan's history.

The evolution of Taiwanese nationality is reflected in various forms of art, such as literature, music, painting, film, and others, that bear witness to social, historical, and cultural transformations. Among these, the development of literature and film is particularly closely related. Many Taiwanese films from different periods are adaptations of literary works. For instance, several Taiwanese language films (*Taiyupian* 台語片)¹¹ and martial arts films were originally from classical Chinese novels, such as *Luo Xiaohu and Yu Jiaolong* (*Luo Xiaohu yu Yu Jiaolong* 羅小虎與玉嬌龍, 1959-60), which was originally from Wang Dulu's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon; A Touch of Zen* (*xia nü* 俠女, 1971), retrieved from Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異); and *Legend of the Mountain* (*shanzhong* 山中傳奇, 1979), retrieved from some of Song dynasty's *Huaben*.¹² Anti-communist films (*fangong dianying* 反共電影) were adaptations of Anti-communist novels (*fangong xiaoshuo* 反共小說) or Scar literature (*shanghen wenxue* 傷痕文學), including *Black and Blue* (*lan yu hei* 藍與黑, 1966), *If I Were for Real* (*jairu wo shi zhen de* 假如我是真的, 1981), and *On the Society File of Shanghai* (*shanghai shehui dangan* 上海社會檔案, 1981).

Moreover, literature and cinema are not just form-shifting textual adaptations; they are especially co-constructing the contemporary national imagination in cultural terms. Taiwan nativist literature in the 1970s indirectly contributed to the birth of TNC (Yip 2004,

⁹ *Cape No. 7* earned nearly NT\$530 million at the domestic box office and remains the best-selling Taiwanese film to date.

¹⁰ In 2008, *Cape No. 7* created an unprecedented social-cultural fever and was called the "Taiwanese Miracle" (Chang 2019, 81). The unexpected success of *Cape No. 7* has resulted in the government's revision of its policies on grants for Taiwan cinema in order to assist the development of Taiwan's film industry (83).

¹¹ *Taiyupian* are films with Taiwanese as the spoken language and were prevalent from the 1950s to the late 1970s. The genre of *Taiyupian* is usually melodrama, produced on a very low budget. Source: <https://www.taiwanculture-uk.org/cs-film/2021/3/18/taiyupian>.

¹² *Huaben* 話本 is a short storytelling or novella written since the Song dynasty.

60).¹³ Several works by nativist literature writer Huang Chunming were adapted into films of TNC.¹⁴ Other nativist works such as Wang Chen-ho's *An Oxcart for Dowry* (*jia Zhuang yi niu che* 嫁妝一牛車, 1967; film 1985); Liao Hui-ying's *Ah Fei* (*youma caizi* 油麻菜籽, 1983; film 1984); and Hsiao Li-Hung's *Osmanthus Alley* (*guihua xiang* 桂花巷, 1977; film 1987) were also notable adaptations of nativist literature during TNC. Furthermore, the close bond characterising Taiwanese cinema and literature since the 1980s is proven by the direct involvement of book authors in the film creation process. Several writers participated in the creation of films, including Hsiao Yeh, Wu Nien-chen, Ting Ya-ming, and Chu T'ien-wen. The experiences of collaborating with TNC's film-makers also had a direct impact on their writing (Yip 2004, 61). Thus, inspired by nativist literature, TNC was also referred to as "national nativist cinema" (Huang 1995, 64). Both film and fiction aimed to deconstruct the grand narrative of state-defined national identity by the Kuomintang, displaying strong "native consciousness" (*bentu yishi* 本土意識) and an attachment to the land (Yip 2004, 62). This highlights the important influence of literature on cinema and nationality. In this context, to further explore the different characteristics of Taiwanese historical films in each period, we can refer to the development of Taiwanese historical fiction.

Taiwanese scholar Chen Chien-chung has made great contributions to the study of Taiwanese historical fiction. Chen's discourse on Taiwanese historical fiction is relevant to the study of Taiwanese historical films. Chen classifies Taiwanese historical fiction into four categories: Traditional Historical Fiction, Anti-Communist Historical Fiction, Post-colonial Historical Fiction, and New Historical Fiction, by analysing the narrative modes of Taiwanese historical fiction in different periods (Chen 2018, 45-6). These four types of historical fiction reflect the social culture and historical consciousness of Taiwan in different periods with different narrative modes. Although the examples presented by Chen are, as mentioned, mainly based on Taiwanese historical fiction, the classification not only echoes historical narratives if placed in the context of Taiwanese cinema, but also helps clarify the transformation of national imagination in Taiwanese cinema.

13 A literary style that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s in Taiwan, it generally refers to literary works that depict the middle and lower classes in local communities. Its literary style expresses the characteristics of 'self-subjectivity' and 'social realism'.

14 For instance, the films *The Sandwich Man* (*Erzi de da wan'ou* 兒子的大玩偶, 1983) is based on Huang's three stories *The Taste of Apples*, *Xiaoqi's Cap* and *His Son's Big Doll*. Other namesake works include *A Flower in the Raining Night* (*kan hai de rizi* 看海的日子, 1983), and *I Love Mary* (*wo ai mali* 我愛瑪莉, 1990).

2.1 Traditional Historical Films (1950s-1970s)

The first type of historical fiction, as defined by Chen, is Traditional Historical Fiction, focusing on the history of mainland China,¹⁵ where legendary historical characters emerged, and significant historical events happened. This type of fiction also has the characteristics of popular fiction (Chen 2018, 235-6). These works often “carry the projection of historical consciousness of the author, himself situated in his own time” (236). In terms of both thematic features and style, Traditional Historical Fiction echoes the popular martial arts films of the 1960s and 1970s, both of which aim to establish an ideal ‘Cultural China’ (through the fiction or film),¹⁶ reflecting, among the others, the historical context of *Waishengren* 外省人, the group of migrants who were exiled out of mainland China post-war.

In the case of Taiwan Cinema, from the 1950s, many Taiwanese opera film (*Gezaixi dianying* 歌仔戲電影), a type of *Taiyupian*, were originally from Chinese traditional legends, such as *The Story of Sit Ping-kwai and Wong Bo-chuen* (*xuepinggui yu wangbaochuan* 薛平貴與王寶釧, 1956), *Butterfly Lovers* (*yingtai bai mu* 英台拜墓, 1959), and *Tale of the Lychee Mirror* (*chen san wu niang* 陳三五娘, 1981). Later, in the 1960s, with the heavy promotion of Kuomintang nationalist policies, film production was changed gradually to Mandarin language films. Among these films, martial arts are one of the genre films that also feature traditional Chinese history. It is worth mentioning that although some martial arts films are set in Taiwan, the stories have nothing to do with the local landscape where they were filmed, which means martial arts films transformed Taiwan in a virtual China. For instance, King Hu’s martial arts films are mostly set in the Ming Dynasty, and the stories are about chivalrous heroes who rescue the loyalists. However, due to the diplomatic tensions between the ‘two Chinas’ during the Cold War, it was difficult for Taiwanese directors to film in mainland China in the 1970s. As a result, most of his films were shot outside China, in Hong Kong, Taiwan or South Korea. Two of his most famous films, *Dragon Inn* (1967) and *A Touch of Zen* (1971),

15 For Taiwanese people, the term ‘mainland China’ (*Zhongguo dalu* 中國大陸) refers to the People’s Republic of China (PRC). It distinguishes the PRC from Taiwan (officially the Republic of China) due to the political divide between the two entities. It’s worth noting that the interpretation and understanding of ‘mainland China’ can vary among individuals in Taiwan. Some may view it as merely a geographical term, while others may associate it with political implications and historical contexts.

16 ‘Cultural China’ refers to a broad conception of China based on cultural identity; Tu wei-ming argues that China does not necessarily refer to a political and territorial entity (i.e., PRC, to which it is usually made equivalent), but rather to a common cultural imaginary shared by other political and territorial entities (Tu 2005, 147). In other words, Cultural China does not necessarily correspond to mainland China, but includes other Chinese communities living in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, or the United States.

were both filmed in Taiwan, transforming the natural landscape of Taiwan into the Chinese mainland one (e.g. *Taroko* in Hualien, *Huoyan Mountain* in Miaoli) and thus projecting his ideal imagination of Cultural China in the film. In addition, as one of the major genre films in the 1960s and 1970s, martial arts films also represented a national allegory, implying the ideology of the ROC at that time. Films often emphasise the dichotomy of good and evil. This ideological narrative not only provides the audience with visual pleasure (the good chivalry conquers the evil), but also reflects the political confrontation between the ROC and the PRC (the good ROC would defeat the evil PRC), conforming to the policies propagated by Kuomintang (Lin 2015, 13).

As a result, from 1950 to 1970, we can observe that both Taiwanese language films and Mandarin language films produced in Taiwan reflected the imagination of Cultural China by traditional historical narratives. These genres not only proclaimed traditional Confucian values, but also conveyed a nostalgic recall to mainland China.

2.2 Anti-Communist Historical Films (1960s-1980s)

Since 1949, after the defeat in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC was established in Taiwan. As mentioned, Kuomintang strongly dominated the implementation of literary and arts policies since the 1950s in order to maintain the legitimacy of the regime. In the field of literature, writers were encouraged to devote themselves to the writing of anti-communist literature (Chen 2018, 105). In that of films, the state-owned film company CMPC fostered films that mimicked Italian neo-realism as one of the main genres of political propaganda (e.g. *Oyster Girl* [1964], *Beautiful Duckling* [1965], and *Good Morning Taipei* [1979], directed by Li Hsing). The CMPC was also involved in the production of anti-communist films as *By the Hillside* (*Mei Gang Chun Hui* 梅崗春回, 1954), its very first film, narrating the story of people and soldiers fighting against the Chinese Communist Party's People's Liberation Army. In the 1970s, due to a series of diplomatic crises such as being forced to withdraw from the United Nations and the severance of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Japan, the CMPC produced many patriotic films featuring the Sino-Japanese War to assert Kuomintang's political authority during this difficult diplomatic time, such as *Everlasting Glory* (*yinglie qianqiu* 英烈千秋, 1974), *Eight Hundred Heroes* (*babai zhuangshi* 八百壯士, 1976), and *Victory* (*meihua* 梅花, 1976) (Tseng 2010).

Such background for cinema, characterised by state-led patriotic films, could echo Chen's second category, Anti-Communist Historical Fiction. Most of Anti-Communist Historical Fiction depict the experience of exile during the Second Sino-Japanese War or the Chinese

Civil War, reflecting the history of those eras through the traumatic experience of individuals (Chen 2018, 105). The common denominator of the two art forms – fiction and film – is that they were deliberately cultivated by the authoritarian government and were intended to serve as cultural vehicles for political propaganda.

Compared to fiction, which tends to focus more on depicting individual experiences, anti-communist films place greater emphasis on the collective, aiming to evoke collective patriotic feeling and present a positive image of the state (Tseng 2010). In other words, the two art forms were committed to the goal of culturally constructing a single national identity through different vehicles in the public and private spheres.

2.3 Post-Colonial Historical Films (1980s-1990s)

The third type of Chen's classification is Post-colonial Historical Fiction. In contemporary post-colonial theory, the term "politics of memory" is used to refer to 'memory' as a tool used by the colonised to resist the colonisers in order to evoke the suppressed memory of the authoritarian eras, with a political connotation of "resistance to colonization" (Chen 2018, 369). The writing of Post-colonial Historical Fiction was a practice of "politics of memory" to retrieve the muted history at that time. In Chen's words, "post-colonial historical fiction is precisely a creation from the perspective of reconstructing historical memory" (237). With such political purpose, the concept of post-colonial writing is in line with the *Zeitgeist* of TNC. Both film and fiction aim to recreate the national history of the colonised, such as the periods under Japanese rule (1895-1945), the February 28 Incident, and the White Terror (1949-91). The motive of these works is to 'recover' the history of the past that was erased by the dictatorship, thereby recreating the trauma of the colonised.

Because of the political connotation of "resistance to colonisation", Post-colonial Historical Films often present a slow, realistic narrative aesthetic that expresses the sadness and gravity of post-colonial history. For instance, Hou Hsiao-hsien's "Taiwan Trilogy" explores the story of ordinary people at the time (between the 1900s and 1950s). The trilogy confronts the legitimacy of the official history through the recreation of personal memories of the common people, and further embodies the suppressed history of post-colonial countries. Among the films in the trilogy, *City of Sadness* depicts the February 28 Incident,¹⁷ which was triggered by a series of corrupt

¹⁷ The February 28 Incident, which occurred in 1947, was a significant uprising in Taiwan where the people revolted against the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) government. In

and unpopular policies of Kuomintang, who had just taken over Taiwan from Japanese rule. Hou Hsiao-hsien narrates the history of the Lin family in the *Jiufen* village by means of long takes and avoidance of close-ups, reflecting the traumatic memories of Taiwanese people in the big time. Other TNC films, such as Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), are set in the early sixties in Taiwan. *A Brighter Summer Day* is based on a true story about juvenile delinquency and gang violence. Using the concentration of long shots and natural lighting, Yang accurately presented the repressive atmosphere of the White Terror, and the teen crime reflects the authoritarian government's omnipresent violence during the martial law era. Wan Ren's *Super Citizen Ko* (1994) and Hou's *Good Men, Good Women* (1995) adopt a narrative strategy of time-space dislocation to piece together the memories of political victims. This narrative strategy not only highlights personal historical trauma, but also effectively serves as a political indictment.

2.4 New Historical Films (2010s)

The last of Chen's categories is named "New Historical Fiction" (*Xin lishi xiaoshuo* 新歷史小說), which is inspired by the theory of New Historicism (Chen 2018, 38). New Historicism, on the one hand, is a literary concept that was first introduced by Stephen Greenblatt (1982) and gained widespread influence by the end of the twentieth century. Unlike "former" (traditional) historicism, which focuses on the textual analysis of the work itself and aimed at the objective interpretation of texts, New Historicism views the text as a product of a specific era and region, that is, as a culturally imprinted document of the historical discourse. Specifically, history is seen as a process of textualisation, and the text itself is thought to have the quality of reflecting the context of history. Therefore, unlike former historicism, New Historicism considers the factors influencing textual production and emphasises the co-constructive relationship between the text and history, that is, "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose 2013, 20). On the other hand, New Historicism is also different from that of the past in terms of historical perspective. Influenced by post-structuralism, New Historicism is skeptical of the grand narrative of traditional historicism. For Foucault, history is a "discursive formation" that is

response to the rebellion, the KMT employed brutal force to suppress the movement. This event holds great significance in modern Taiwanese history and played a crucial role in promoting the democratisation in Taiwan (Fleischauer 2007).

constructed according to a specific time and space.¹⁸ In other words, as a post-modern approach to history, New Historicism emphasises that history should be deconstructed, non-linear, and decentred, and that a spatialised view of history needs to be established.

While New Historicism is commonly applied in textual analysis and interpretation of history, it has also inspired new approaches to storytelling. New Historicism argues that in order to understand facts, we should see them as if they were products of imagination, thereby opening up another way of interpretation of history (Chen 2018, 60). This way of historical interpretation is embodied in the fictional texts, which means story (e.g. novels and films). The texts of New Historicism often use deconstruction of grand narratives as a narrative strategy, creating a different approach of historical interpretation. These narratives employ New Historicist ideas to construct a more nuanced view of history, one that takes into account the complexities of context and multiple perspectives. Regarding the historical interpretation of New Historicism, I will further explain its narrative characteristics in the following paragraphs.

Chen defines the New Historical Fiction as a literary form with a deconstructive perspective on textual narrative and is concerned with the inter-construction between text and history, further embodying a post-modernist historical view through this narrative aesthetic. Therefore, the New Historical Fiction is not only a form of literary writing, but also historical writing itself. For Chen, New Historical Fiction emphasises a connection with contemporary society, in which writers engage with contemporary social issues through historical writing, and express their concern for society (Chen 2018, 72). The New Historical Fiction emphasises individualised discourse, with the first person, 'I', as the main narrator. This narrative strategy deconstructs the objectivity of traditional historical writing, allowing writers to create "Imagined (Non) Communities".¹⁹ In other words, the writers of New Historical Fiction no longer see history as an objective but engage with it through their own experience, seeking a 'dialogue' between the individual and society. Beyond fiction, the use of "deconstruction as a narrative strategy" can also be found in Taiwanese films of the 2010s, which, with reference to Chen's classification of fictions, can be called "New Historical Films" (NHF).

18 "Discursive formation" is in fact the combination of various 'Statements'. Different combinations of statements form different discourses, and the combination of statements can further develop into a system in the process of discourse formation and become different "Archives" (cf. Foucault 1969).

19 Chen's so-called "Imagined (Non) Communities" means that the New Historical Fiction creates a "synchronic" view of history, either by writing to recall a common memory or by fabricating a history of the "Other" in order to reflect its difference from our own history (Chen 2018, 75).

The Taiwanese films produced during the 2010s have established a distinctive style in terms of film paradigm and historical representation. In terms of film paradigm, unlike TNC, which used third-person perspectives such as realist setting and wide shots, the 2010s Taiwanese films left behind this paradigm of *auteur* and shifted towards developing genre films, transforming historical representation from a realist narrative into a popular narrative. In other words, instead of exploring historical facts in a heavy, melancholic style, NHF of the 2010s incorporated deconstructive and hyperrealist elements such as collage, time-travel or anachronism, as narrative strategies. These narrative strategies opened new styles in historical interpretation. However, has NHF formed a heteroglossic view of history, embodying a historical approach of public history,²⁰ or has it been influenced by fetishism, turning history into a mass commodity to be produced, sold, and consumed for the sake of commercial profit at the box office? This concern about the commodification of history remains to be further clarified, and we will not discuss it further here.

Nevertheless, the *Zeitgeist* of TNC – the historical consciousness of pursuing the island’s own identity – can still be identified in these commercial feature films of the 2010s, which continue to influence the creation of the most recent generation of film-makers. Through the above analysis, we can clearly observe that Taiwanese cinema in the 2010s has transitioned from Post-colonial Historical to New Historical Films (NHF). NHF re-negotiates the monolithic narrative of history, rethinking Taiwanese past in a different way that reflects a contemporary perspective on history.

3 Transition of the Historical Perspective Between TNC and 2010s Taiwanese Films

The above-mentioned narrative approaches to historical texts reflect the creators’ understanding of history as well as the prevailing ideologies of the respective era they belonged to. The last two narrative forms – Post-colonial Historical Films and New Historical Films – mentioned in the previous section, precisely embody the process of establishing Taiwanese consciousness free from state control in modern history. Hence, if TNC is regarded as the start of historical consciousness of Taiwanese identity, then the 2010s Taiwanese

20 The vehicles of transmission of public history are often associated with the consumption of popular historical products, such as films, television, museums, performances, and novels. Public history can be seen as a decentred historical discourse in comparison with traditional historiography (De Groot 2018).

films can be regarded as another page in the progress of Taiwanese identity.

In order to explore this evolution of historical perspective, I will further focus on the two distinct periods: the 1980s TNC and the 2010s Taiwanese films. By comparing historical films from these two periods, we can observe significant changes in the way Taiwan's national identity is constructed and represented. This shift will be analysed through three dimensions, namely changes in narrative structure, agency, and the representation of the 'Other'.

The first transformation pertains to the narrative structure. Although both the Post-colonial Historical Films and NHF display a counter-hegemonic ideology, they interpret history differently through their narrative structure. TNC adopted a realist aesthetic, such as long shots, long takes, natural lights and real scenes, to 'recreate' history that had been erased by the authoritarian regime, emphasising the national trauma. Through slow style, realist aesthetic and long silence, TNC pose a significant interrogation to Kuomintang authority and challenged the legitimacy of official history, which was under authoritarian rule at that time. For instance, in *A Brighter Summer Day*, in the scene of the secret police interrogating Mr. Chang, director Edward Yang uses scenery shot, medium shots, off-screen voice, as well as long silence to convey the intense state of the person being interrogated [figs 1-3]. Similarly, through ice cubes in the corridor and a puddle of water on the floor of the interrogation room, this scene subtly reveals how the secret police forced people to confess [figs 4-5]. By using a third-party perspective, *A Brighter Summer Day* recreates the atmosphere of the White Terror period, accusing the national trauma caused by state violence.

However, with the influence of New Historicism and post-modernism, the 2010s Taiwanese cinema does not intend to restore or recreate the past, but rather represent history in a re-contextualised way. That means historical events are extracted from the original context and placed in another reconstructed context. For instance, in the 2019 horror film *Detention* (*Fan xiao* 返校), the story is based on a real-life event during White Terror.²¹ By combining elements of the horror genre with local cult religion and folk culture, the historical events are re-contextualised into a new filmic text. In parallel, the storytelling of *Cape No. 7* combines two storylines: a pair of Taiwanese and Japanese lovers in 2008, and another pair of Taiwanese and Japanese lovers in 1945. Through juxtaposing the two storylines, *Cape No. 7* creates a narrative style to look back on the history under

²¹ *Detention* is based on a real-life event that happened in 1949 in Keelung Middle School, where the school was caught running an underground newspaper. The principal was executed while hundreds of students were jailed (Lee 2019).



Figures 1-5
A Brighter Summer Day,
 the scene from 153'33"
 to 171'25"

Japanese colonial rule with a contemporary regard, conveying another historical interpretation. Hence, we can observe that the focus of NHF has shifted from grand narratives to small narratives, with a tendency to deconstruct mainstream and authoritarian narratives,²² embodying a collage style of post-modern narrative.

The second transformation pertains to agency. Although TNC and 2010s Taiwanese films both exhibit characteristics of public history,²³ there are significant differences in their portrayal of agency. The portrayal of the characters shows more of the drive of agency in 2010s Taiwanese films than TNC. In TNC, characters mostly serve to reveal the sadness under the big time and the oppression of the authority, which they had no choice but to endure (Sing 2010, 144-5). Two films of Wang Tong's "Modern History Trilogy" are good examples. *Strawman* is a black comedy that portrays Taiwanese farmers' story towards the end of the Japanese occupation. The two brothers, the protagonists of the story, find an unexploded American bomb in a field and excitedly carry it to the city, hoping to be rewarded by a Japanese general. The journey is filled with slapstick humour but also outlines the damage of the war on the Taiwanese people. Another film, *Hill of No Return*, is about the story of the gold miners who worked for the Japanese in *Jinguashi*, a village in Taipei. The film

²² In *La Condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*, Jean-François Lyotard (1979) propose the use of *petit récit* (small narrative), a localised, event-centred, and personally centred pluralistic discourse, to question the totalitarian and eternal truths of grand narratives.

²³ The forms of transmission of popular history are diverse; the historical texts can be written, visual, audio, artifacts, or even digital, multi-media, in different form (Chou 2004). Chou defines public history as generally referring to: 1) history of the publics; 2) history written for the publics; 3) history written by the publics (Chou 2004).

depicts the humiliation they suffered at Japanese hands and the hardships of their working conditions, which convey the helplessness of Taiwan being forced to become a Japanese colony.

Compared to the pessimistic and powerless image of characters in the 1980s, the characters in the 2010s Taiwanese cinema have transformed, becoming active and courageous, showing the agency of individuals under the oppression of neoliberalist hegemony. Specifically, the oppressed classes can be seen standing up against the powerful classes. For instance, in *Cape No. 7*, one of the characters, the town council representative, sees his hometown losing its local characteristics as a result of the globalised capitalist hegemony. He therefore opposes the conversion of local resources into private property for a transnational consortium and fights hard for the rights of the local residents (Pan 2021, 290). Other films, such as *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* (*Saideke balai* 賽德克·巴萊, 2013) and *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* (*Dadaocheng* 大稻埕, 2014), recreate the historical incidents of the Japanese rule period, respectively the Wushe Incident of 1930 and the Petition Movement for the Establishment of a Taiwanese Parliament in the 1920s. The plots of these films both depict the bravery of the Taiwanese people in their struggle against the hegemonic regime.

The last transformation is the representation of the 'Other'. The period of TNC underwent the dissolution of martial law, so the purpose in these works is nothing less than a political recourse against the long-standing authoritarian regime of the Kuomintang. Such as in *Super Citizen Ko*, *A Brighter Summer Day*, *Banana Paradise*, *City of Sadness* and *Good Men, Good Women*, the story background is always around the White Terror, the collective trauma of state violence on the people of Taiwan. Yet, in the 2010s, Taiwanese films have shifted their reference to the 'Other' from the authoritarian regime of post-colonialism to the globalised issues of late capitalism. In some films that depict contemporary society, we can see that the issues they focus on have shifted from portraying the oppression of authoritarian rule in the past to examining the symptoms of contemporary society arising from neo-capitalist hegemony and global mobility. Such contemporary issue is particularly well portrayed in *Cape No. 7*. Due to the gap between urban and rural areas, the small town in the film faces many difficulties, such as brain drain, a crisis of traditional culture, and the occupation of local natural resources by international conglomerates. These storylines realistically depict the social issues in contemporary Taiwan and reflect the survival crisis of Taiwanese people under late capitalism.

Most importantly, there is a special 'Other' who is invisible in contemporary Taiwanese cinema, namely mainland China, which has emerged after the millennium (Berry 2017, 119). Although there may be a lack of explicit references to China in Taiwanese cinema of the 2010s, we can still perceive this invisible 'Other' by the significant

emphasis on Taiwanese identity, particularly in works that explored historical themes. For instance, film-maker Wei De-sheng's works (e.g. *Cape No. 7*, *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* and *Kano*, 2014) focus on depicting Taiwan's national memory of the Japanese rule period. By highlighting the historical connection between Taiwan and Japan, Wei's films showcase Taiwan's historical and cultural peculiarity. In parallel, by incorporating more local characteristics, the historical films of the 2010s also attempt to detach themselves from the historical context of Greater China and establish its unique Taiwanese history. For instance, the famous Taiwanese actor Chu Ke-liang plays a history professor in *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* (similar to a storyteller's role in this movie). Through his signature *Taike* feature,²⁴ *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* incorporated successfully the grassroot element with the historical theme and brings history closer to the public. Moreover, we can also see the emphasis on ethnic diversity, such as in *Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa in 1895* (2008), which features the Hakka people; and *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*, which depicts the Wushe Incident of 1930. Mona Rudao, the chief of Wushe (a village in Nantou County), led Seediq warriors to fight against Japanese police. Thus, through the representation of the 'Other' in TNC and 2010s Taiwanese films, we can observe that the 'Other' has shifted from the Kuomintang regime to today's mainland China. Specifically, Taiwan's attempt to establish a distinct identity separate from PRC culture is prominently depicted.

The aforementioned three transformations in historical interpretation reflect the globalisation-driven, geopolitical, and socio-cultural changes that have occurred in Taiwan since the turn of the millennium. These changes have influenced the ideological shifts among Taiwanese people and the process to establish their own identity through cinema. After exploring the evolution of historical perspectives between the 1980s TNC Post-colonial Historical Film and the 2010s NHF, our focus will now turn to analysing the narrative style of the latter.

²⁴ *Taike* 台客, a Taiwanese subcultural phenomenon widespread since 2000, was initially regarded as vulgar; however, as island consciousness rose in the 1990s and 2000s, *taike* gradually evolved into a Taiwanese cultural icon and a source of local pride. "Recently, *Taike* has imposed itself on the youth as an archetypal representation of a rediscovered local lifestyle and as the revaluation of a particular island identity" (Ligot 2012, 167).

4 The Narrative Styles of the New Historical Films

The resurgence of the film industry has enabled Taiwanese cinema in the 2010s to make significant strides in the development of themes and genres, leading to an increased experimentation with different narrative styles. Among these numerous works, whether they are commercially oriented feature films or art-oriented documentaries, there are some works that conform to the above-mentioned narrative style of New Historicism. In order to analyse this narrative style in more detail, I broadly categorise the historical narrative style of Taiwanese films in the 2010s into two categories: popular narratives in feature films and alternative narratives in documentaries. While it is evident that popular-narrative feature films dominate the trend in Taiwanese cinema during the 2010s, we should not overlook the many excellent creators in documentaries who boldly explore historical themes and interpret their personal views of history more intuitively, without worrying about commercial considerations. Specifically, both filmic forms reflect the thoughts of the 2010s' creators on history, and this will be the focus of my next discussion.

4.1 Popular Narratives

Regarding popular narrative, producers and directors have been, since 2010, trying to develop a more diversified and specific genre of films in Taiwan, such as horror, comedy, teenage and gangster, etc. Among the commercially successful films are also those related to historical themes. It is worth mentioning that in 2008, several new directors released their critically acclaimed debut films, which mainly featured popular narratives and successfully attracted public attention, marking a milestone in the history of Taiwanese cinema, and paving the way for the commercial film industry of the 2010s (Pan 2021, 284). Therefore, the Taiwanese cinema of 2008 can be seen as a precursor and catalyst to the resurgence of the film industry in the 2010s. Thus, the analysis to follow will also cover some works from 2008. Here are some examples of feature films.

The teenage coming-of-age film, *Winds of September* (*jiu jiang feng* 九降風, 2008), set on a high school campus in Taiwan in the 1990s just after the lifting of the martial law, reflects the collective memory and the social atmosphere of the 1990s at that time through the depiction of a seven-member youth gang who love baseball. Based on personal experiences, the director's semi-autobiographical portrayal of the post-martial law period successfully evokes contemporary collective memory and the public's nostalgia for the past, constructing a national allegory of the 1990s. A key plot point of the film refers to the

1996 baseball scandal that shocked Taiwanese society.²⁵ In terms of narrative structure, the film combines personal intimacy with social events through inter-referencing, evoking the common memory with the collective.²⁶ In terms of image style, the film is interspersed with news footage about the baseball scandal, blurring the line between feature film and documentary. For instance, in the final scene, the director arranges Xiao Tang to act with Liao Ming-hsiung,²⁷ the baseball player in the scandal (one of the seven members of the gang). This surreal scene juxtaposes two people from different time-space: the real (and nowadays old) Liao in 2008 and the fictional Xiao Tang in 1997. It combines the present and the past and blurs the line between fiction and reality. This arrangement embodies the narrative of NHF, guiding Taiwanese audiences to re-experience history and reminisce about their common memories.

Another film from 2008 is *Cape No. 7*. This film tells the story of two love affairs between Taiwan and Japan at different times. *Cape No. 7* is closely interconnected by two time-space: the Japanese evacuation from Taiwan in 1945 and the present-day Taiwan in 2008. The two storylines seem to be unrelated, but they are linked by seven love letters written in 1945. Through these seven unsent love letters, Tomoko and Aga (the lovers in 2008) discover the love story of a pair of Taiwanese and Japanese lovers who were forced apart by Japan's defeat in World War II. The film uses the love letters as the element of time travel, using audio-visual juxtapositions to interweave the love stories from two different time periods. Most importantly, when the lovers of the present-day, Tomoko and Aga, face their own moment of farewell as the past lovers did, they recognise the significance of history through the seven love letters, which eventually causes them to decide to stay together rather than repeat the regrets of the past. Further to the point, the love letters function as a key twist in the advancement of the storyline. They not only become in themselves a symbol of transitional time, but also signify the inspiration of the past history for the present time. This narrative strategy displays a historical interaction between two time periods, creating a time state of simultaneity. In Foucault's words,

25 The 1996 Chinese Baseball Fraud Scandal refers to several Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) players being arrested and facing charges of bribe-taking for match-fixing and baseball gambling. [http://twbsball.dils.tku.edu.tw/wiki/index.php/職棒簽賭事件_\(1996_年\)](http://twbsball.dils.tku.edu.tw/wiki/index.php/職棒簽賭事件_(1996_年)).

26 Taiwanese people used to consider baseball as their national sport. However, this scandal caused many fans to be disappointed and the number of spectators to drop drastically.

27 Liao Ming-hsiung was a Taiwanese baseball player. He was known as a baseball hero for his outstanding performance, but was later banned for life from the CPBL as a result of the 1996 Chinese Baseball Fraud Scandal.

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition [...] We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault, Miskowiec 1986, 23)

In the film, the narrative strategy of *Cape No. 7* - juxtaposing the epochs of 1945 and 2008 - demonstrates exactly the concept of Foucault about the time and space, embodying the notion of historical revelation to the contemporary, as emphasised by New Historicism.

In the film *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, the protagonist time-travels from present-day Taiwan to the time of Japanese rule to witness the historical event of Chiang Wei-Shui demanding that the Japanese government establish a self-governing parliament. This experience inspires the transformation of the protagonist from indifference to his own history to becoming conscious of history. It is thus seen that the theme of time-travel embodies the concept of intervention in history advocated by New Historicism, in other words, the importance of history for contemporary inspiration. The film *Detention* replicates the concept of its namesake prototype video game, presenting the 1970s White Terror in a meta-narration of dream-within-a-dream. It is worth mentioning that the film incorporates elements of horror genre films, visualising the authoritarian regime as a ghostly figure, which is different from the cinema language of TNC that employed realist aesthetics to present authoritarianism. Another example, the TV series *The Magician on the Skywalk* (*tianqiao shang de moshu shi* 天橋上的魔術師, 2021), also uses elements such as time-travel, magical realism and meta-narration to recreate the historical traces of Taipei city in the 1980s.

These feature films use a deconstructive concept to fragment history and include elements of commercial entertainment to make the subject of history more accessible to the public. The popular narrative employs the approaches such as collage, time-travel or magical realism to interpret a post-modern historicism. This narrative approach deconstructs linear history and constructs a “spatial history”, enabling contemporary audiences to search for a weak Messianic power in the fragments of history (Benjamin 1969, 254). On the other hand, the NHF usage of popular narrative also confirm Adorno’s concept of the “culture industry”, which commodifies history as a product for mass consumption, leading to the possibility of ideological control by the capitalist hegemony in the interpretation of

history.²⁸ In view of the above, in exploring the New Historicism of the 2010s, it is necessary not only to analyse popular narrative but also to consider alternative narratives from documentaries to fully comprehend contemporary perspectives on history.

4.2 Alternative Narratives

The second type of narrative style in NHF is the alternative narrative. Different from the popular narrative, which characterises commercially oriented feature films, the alternative narrative is mainly used in art-oriented documentaries. Their primary funding typically comes from the non-profit sector or the government, and the budgets for their productions are usually low. Consequently, devoid of commercial constraints, alternative narrative videos often employ avant-garde and experimental approach to interpret historical themes in the form of art-house films.

Taiwanese historical documentaries, especially those related to the Japanese colonial period, rely heavily on archival footage, historical documents, and first-hand interviews with witnesses or participants to provide an accurate and factual representation of history. These documentaries adopt a third-person perspective as the storyteller and use the linear storytelling approach to document individuals and present historical archives as evidence. For instance, *Viva Tonal* (2003) uses interviews and historical records to trace the evolution of popular songs during the Japanese colonial period. *Shonen-ko* (2006) combines archival footage and interviews to tell the story of Taiwanese teenagers who were sent to Japan to produce military aircraft during the war. *Song of the Reed* (2015) follows and films six Taiwanese comfort women as they heal their personal traumas caused by World War II.

Different from these historical documentaries, *Le Moulin* (2015) stands out as an experimental documentary that offers an alternative approach to storytelling. Instead of relying on conventional narrative approaches, *Le Moulin* combines archives and theatre to recreate the history of “Le Moulin Poetry Society” (*Fengche Shishe* 風車詩社) in the 1930s in Taiwan using a formerly avant-garde approach.²⁹ At the time, the surreal literary philosophy of Le Moulin Poetry Society

²⁸ Cf. the chapter “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer, Adorno 2002, 94-136).

²⁹ “Le Moulin Poetry Society” was a group of Taiwanese poets who were active during the Japanese colonial period. Influenced by French Surrealism, they belonged to a generation of Taiwanese individuals who were born and raised under Japanese rule. Most of the poets in the group wrote their works in Japanese, as they felt more comfortable expressing themselves in that language rather than in Chinese (Hioe 2016).

confirmed that Taiwan had an association with Western modernism as early as during the Japanese rule. Through voice-over, the documentary presents letters or diaries of the members of Le Moulin Poetry Society, reflecting the ambivalence of a colonised country caught between Western modernity and local identity. Unlike traditional documentaries, which display historical events for the audience through extensive interviews and archive collection, *Le Moulin* employs experimental approaches such as theatrical simulation, avant-garde music and visual collage to recreate the context at that time, leading the audience to feel the background of Le Moulin Poetry Society and its creative philosophy. This proves that the ambition of the millennial Taiwanese film-makers is no longer just to recreate the hidden history of the past, but to offer a multilingual and multi-temporal (Japan, Taiwan, France) view of history through a multi-media approach.

In addition, alternative narrative is not only a deconstruction of historical discourses outside the official context, but also a re-deconstruction and re-creation of official video archives. This deconstruction is not limited to the works themselves but is also evident in the curation and presentation of video screenings. The Taiwan International Documentary Festival (TIDF) exemplifies these characteristics. Since 2014, TIDF has been running a programme titled *Real Taiwan* (*Shiguang Taiwan* 時光台灣)³⁰ which is a project conceived by the current director of TIDF, Wood Lin.

Before discussing *Real Taiwan*, it is necessary to go back to its predecessor: *Memory Ninety-Nine* (*Jiyi jiujiu* 記憶玖玖). Wood Lin was invited to participate in the curation of the TIDF in 2010, which was also the 99th year of the ROC calendar. The last two characters of the Chinese name *jiujiu*, which spell out the Chinese number ninety-nine, are also homophonic with the Chinese word 'forever'. In Lin's view, the governing Kuomintang and Taiwanese society at the time were surrounded by the festive atmosphere of the centennial celebration of the ROC, but, as he considers, the historical relationship between the ROC and Taiwan had not yet been sorted out and clarified. That's why he conceived the programme of *Memory Ninety-Nine* to criticise the festive approach towards the 100th anniversary of ROC of the time, and further deconstruct the ideology created by the Kuomintang government for the ROC centennial celebration (Lin 2019). The name *Memory Ninety-Nine* suggests a question: can the memory of the Republic of China represent the memory of Taiwan 'forever'?

³⁰ Founded in 1998, the TIDF is one of the major platforms for documentaries in Asia. In 2014, the TIDF executive team established its permanent office under the Taiwan Film and Audiovisual Institute. The current program director is Wood Lin (2014-present). Source: <https://www.tidf.org.tw/en/page/32016>.

Building upon this idea, the selection of the programme contains a collection of official documentary propaganda films from different eras in Taiwan, such as *To the South, Taiwan* (*Nanjin taiwan* 南進台灣), *Happy Farmers* (*Xingfu de nongmin* 幸福的農民) and *Citizens' Dojo* (*Guomin daochang* 國民道場), produced by the Japanese government in 1920, as well as *The Livestock Industry in Taiwan* (*Xumu shengchan zai taiwan* 畜牧生產在台灣, 1953), the Sino-American Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR) propaganda film produced by Kuomintang to improve the island's agricultural basis in the 1950s.³¹ Wood Lin expected that the audience would become self-aware and reflective while watching these official propaganda films from different periods, and conscious of the government's self-propaganda created for the centennial celebration in that context (Lin 2015).

As Lin's ideas became more concrete, the prototype of the *Real Taiwan* project gradually took shape. In 2014, *Real Taiwan* was officially incorporated as a permanent programme of the TIDF. The objective of *Real Taiwan* is to discover the unknown side of Taiwan through video archives. The TIDF team released long-lost official materials and collected a series of propaganda films shot by the Agricultural Restoration Society from 1951 to 1965. These were shown under the umbrella title *Real Taiwan 1951-1965*. Using these gradually unsealed video archives, Lin aimed to present an alternative perspective on history and uncover the historical narrative that lies beyond the dominant official discourse. This is precisely the purpose of *Real Taiwan*.

In 2016, Lin and the TIDF team attempted a different curatorial approach, combining *Real Taiwan* with another programme of TIDF, *Taiwan Spectrum* (*Taiwan qie pian* 台灣切片). For the first time, a TV news video was added to the official videos to cover a wider range of historical themes. The module was titled *Green Team vs. TV News*. That year, TIDF screened the 1980s TV News of CTS³² and productions of the independent media outlet, Green Team (*Luse Xiaozu* 綠色小組),³³ together in the same session. For example, "Real Taiwan #1"

³¹ Established in 1948, the JCRR was a commission involving collaboration between the ROC and the United States. After the JRCC moved to Taiwan, it was credited with laying the foundations of agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan with a coordinated programme of economic, social and technical development. Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180727024521/http://nrch.culture.tw/twpedia.aspx?id=3923>.

³² Chinese Television System, Inc. (CTS) was an official television station in Taiwan previously owned by Kuomintang. CTS transformed into a public broadcasting group and became a member of Taiwan Broadcasting System after the democratisation. Source: http://web.pts.org.tw/~web01/TBS/index_e.htm.

³³ Green Team (1986-90) is regarded as the most important non-mainstream media group in the period prior to and after the lifting of martial law in Taiwan. Its members aimed to document social movements and transmit them to the public in order to fight against the official TV station. Source: <https://docs.tfai.org.tw/en/office/6231>.

screened the news *The Chiang Kai-shek Int'l Airport Incident* (1986) and *Follow-Up Report on the Chiang Kai-shek Int'l Airport Incident* (1986) by CTS, together with *The Taoyuan Airport Incident* (1986) by the Green Team. The background of this incident is that on 30 November 1986, when the exiled Hsu Hsin-liang (許信良)³⁴ planned to return to Taiwan from Japan, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)³⁵ mobilised its supporters to greet him at the airport.

In the TV News, the official media used many subjective words such as 'lawbreakers' (*bufa fenzi* 不法份子), 'mob' (*yexing fenzi* 暴亂份子), 'barbarians' (*baoluan fenzi* 野性份子) and 'extremists' (*pianji fenzi* 偏激份子) to describe DPP's supporters at the airport, and repeatedly showed images of the supporters throwing rocks at military police. Such broadcast was clearly intended to stigmatise these DPP supporters and conceal the fact that Hsu Hsin-liang himself had returned to Taiwan. However, in *The Taoyuan Airport Incident*, the Green Team documented the full sequence of the incident from another perspective. The opening of the film shows that DPP issued a speech at the party headquarters before departure, in which the organisers called for its supporters to walk to the airport in a peaceful and non-violent manner. But in the next scene, we can see the military police deliberately blocking supporters from entering the airport. Afterwards, military police tries several times to disperse the crowd with water jets and tear gas. This conflict lasts until late into the night, when Hsu Hsin-liang himself arrives at the airport to address his supporters. This curatorial concept juxtaposes official media and independent media to view the same event through different perspectives, allowing the audience to experience directly the manipulation of different ideologies, thus creating reflexivity in the process of watching and further asking: what is real?

In 2018, Wood Lin planned to interpret official archival materials through visual intervention. The project, titled *Real Taiwan 2018: Archives Revisited* (*Shiguang taiwan 2018: fan dang'an* 時光台灣2018: 翻檔案), is a collaboration between the Taiwan Film Audiovisual

34 Hsu Hsin-liang is a Taiwanese politician, formerly Chairman of the DPP. In 1979, Hsu left Taiwan exiled in the United States, where he maintained his position opposing Kuomintang. In 1986, he tried to return to Taiwan via Japan, but was repeatedly blocked at the airport by the Kuomintang government.

35 Founded in 1986, the DPP is the first local political party in Taiwan. DPP is currently the majority ruling party and the dominant party in Taiwan.

Institute (TFAI)³⁶ and the Public Television Service (PTS).³⁷ Fourteen film-makers participated in this project to shoot short films using the official archival videos in the TFAI's collection. The film-makers edited these official video materials (e.g. TV news, political propaganda videos, and early national films), integrating them into their own videos and ultimately reinterpreting them to produce new works. These short films were screened both at the TIDF and on the PTS. Although such re-creation of official video has been practiced in foreign countries for years, it is still a new concept for Taiwanese film-makers (Lin 2019). This is primarily due to the fact that it was only after the dissolution of martial law that the government gradually started making public what was once considered classified official material. In Lin's words:

What I contemplated was to liberate these images. While we now talk about transitional justice in political terms, I feel that it can be achieved in terms of images too. How should we give new political meaning to these authoritarian images of the past and subvert them? (Lin 2019)

These thirteen short films touch on a wide range of issues: Chung Chuan's *One World One Dream* (*Yi zhong* 一中) and Fu Yue's *Taiwan Province of China* (*Buceng xiaoshi de taiwan sheng* 不曾消失的台灣省) investigate the political issues of history and identity between China and the Republic of China/Taiwan. Rina B. Tsou's *The Horrible Thirty: Me, My Father and Richard the Tiger* (*Hufu niuniu de wei erli* 虎父妞妞的未而立) and Shen Ko-shang's *Moment Within Time* (*Shiguang zhong* 時光中) explore the connection between individual family memories and collective history. Chen Singing's *In Trance We Gaze* (*Huanghu yu ningshi de lianxi* 恍惚與凝視的練習) discusses the relationship between Taiwan traditional folk religions and individual existence. Lau Kek-huat's *Firefly* (*Yinghuo* 螢火) extends its vision to the history of Chinese immigrants in Malaysia, mirroring the history of Sino-phone diaspora with that of Taiwan.

Through the above examples, we can find that both the documentaries themselves and Lin's curatorial concept demonstrate the ambition for history discourse, practicing the New Historicist concept in the 2010s. These documentaries use an alternative narrative style to deconstruct history, to diversify history and allow us to gaze at the past with a contemporary view.

³⁶ The TFAI is the national administrative institution specialising in the collection of audio-visual assets, with the mission of preserving, restoring, researching, and promoting these assets and making them available to the public. Source: <https://www.tfai.org.tw/en/page/history.html>.

³⁷ The PTS is the first independent public broadcasting institution in Taiwan. Since its creation, PTS has been perceived to be a hallmark of the 'Taiwanisation' efforts.

5 Conclusion: Cultural Imagination of Post-Nationalism

In *Cinema et histoire*, the French historian Marc Ferro called the historical film as “a cinematic writing of the past” (Rosenstone 2012, xiv), and such film-makers create independent interpretations of history and thereby make “an original contribution to the understanding of past phenomena and their relation to the present” (25). Since the 2010s, Taiwanese historical films (both feature films and documentaries) have created different forms in the cinematic writing of history, such as anachronic narrative and meta-narration in terms of narrative approach, or hyperrealist aesthetics and reconstitution of video archives in terms of visual style, etc. These transformations are not only stylistic innovations, but also convey a desire to reconstruct self-identity. In other words, when people look at the past in different forms, they are not just reinterpreting it, but also presenting a contemporary self-imagination.

In *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary*, Yip argues that national imagination has developed towards post-colonial, post-modern and globalised trends in Taiwanese films from the 1980s to 1990s, demonstrating the characteristic of “post-modern hybridity”, which has enabled Taiwan to become a post-nationalist paradigm (Yip 2004, 285). However, Ming-tsung Lee considers that Yip’s post-nationalist argument, while persuasive in post-colonial and post-modern discourses, lacks a relevant discussion of nationalism (Lee 2006, 237), overlooking the complexity of the historicisation process in Taiwan and its impact on the transformation of national consciousness, resulting in the oversimplified discourse of national imaginary that “Taiwan’s nationhood started too late and its ‘post-nationhood’ came too soon” (240). Looking back at Yip’s argument, it was perhaps a little premature for Taiwan in the 1990s to be considered the vanguard of post-nationalism at that time. More recently, the Taiwanese identity-making process in the 2010s has experienced several significant moments, such as the Sunflower Student Movement,³⁸ the alternation of political parties, the boom in social media, the acceleration of inter-globalisation, and the rise of the PRC, etc. All these changes have been constantly shaping the direction of Taiwan cinema and projected the national imagination of Taiwanese people. Today, the arguments of Yip are no less than a prophecy of the current global and Taiwanese situation, and Taiwan cinema since the 2010s is reflecting the national imagination of contemporary Taiwan. Nonetheless, in the post-capitalist era

38 A protest movement driven by Taiwanese students and civic groups in 2014. Students stormed the national legislature to oppose a free trade agreement with China. Source: <https://oftaiwan.org/social-movements/sunflower-movement>.

of accelerated globalisation, liberal multiculturalism and geopolitically re-organisation, developing a post-nationalist cultural imagination and building the new self-identities is not only a trend but also a compelling choice for Taiwan today.

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