# The Rebellious Slowness: Youth Culture, Political Resistance and Historical Reminiscence in Taiwan New Cinema

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## Abstract

Published by a group of young Taiwanese filmmakers in 1987, the Taiwan New Cinema manifesto shared concerns about the future and authenticity of Taiwanese cinema. With the unique adoption of slow-cinema techniques by these Taiwanese New Cinema filmmakers, such as static cameras, deep focus, long takes, complex depth of field, cool color schemes, and melancholic atmosphere, Taiwanese cinema from 1980s to early 2000s has influenced many contemporary Taiwanese and Asian filmmakers. Focusing on the works of three highly influential filmmakers associated with the Taiwan New Cinema -- Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-Liang -- this thesis explores how the aesthetics of "slowness" in cinema operates as a critical response to the social, political, and economic changes in Taiwan in the late twentieth century as it transitioned from the era of Kuomintang authoritarianism to that of neoliberalism and the post-martial law Democratic Progressive Party ruling. In doing so, this thesis explores the impact of Taiwan's authoritarian regimes, neoliberal reforms, democratization, and queer activism on the everyday space captured by their slow cameras. This thesis also investigates the youth culture, which is one of the main forces of Taiwan's tumultuous societal transformation, as portrayed in the similarly "young" New Cinema films. By examining Hou Hsiao-Hsien's portrayal of lower-class countryside youth, Edward Yang's exploration of the high-middle class urban generation, and Tsai Ming-Liang's depiction of marginal queer flâneurs, this thesis demonstrates how New Cinema films act as a critical mirror reflecting subtle resistance by youth to neoliberal expectations of individualism and Confucian ideals of collectivity in Taiwan. The rebellious young generations in these films thus represent a desire to establish a Taiwanese identity that is distinct from Chinese, Japanese, and American influences. In doing so, this thesis illuminates the power of slow cinema as a timely medium for reflecting and addressing social and political issues.

## Abrégé

Publié en 1987 par un groupe de jeunes cinéastes taïwanais, le manifeste du Nouveau Cinéma taïwanais partageait des préoccupations concernant l'avenir et l'authenticité du cinéma taïwanais. En adoptant des techniques uniques de films contemplatifs, tels que des caméras statiques, une mise au point profonde, des prises de vue longues, une profondeur de champ complexe, une palette de couleurs froide, et une atmosphère mélancolique, le cinéma taïwanais des années 1980 au début des années 2000 a influencé de nombreux cinéastes taïwanais et asiatiques contemporains. En se concentrant sur les œuvres de trois cinéastes très influents associés au Nouveau cinéma taïwanais : Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang et Tsai Ming-Liang, cette thèse examine la manière dont l'esthétique de la « lenteur » dans le cinéma fonctionne en tant qu'une réponse critique aux changements sociaux, politiques et économiques survenus à Taïwan à la fin du XXe siècle. Cette période a marqué la transition entre l'ère autoritariste du Kuomintang et celle du néolibéralisme, avec le Parti progressiste démocratique au pouvoir suite à la levée de la loi martiale. En ce sens, cette thèse examine l'impact des régimes autoritaires, des réformes néolibérales, de la démocratisation et de l'activisme queer à Taïwan sur l'espace quotidien capturé par leurs caméras lentes. Elle analyse également la culture de la jeunesse, l'une des principales forces de transformation tumultueuse de la société taïwanaise, telle qu'elle est dépeinte dans les films du Nouveau cinéma, qui sont également considérés comme « jeunes ». En parcourant la représentation par Hou Hsiao-Hsien de la jeunesse rurale de la classe inférieure, l'exploration par Edward Yang de la génération urbaine de la classe moyenne supérieure, et la représentation par Tsai Ming-Liang des flâneurs queer marginaux, cette thèse démontre comment les films du Nouveau Cinéma agissent comme un miroir critique, reflétant une résistance subtile de la jeunesse aux attentes néolibérales d'individualisme et aux idéaux confucéens de collectivité à Taïwan. Les jeunes générations rebelles de ces films représentent donc un désir d'établir une identité taïwanaise distincte des influences chinoises, japonaises et américaines. Ce faisant, cette thèse met en lumière le pouvoir du cinéma lent en tant que moyen pertinent de réflexion et de traitement des questions sociales et politiques.

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## Introduction:
## The Slowness, The Youth, and The Auteurs

> The image is not a certain meaning, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as a drop of water.
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> — Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*[1]

In a frantic world that celebrates instantaneity and speed, digital media has become easier and faster for people to consume, exemplified by the widespread mobile devices and social media such as TikTok videos.[2] However, a number of "slow cinemas" that embrace contemplation, silence, and duration have developed significantly, resonating with a larger sociocultural movement that aims to slow down the accelerated tempo of late capitalism in recent years, such as the "cittaslow" and Slow Food movement in Italy.[3] In the April 2010 issue of *Sight & Sound*, the journal's editor Nick James set in motion a polemic that was later referred to as the Slow Cinema Debate.[4] In his editorial piece, James outlined Slow Criticism and Slow Cinema as acts of passive aggression mounted against the Hollywood domination of the film industry. While slow cinema has been popularly discussed in Western cinema, slow cinema in Asia is often overlooked. Different from James' argument of slowness as rebellion, the development of Asian slow cinema often reflects social anxiety from certain cultural-specific social issues. Sinophone slow cinema often explores the notions of time, history, memory, absence and allegory in the works of Chinese auteurs. The idea of being left behind is common to many slow cinema films in Asia, played out through both mise-en-scene and the characters' narration. For instance, Domitilla Olivieri argues that Kazuhiro Soda's

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[1] Tarkovsky, Andrey. *Andrey Tarkovsky: sculpting in time: reflections on the cinema* (London: Bodley Head, 1986).
[2] De Luca, Tiago, and Nuno Barradas Jorge, eds. *Slow Cinema*. Traditions in World Cinema. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
[3] Çağlayan, Emre. *Poetics of Slow Cinema: Nostalgia, Absurdism, Boredom*. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 8
[4] James, Nick. "Passive-Aggressive," *Sight & Sound*. 20: 4 (2010), 5.

slow-paced observational documentary *Inland Sea* (2018) is a way of "seeing politically."[5] The seemly primitive but casual lifestyle of the lonely old lady is disruptive of the normative: the teleological, goal-oriented, colonial, and capitalist mode that has been established as dominant in our society. Jessica Yeung further argues that Xu Xin's *Yangtze River Landscape* (2011) which maps the homeless or jobless people living by the riverbank, speaks to the wreckage of the post-socialist economy, the failures of modernity, notions of prosperity/poverty, progress/stagnancy, future/past, and life/death.[6] While slow cinema is a relatively new filmic rhythm in Asia, it is also a complex cinematic consciousness moderated by neoliberalism, capitalism, government censorship, and highly praised productivity.

As South Korean-born German philosopher Byung-Chul Han suggests, our current society of achievement and activeness is generating excessive tiredness and exhaustion, especially in East Asian countries because of their collectivism and family-centred ideologies.[7] In the case of Sinophone cinema, the depiction of Confucian patriarchy in the service of neoliberal globalization becomes critical. While neoliberalism suggests that economic progress is best achieved by liberating individuals to pursue their own initiatives, Confucianism, on the other hand, requires people to follow filial piety that stresses the importance of family and collectivism. However, the post-Mao younger generation are living in a neoliberal economy where social services rely on individual family member, labor becomes devalued in the ''free'' marketplace, and the young people take up the slack in both the workforce as well as the domestic sphere.[8] As anthropologist Lisa Rofel suggests, in

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[5] Olivieri, Domitilla. "Slowness As a Mode of Attention and Resistance: Playing with Time in Documentary Cinema and Disturbing the Rhythms of the Neoliberal University." *Contention* 10, no. 1 (2022): 99–114. https://doi.org/10.3167/cont.2022.100108.

[6] Yeung, Jessica. The Environment and Social Justice in Chinese Documentaries: Crisis or Hope?. In: Lo, KC., Yeung, J. (eds) *Chinese Shock of the Anthropocene*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2019, 37-55.

[7] Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 31.

[8] Chan, Kam Wing. "Migration in China in the reform era: characteristics, consequences, and implications." *China's Developmental Miracle*. Routledge, 2016. 111-135; Duckett, Jane. "Neoliberalism, authoritarian politics and social policy in China." *Development and Change* 51.2 (2020): 523-539; Zhou, Yu, George CS Lin, and Jun

terms of China, while emphasis on consumer and mass culture has dominated urban life since the June 4th movement, urban infrastructural projects and foreign investment have wanted to create labor at minimal cost, objectifying the labourers.[9] It is important to note that the ongoing interplay between neoliberalism and Confucianism in the Sinophone world often aims to construct collective identity, assisting the relatively new neoliberal ideology in integrating with older generations.[10] The Confucian ideology, which emphasizes social harmony, obligation, and obedience, both within kinship relations and across wider social interactions, regulates the culturally specific neoliberalism that necessitates both individual success and familial sacrifice.

Geographer and specialist on China's urbanization, Fulong Wu, further argues that managing cheap labor was a crucial task in governing the market during the neoliberal reform.[11] For people living in such a society, consumerism proves to be a firmer common ground than Confucian values like filial piety. For example, the act of "buying services" like sending the elderly in the family to nursing homes or hiring a personal care attendant is much more "productive" than being "filial" and taking care of them on their own. In other words, the act of utilizing commercial services and institutions for elderly care is considered in alignment with the principles of a neoliberal economy. The clash between these two ideologies has been shown in Sinophone cinema, such as Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers* and Ann Hui's *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt*.[12]

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Zhang. "Urban China through the lens of neoliberalism: Is a conceptual twist enough?." *Urban Studies* 56.1 (2019): 33-43.

[9] Rofel, Lisa. *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Perverse Modernities, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

[10] Zhao, Wenting, and Gwen Bouvier. "Where Neoliberalism Shapes Confucian Notions of Child Rearing: Influencers, Experts and Discourses of Intensive Parenting on Chinese Weibo." *Discourse, Context & Media* 45 (March 1, 2022): 100561. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100561.

[11] Wu, Fulong. "How Neoliberal Is China's Reform? The Origins of Change during Transition," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 51, no. 5 (2010): 619–31.

[12] Liu, Catherine. "Taiwan's Cold War Geopolitics in Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers*," Essay, In *Surveillance in Asian Cinema: Under Eastern Eyes*, edited by Karen Fang, 113–27. New York: Routledge, 2017; Marchetti,

Slow cinema, therefore, is an intriguing genre to look at, considering its effort to rescue temporal structures from what Lim Song Hwee terms the "accelerated tempo of late capitalism". Slow films demand patience, attention, and imagination that are designed to transform idleness and monotony into a productive way of social and political reflection.[13] The popularity of the delayed cinematic rhythm in Sinophone cinema, therefore, becomes a representation of the feeling of stagnation and being trapped for the young people who are asked to be successful, independent, and flexible, but at the same time, obeying filial piety. While slow cinema is still an emerging genre in Asia, it is a profound medium for scholars to study the culturally specific Sinophone society.

**The Present, Past, and Future of Slow Cinema**

In a film industry largely dominated by American blockbusters and propagandist "main melody" films, the slow cinema genre, with its focus on social justice, equality, and the human costs of China's economic growth, seems out of place. However, it manages to thrive year after year, not only in China but also in many other Asian countries. This growth is nurtured by the unrelenting aspiration of Asian filmmakers to address the prevailing circumstances of their times in a meaningful manner. In the contemporary Asian cinematic world, many young filmmakers adopt this kind of cinematic language, and slowness has become a popular trend. For example, Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul has adopted a meditative style with minimal dialogues, long takes, and static camera since his first featured-length fictional film, *Blissfully Yours* (2002). Filipino director Lav Diaz has made several of the longest narrative films on record, including Evolution of a Filipino

Gina. "Gender Politics and Neoliberalism in China: Ann Hui's *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt*," *Visual Anthropology* 22, no. 2-3 (2009): 123–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/08949460802623747.

[13] Çağlayan, *Poetics of Slow Cinema*, xiii.

Family (2004) which runs for over ten hours long. Mainland Chinese filmmaker Bi Gan has further experimented with the genre of slow cinema with a 59-minute-long, unbroken long take in 3D in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (2018). More recently, Filipino filmmaker Carlo Francisco Manatad's feature directorial debut, *Whether the Weather is Fine* (2021), combines the catastrophic typhoon aftermath and slow, long takes to create a certain sense of surrealism. There is also an overlap between slow cinema and the creations of Sixth-Generation directors in Mainland China, including names such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Bing, Xu Xin, and Tibetan filmmaker Pema Tseden. Due to limited funding for elaborate productions, these directors naturally embraced a stripped-down aesthetic. They employed techniques such as long takes, ambient sound, handheld cameras, and non-professional actors.

These young slow cinema masters were all somewhat influenced and inspired by the Taiwanese masters, including Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-Liang, who first picked up this style. For example, Apichatpong Weerasethakul discloses in the documentary *Flowers of Taipei: Taiwan New Cinema* (2014), "When I watch films by Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang or Tsai Ming-Liang, I always fall asleep. Years later, my films put audiences to sleep. Maybe there's a special power to these films that take viewers to a different world, a different state of relaxation, where we can leave ourselves behind. Film transports us to a dream world, then as we wake up, we're still there, almost like a unique voyage."[14] In the same documentary, Jia Zhangke also expresses the influence of Hou Hsiao-Hsien on his work, especially Hou's first new-cinema film, *Boys from Kengkuei*. Therefore, in order to understand the popularity of slow cinema in Asia nowadays, it is essential to go back to the root and study the Taiwanese slow cinema auteurs, as well as their films'

[14] *Flowers of Taipei: Taiwan New Cinema* is a tribute from filmmakers and critics around the world to the Taiwan New Cinema movement in the 1980s.

engagement with the cultural-specific social issues in society.

Current scholarship around slow cinema has been mostly around the Western masters. For example, Ira Jaffe's *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action*, Lutz Koepnick's *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, and Tiago de Luca's *Slow Cinema* all analyzed Western slow cinema in detail.[15] With the recent publication of Song Hwee Lim's *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness* and Jean Ma's *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema*, the significance of Asian slow cinema has begun to be recognized by academia.[16]

While Hou Hsiao-Hsei, Tsai Ming-Liang, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Lav Diaz, Hirokazu Kore-eda, etc., are all masters of slow cinema, Asian cultural-specific slow cinema is still overlooked. Many scholars have mistakenly argued that slow cinema in Asia has developed later than the European slow cinema after "imitating the west." The incorporation of the "time-image"[17] that reflects the personal visions of its director rather than the general styles of its contemporaries appears as early as in Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* (1948), which takes place in a ruined family compound in a small town in the Jiangnan region after the Sino-Japanese War.[18] This thesis thus aims to contribute to the emerging discussion of slow cinema in Asia. Taiwanese New Wave cinema, which is one of the earliest new wave movements that aim to acquire an identity as a cohesive movement while grappling with the fallout of the "economic miracle," occupies a central position within the Asian slow cinema.

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[15] Jaffe, Ira. "Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action." Dissertation, Wallflower Press, 2014; Koepnick, Lutz P. *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*. Columbia Themes in Philosophy, Social Criticism, and the Arts. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014; De Luca, Tiago, and Nuno Barradas Jorge, eds. *Slow Cinema*. Traditions in World Cinema. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

[16] Lim, Song Hwee. *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016; Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 2010.

[17] This term "time-image" is from French philosopher Gills Deleuze's book, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. This term has been cited by other scholars, such as De Luca (2016); Lim (2016); Çağlayan (2018), as one of the formal elements of slow cinema. This will be explained in more details in later section.

[18] Li, Jie. "Home and Nation Amid the Rubble: Fei Mu's 'Spring in a Small Town' and Jia Zhangke's 'Still Life.'" *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 21, no. 2 (2009): 86–125.

Therefore, this thesis chooses to analyze the three key filmmakers from the Taiwanese New Wave, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-Liang, to discuss their distinctive ways of intertwining time and history.

Before we turn to these Taiwanese masters, it is important first to understand the emergence of slow cinema as a genre in terms of its basic formal elements of cinema, including cinematography and editing. The discussion around the "cinematic time" and natural flow of reality among film theorists largely builds the base of slow cinema. Starting from the premise that film has an "ontological" relation with reality owing to its photographic basis, French film theorist André Bazin celebrated the fact that cinema allowed "for the first time, the image of things to be likewise the image of their duration, change mummified."[19] In contrast to the montage-based aesthetics as praised by Sergei Eisenstein, Bazin admired films that preserved the continuity of reality by employing non-professional actors, shooting on location, and, most impressively, using depth of field and the long take, which together produced what he famously conceptualized as a "sequence shots."[20] He favors long takes for its temporal realism: the long take's time is the event's time. According to Bazin's "law of aesthetics," the long take is necessary for verisimilitude. He justified the use of the long take by the criterion of "bringing an added measure of realism to the screen."[21]

For example, Bazin discussed the works of German filmmaker F. W. Murnau, whose shots "do not add to or deform reality" but merely "bring out the pre-existent structures of reality."[22] Alexandre Astruc further elaborates on Bazin's comments on Murnau's cinema and notes it in "relational terms." In Murnau's films, "everything happens within the sequence"; that is, each shot begins anew and does not depend on the shot before or carry over to the shot

[19] Bazin André, Dudley Andrew, Hugh Gray, and Jean Renoir. *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
[20] Ibid., 35
[21] Bazin, André. What is cinema? Volume II. University of California Press, 1971, 17.
[22] Bazin, *What is Cinema Vol. 1*, 109

following.[23] What makes Murnau's cinematography count as "long takes" is not necessarily because of the length of the shot but the structure of the shots. Therefore, one of the significant aspects of the long takes is the editing style: whether it is purely connective editing or expressive editing techniques. Murnau's films, such as *The Last Laugh* (1924), adopt an approach to express the on-screen character's emotions and motivation only through the film's visuals and never through words, which intriguingly aligns with contemporary slow cinema's preference to use limited dialogues. This naturalistic editing approach largely takes advantage of cinema's capacity to represent time, where the rhythm of reality can provoke more self-reflexive emotions among the audiences.

This perception of time is one of the most important elements for slow cinema. Cinema's relation to time has been variously theorized by scholars including Bazin and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Building upon Bazin's work, Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 2* charts a paradigmatic shift from classical pre-World War II cinema, or the "movement-image," to post-World War II modernist cinema, or the "time-image," where characters are more passive figures in the landscape than active motivators of the plot. Starting off with Bazin's idea of the "fact-images," Deleuze explores films such as Italian neo-realism and Japanese director Yasujirō Ozu. While Bazin comments on Roberto Rossellini as "perhaps the only filmmaker who knows how to get us interested in an action while leaving it in its objective context" on his film, *Germany Year Zero*, the documentary-like cinematography among Italian neo-realist broadens the scope of cinematic storytelling.[24] Deleuze further describes the "time-image" cinematic techniques, especially Yasujirō Ozu's works, in the following terms:

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[23] Henderson, Brian. "THE LONG TAKE." *Film Comment* 7, no. 2 (1971): 6–11, 8. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43752806.
[24] Bazin, André, and Bert Cardullo. *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*. New York: Continuum, 2011, 57.

> Camera movements take place less and less frequently: tracking shots are slow, low 'blocs of movement'; the always low camera is usually fixed, frontal or at an unchanging angle; dissolves are abandoned in favour of the simple cut.[25]

Indeed, Bazin's emphasis on objectivity and Deleuze's contextualization of the "time-image" become the universal "formula" of modernist art cinema and, later, slow cinema, with on-screen characters wandering around purposelessly (flaneur), dedramatized plots, observational cameras, minimalist mise-en-scène, and self-reflexive long shots. These "time-image" driven films are opposed to the "movement-image" driven Hollywood cinema as they let the story unfold naturally without depending on the cinematic devices to exaggerate emotions.

Around the same time as the rise of Italian neo-realism, derived mainly from Alexandre Astruc's concept of caméra-stylo (camera-pen), the auteur theory became a foundation of the French New Wave, building off the cinematic theories of André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc.[26] Auteur theory sees the filmmaker as the artist and author of their works, where their works often have distinctive and recognizable styles. Two of its theoreticians—François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard—later became major directors of the French New Wave. With the blooming of the auteur theory and the likes of masters like Carl Theodor Dreyer and Michelangelo Antonioni, the aesthetics of slowness starts to rise among art cinema auteurs, such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Theo Angelopoulous, Satyajit Ray, and Sergei Parajanov. At the same time, in New York, artists like Andy Warhol were making even more experimental films, such as the eight hours and five minutes of slow-motion footage of an unchanging view of New York City's Empire State Building. With the rising rejection of the repetitive,

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[25] Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema: The Time-Image.* Vol. 2. U of Minnesota Press, 1986, 13.
[26] British Film Institute. *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*. Edited by Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau. New and expanded. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

monotonous, and fast-producing Hollywood studio-made films, slowness, the deliberate refusal of speed, became "central in vanguard art and culture."[27]

With the success of slow cinema masters at international film festivals in the 1970s and 1980s, exemplified by Andrei Tarkovsky's fame at Cannes Film Festival and Venice Film Festival, more and more slow cinema filmmakers have started to appear, including Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr, and Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Frammartino. In her chapter on Abbas Kiarostami's films, Laura Mulvey proposed the term "cinema of delay" to describe films that enable the presence of time on screen. She describes the "time-image" in two levels: first is the "actual act of slowing down the flow of the film," and the second is by delaying the time "during which some detail has lain dormant, as it were, waiting to be noticed."[28] She further suggests that cinema of delay's shooting style conforms to André Bazin's view that the long take opens up time for thought within the film flow.[29] Therefore, while average shot length is an important part of determining the slowness, there are many other significant stylistic parameters such as editing style, camera movement, camera angle, the content of the shot, camera distance, and complexity of mise-en-scene.[30] The "drifting" of time, the "waiting" of the narrative, and the "wandering" of the on-screen characters are the three key aspects of understanding slow cinema.

**Taiwanese Cinema in the Global Scene**

Taiwan has always been an "in-between" place and a state of confusion. Geographically, it is located at the junction of the East and South China Seas in the northwestern Pacific

[27] Campany, David. *Photography and Cinema* (London: Reaktion), 2006, 36.
[28] Mulvey, Laura. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006, 8.
[29] Ibid., 130.
[30] For the quantitative measure of ASL: David Bordwell - Cinemetrics. http://www.cinemetrics.lv/bordwell.php.

Ocean. Historically, the culture of Taiwan is a blend of Austronesian. Chinese, Dutch, and Japanese. From 1895 to 1945, Taiwan was a colony of Japan, where people living in Taiwan must "dress, eat, and live as Japanese do and speak the Japanese tongue as do Japanese born in Japan."[31] Therefore, Taiwanese cinema was influenced immensely by Japanese cinema, where Taiwanese producers generally accepted the traditions of Japanese movies. Under colonial rule, film production in Taiwan was controlled by the Japanese, where local filmmakers were only making non-narrative documentaries and educational reels. After the defeat of Japan in World War II, Taiwan's rule was handed over to Kuomintang (KMT). In 1949, the KMT declared martial law, which was the start of its four-decade-long dictatorship. As Emilie Yeh and Darrell Davis suggest, as a result of KMT's initial lack of interest in film policy and public consciousness, it is not until the 1960s that we see the emergence of Taiwanese cinema.[32]

Taiwanese film scholar Lin Wen-chi notes that by examining the representation of Taipei in Taiwanese films over the last 30 years, the evolution of Taiwan from a rapidly developing and changing state to an international metropolis is evident.[33] Besides the popularity of romantic films, martial arts films, and healthy realism films in the 1960s, city films about Taiwan also started to emerge. The representation of Taiwan in films of the 60s and 70s mainly depicts the spatial contrast between the city and the countryside, highlighting the hesitation and conflict of Taiwan gradually transitioning from an agricultural society to industrialization and modernization. This period's Taiwanese films used the narrative of people from the countryside moving to the city to show Taipei's bustling and novel urban

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[31] Tsurumi, E. Patricia. *Japanese Colonial Education in Taiwan, 1895-1945*. Harvard East Asian Series, 88. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977, 109, cf. Kawamura Takeji 川村竹治, *台湾の一年 A Year in Taiwan* (Tokyo, 1930), p.6.

[32] Yeh, Emilie Yueh-yu, and Darrell William Davis. *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island. Film and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 17.

[33] Lin, Wen-chi (林文淇). "台灣電影中的台呈現 Representation of Taipei in Taiwan Cinema". *1950–1990 尋找電影中的台北 1950–1990 In Search of Taipei in Films*. Taipei: Wànxiàng Túshū (萬象圖書), 1995.

landscape while exaggerating the hidden evil and danger in urban life. For example, Liang Zhefu's *Early Train from Taipei* (1964) tells a story of a fallen woman tempted by the city. This film presents a comparison between urban and rural life through the use of parallel editing, such as crosscutting between farmlands and nightclubs or between flutes and loudspeakers. Similar to many city films around the same time, such as Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) or Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa Vie* (1962), the city of Taipei in this film became both attractive and full of traps, contrasted with the idealized country life.

In the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema was under the threat of the invasion of popular Hong Kong cinema and Hollywood.[34] With regards to politics in 1979, the U.S. closed its embassy and consulate in Taipei and officially recognized the People's Republic of China as the only authorized representative of China. As a result, political and economic uncertainty prevailed in Taiwan. As Catherine Liu notes, Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang "grew more desperate about its fantasies of retaking the Mainland from the Communists".[35] Taiwan New Cinema arises under such backgrounds (See Figure 1). Beginning in 1983 with the production of Chen Kun-Hou's *Growing Up* (小畢的故事), Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Sandwich Man* (兒子的大玩偶), Edward Yang's *That Day, on the Beach* (海灘的一天), as well as Wang Toon's *A Flower in the Rainy Night* (看海的日子). The new cinema of the 1980s represents major changes in theme, which is more about the new and old cultural conflicts brought about by the rapid development of Taiwan.

These new wave films mostly depict people adapting poorly to social and cultural changes in Taiwan and end mostly with sentimentality or even tragedy, exemplified by films such as *Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), *Taipei Story* (1985), and *The Terrorizer* (1986). These

[34] Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 55.
[35] Liu, "Taiwan's Cold War Geopolitics in Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers*," 119.

films all discuss the clash between the new, capitalized ideologies, the old, nostalgic culture in Taiwan, and the complexity of urban lives. In the mid-1980s, Taiwan began to shift from its previous embedded model to a neoliberal strategy which aimed to sustain growth through economic liberalization.

However, neoliberal reform of Taiwan's trade regime and financial industries was more a strategic reaction to save the potential trade relationship with the USA than an attempt to rescue a troubled economy, as in other countries. Taiwan's weak position in international politics because of its continuous sovereignty conflicts with mainland China constituted one of the major factors of market openness. Taiwan experienced neither growth stagnation nor difficulties in the balance of payments during the adjustment period. Indeed, economic growth remained stable immediately before these liberalization actions (an annual average of 8.9% from 1981–85), and inflation was also stabilized after a turbulent period (1977–81).[36] Therefore, the new cinema films in the 1980s dealt with the confusion among the mass due to this not-so-conventional neoliberal shift. Many domestic companies and businesses had a hard time surviving with international companies pouring in and the import and export trade trend. We can often see American cooperations, such as KFC, or hear conversations regarding going working abroad or learning English in films from this era.

The 1990s is a new era for Taiwan. After four decades of politically dominated cultural production, the lifting of martial law in 1987 marked the beginning of a "Great Divide" in Taiwan's cultural development, releasing political prisoners and lifting censorship laws.[37] The Democratic Progressive Party, the current ruling party of Taiwan, was also founded at the end of the 1980s, aiming to challenge the authoritative ruling of the KMT. Therefore, the

[36] Tsai, Ming-Chang. "Dependency, the State and Class in the Neoliberal Transition of Taiwan." *Third World Quarterly 22*, no. 3 (2001): 359–79, 365.
[37] Chang, Sung-sheng Yvonne. "The Terrorizer and the Great Divide in Contemporary Taiwan's Cultural Development." Essay. In *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, edited by Chris Berry and Feiyi Lu, 13–25. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005, 13.

voicing of historical revisions and grievances made its way into social and political activity in Taiwan. Consequently, historical films became popular around this time, exemplified by Hou Hsiao Hsien's *A City of Sadness* (1989), which centers around the 228 incidents, and Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), which depicts the conflict between *benshengren* and *waishengren* during the white terror.

On the other hand, by the 1990s, the complete globalization of cities such as Taipei, characterized by transnational capitalism, brought significant changes to Taiwan. Films made around this era are more focused on exploring the city's existential challenges, people's ideologies, and the relationships between urban life and the individual. For example, Hou Hsiao-Hsien has shifted to make city films such as *Good Men, Good Women* (1995) and *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996). Similarly, Edward Yang continued to narrate the stories of the city people in *A Confucian Confusion* (1994), and *Mahjong* (1996).

The 1990s Taiwanese cinema also welcomed a new director, Tsai Ming-Liang, who pushed the favourable cinematic techniques of the Taiwan New Wave, such as long shots and observational cameras, to the extreme. *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992) was Tsai's first film. He starred Lee Kang-sheng as a problematic kid in Taipei, Hsiao-Kang, who continued to make appearances in all of Tsai's films. The popularity of Tsai's works also signifies the emerging of a new theme in Taiwanese cinema: the alienation, isolation, and loneliness of people living in the metropolis, which Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang also picked up in their later films, such as *Millennium Mambo* (2001) and *A One and A Two* (2000). Tsai makes films in a wide range of genres. After making *Vive L'Amour* (1994) and *The River* (1997), which both touches upon the exploration of homosexuality, Tsai made a musical, *The Hole,* in 1998 that challenges the boundaries between narrative films and music videos. Coming into the 2000s, Tsai continues to explore the boundaries of different genres. For example, *The Wayward Cloud* (2005) is also a musical but is somewhat of a pornography as well. *Goodbye,*

*Dragon Inn* (2003) is a "film-within-film" about a desolate movie theater and its final screening of the 1967 *wuxia* film *Dragon Inn*. Under all these genre-mixings, Tsai's films encapsulate Taiwan's working-class life in one word, *song* (the Taiwanese pronunciation of *su*, 素, down-to-earth).[38] Tsai's films are nevertheless authentic representations of Taiwanese urban life and queer culture.

As Yeh and Davis note, Taiwanese directors like Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and Tsai Ming-Liang are masters of the long take–long shot aesthetic.[39] Their films are disorienting and contradict conventional viewing habits. They require patience, and the narratives appear to be unstructured, especially for Tsai Ming-Liang's films which are somewhat claustrophobic. The audience thus becomes active viewers, where they need to make meaning from the films by themselves.

As discussed earlier, the "slowness" in cinema can be seen as a resistance towards accelerating social change. For post-colonial and post-martial-law Taiwan, neoliberalism quickly penetrated Taiwanese society. Different from some other countries where economic liberalization comes from low growth and foreign debt, neoliberalism developed in Taiwan as a way of reinforcing power for the ruling party. Neoliberalization was essentially a political project.[40] In the late 1980s, the KMT engineered the rise of big business groups and consortia with the introduction of its neoliberalization project, such as privatization, financial liberalization, and public-private partnership. They also offered varieties of subsidies to the Holko communities, mostly concentrated in the South, to reinforce its political stronghold.[41] After the collapse of the one-party dominance of the KMT in the 2000 presidential election,

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[38] Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 219.
[39] Ibid., 100.
[40] Hsu, Jinn-yuh. "The Spatial Encounter between Neoliberalism and Populism in Taiwan: Regional Restructuring Under the Dpp Regime in the New Millennium." *Political Geography* 28, no. 5 (2009): 296–308. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.07.008, 297.
[41] Ibid, 296.

in order to remain in power, the Democratic Progressive Party regime continued to implement this neoliberalization project to win political loyalties and donations from emerging business groups and show a dedication to economic development.[42] This politicization of the economy that is embedded in Taiwan's neoliberalization process, therefore, contains many unspoken social issues that the new cinema directors try to reveal.

As media scholar Paul Roquet suggests, neoliberalism as an ideology often depends on sustaining the illusion of an autonomous self. The fantasy of a totally autonomous self and the fantasy of merging with the atmosphere, such as dissolving the self into a stream of sense impressions or letting go of personal responsibility and becoming one with the larger landscape, are both essential to neoliberal governmentality.[43] In the context of Taiwan's politicized neoliberalism, the central government still retained its authority over resource allocation, policy formation, and implementation. Despite the ongoing expansion of global connections, local governments remained devoid of decision-making powers in economic matters. Their attempts to attract businesses primarily centred on land regulations and road construction adjustments. Critical policies, including the designation of strategic industries and the specifics of incentives, were meticulously overseen by the central government. Even pivotal personnel issues like law enforcement and fiscal management fell under the central government's jurisdiction. Additionally, business revenues were collected on a national level and then distributed as part of the comprehensive funding allocation for local authorities.[44] The central government's political considerations often guided this distribution. Even though Taiwan has moved on from KMT's authoritarian political regime that controls the state's economy and everyday life in a top-down manner, DPP's attempt at neoliberalism does not

[42] Hsu, "The Spatial Encounter between Neoliberalism and Populism in Taiwan," 299
[43] Roquet, Paul. *Ambient Media: Japanese Atmospheres of Self*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 15.
[44] Hsu, "The Spatial Encounter between Neoliberalism and Populism in Taiwan," 305.

seem to be very “bottom-up” like they claimed.

This diffused government control within the fast-developing Taiwanese society in the 1990s often burned people out and induced a sense of “losing control.” While Byung-Chul Han argues that burn-out syndrome is often triggered by neoliberal expectations of productivity and success, in the case of Taiwan, the inefficiency of governmental policies and economic development is also a primary cause of the young people’s chaotic sentiment. The Taiwanese New Cinema that aimed to reveal the “social transition period across the Taiwan Strait,” thus attempted to confront these kinds of social issues through their distinctive slow-cinema style. As Lim notes, slow cinema is a rather recent phenomenon in conceptual terms and shares its discursive genesis with a much larger socio-cultural movement aiming to rescue extended temporal structures from the accelerated tempo of late capitalism. Indeed, globally, the term “slow” has noticeably become a convenient prefix for a number of bottom-up grass-roots movements in the 1980s and 1990s Europe, such as “slow media,” “slow travel,” and “slow food.” The new cinema’s slow cinema style thus is a response to social anxiety generated by neoliberalization and shifts in political regimes. The popularity of slowness in Taiwanese cinema is hence worth researching in terms of its relationship with the Taiwanese social structure.

**Youth Culture in Taiwanese Cinema**

During the postwar era, except for the emphasis on the “time-image,” the rise of the youth culture also influences the art scene significantly in countries where youth culture developed concurrently with a time of great progress in economy, such as 1960s France with General DeGaulle came into power, 1980s US under Ronald Reagan’s expansionary fiscal policies, and the 1980s Japan under the economic bubble. The category of youth became an essential reference point for the filmmakers of the French new wave, Japan’s *taiyozoku*, as

well as US literature such as Jack Kerouac's "Beat Generation."[45] Youth becomes the crucial concept for reimagining revolution and a universal way to explore alienation in a global age. Similar to the "slowness," youth culture has also been put on the labels of "resistant" and "rebellion."[46] The representational filmmakers of the French New Wave, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Agnès Varda are all keen to depict teenagers or youth adults in films such as *The 400 Blows* (1959), *Breathless* (1960), and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962). Themes such as mortality, despair, and confusion are often explored in these films, which continue to present in not only art films but also commercial films. For example, John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club* (1985) explores the American teenager's struggle to be understood, both by adults and by themselves. His *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) further examines the search for identities and meanings in life among the youth. At the same time, in Japan, Shinji Somai' *Typhoon Club* (台風クラブ, 1985) also focuses on the problematic youth who vent their emotions and stress in foolish ways. Hou Hsiao-Hsien also praises *Typhoon Club*, "Although it is not clear what they are doing, it is very flavorful and keeps attracting you, when you watch further, you will think 'This is what is called a movie.'"[47]

Intriguingly, different from Western coming-of-age films that favor quick cuts, *Typhoon Club* depicts the youth in a more contemplative way through long shots, static cameras, and deep focus. Similarly, in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's early films, such as *A Summer At Grandpa's* (冬冬的假期, 1984), as well as Chen Yu-Hsun *Tropical Fish* (熱帶魚, 1995), the "slow" cinematic techniques such as long shots, depth of field, and minimal setting, are also present.

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[45] Tweedie, James. *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 3.
[46] Shary, Timothy, and Alexandra Seibel, eds. *Youth Culture in Global Cinema* (version 1st ed.). 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.
[47] Chu, T'ien-wen 朱天文. *最好的時光: 電影本事, 分場劇本, 以及所有關於電影的, 1982-2006* (The Best of Times: Movie Facts, Scene-by-Scene Scripts, and All About Movies, 1982-2006). Taipei: INK Publishing 印刻出版有限公司, 2008.

The youth films in Asia hence seem to prefer a more melancholic storytelling mode. In the case of Taiwan, one of the reoccurring themes in films about youth is the search for identities, especially for the youth whose parents moved to Taiwan from the mainland during the cold war, like Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang themselves. While the larger Taiwanese society was witnessing fast development and globalization, the youth lived a mentally divided existence. Their culture is traditional Chinese, but it is framed by that of the native Taiwanese, who speak their own dialect, and by the lingering Japanese influence. When it comes to the late 1990s and early 2000s, the political change from the ruling of the KMT to the DPP further induces social instability. The young people in Taiwan at that moment consequently lived in confusion. On the one hand, under the influence of the older generation, some of them are still nostalgic for the mainland and the "Taiwan Economic Miracle" under the KMT rule. On the other hand, the policy position of the new DPP government led by Chen Shui-Bian remains unclear, which makes the young people who just stepped into society feel a certain fear for their future.

In his ethnographical analysis of the lifestyle of young people in Taiwan, Thomas A. Shaw argues that, in the 1990s Taiwan, most young people participated in activities and adopted meanings that were mediated by youth-subcultural styles and identities as ways of discovering the "self."[48] Some popular activities among the trendy youth include dancing at discotheques, roller and ice skating, hanging out at commercially run soft drink and coffee shops, going to movies, playing video games at amusement arcades, and riding motorcycles (See Figure 2&3).[49] These young urban activities all encourage young people to discover their sense of "self" as they are essentially ways to pursue self-interest and personal pleasure.

[48] Shaw, Thomas A. "'We Like to Have Fun': Leisure and the Discovery of the Self in Taiwan's 'New' Middle Class." *Modern China* 20, no. 4 (1994): 416–45, 440.
[49] Ibid., 424.

Taiwan in the 1990s also was the time when neoliberal ethos encouraged individual autonomy due to economic and political reforms. The privatization of the public sectors such as banks and state enterprises, as well as the lift of martial law that removes many censorships, both opens many opportunities for young people to explore their own interests in jobs and daily lives.

These urban lifestyles are also widely present in the 80s and 90s Taiwanese films. For example, starting with *Daughter of the Nile* (1987), dancing at the disco becomes a representational leisure activity for Hou Hsiao-Hsein. In Tsai Ming-Liang's first feature-length film, *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992), the roller-skating rink, the amusement arcades, and the poster of James Dean's *Rebel Without a Cause* are significant symbols of Hsiao-Kang's rebellion. Soft drink and coffee shops are also reoccurring hang-out locations for Edward Yang's Taipei youth in films such as *A Confucian Confusion* (1994). While Shaw defines the youth culture in Taiwan as a "fun-seeking Western culture endorsing 'individualistic' subculture," films around the youth, on the other hand, always have a more "melancholic" style, as discussed earlier.[50]

The endings of these films are often ambiguous, open to interpretation, and somewhat despairing. Therefore, I aim to argue that youth culture in the 1990s and 2000s is both a result and a response to neoliberal capitalism, which the New Cinema directors try to examine. While the neoliberal society requires young people to be successful and survive on their own, in a collectivistic society like Taiwan, they are also expected to take care of their families. In order to deal with the amount of stress they are facing, activities such as clubbing, dancing, or just wandering around at night doing nothing start to emerge as a kind of resistance towards the high expectations falling on them. The melancholic slow-cinema style that is often paired

[50] Shaw, "We Like to Have Fun," 418.

with this youth culture in New Cinema is thus a visual way of resistance towards the pursuit of productivity in the Taiwanese neoliberal society.

**Literature Review**

Film studies around Taiwan is a wide multidisciplinary field, with approaches ranging from ethnography to urban studies, scholarships from local film critics to Western literary scholars, and historical periods spanning from the colonial era to the present. In Taiwan, Peggy Chiao Hsiung-ping and Huang Jianye were the most prolific and influential among a group of critics writing in the 1980s. Through their review articles in newspapers and film magazines, young cinephiles learned to embrace the burgeoning local art cinema in directors such as Hou, Yang, and Tsai. Peggy Chiao's key book on Taiwan New Cinema is primarily organized by authorship, and Huang Jianye also published the first book-length study on Edward Yang.[51] Scholars in academia are also keen to write about Taiwan's New Wave cinema. John Anderson has published an introductory book on Edward Yang's films for the *Contemporary Film Directors* series. At the same time, James Udden wrote a book-length analysis of Hou Hsiao-Hsien, *No Man an Island*.[52] Because of the rich sources around the Taiwan New Wave, I have chosen to focus on Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-Liang.

In order to build a foundational understanding of the film culture around these three directors in Taiwan, I take three books in film studies and urban studies as pillars. First is the influential volume *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*, written by Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh

[51] Chiao, Peggy. *Taiwan New Cinema* (台灣新電影). Taipei: China Times, 1988; Huang Jianye, *Studies on films by Edward Yang—A critical thinker in Taiwan's New Cinema* (楊德昌電影研究知性思辯家). Taipei: Yuan-liou, 1995.

[52] Anderson, John. *Edward Yang*. Contemporary Film Directors. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005; Udden, James. *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* (version Second edition.). Seconded. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017.

and Darrell William Davis.[53] As the book title suggested, this book focuses on four directors, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-Liang. The first chapter, "parallel cinemas," chronicles Taiwan's cinematic history following the island's liberation from Japanese occupation after fifty years at the end of World War II. Furthermore, Yeh and Davis introduce the careers of each filmmaker and their significant collaborators. They also identify the distinctive themes, obsessions, motifs, and narrative structures of each auteur. Building on the extensive analysis of Yeh and Davis, this thesis continues to explore the unstated cinematic characteristics of Hou, Yang, and Tsai. While this book is published in 2005, this thesis further extends the significance of these directors' works into contemporary society while examining the past retrospectively.

Another book that inspired me to write this thesis is *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* by Jean Ma.[54] In this book, Ma offers an innovative study of three provocative Chinese directors Wong Kar-Wai, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and Tsai Ming-Liang. Their films all explore the temporality of memory, as well as the relationship between national history and collective memory. This book has provided insights regarding how to situate the "slowness" in cinema. Even though Ma did not write about Edward Yang, her analysis of the use of photography in *City of Sadness* also applies to reading Yang's films. As Ma notes, "photography constitutes a rich mediation on image technology's framing of time, presence and absence, memory, and amnesia."[55] Examining the relationship between photography and cinema is hence a helpful approach to understanding the "stillness" embedded in Taiwanese cinema, which I will discuss in Chapter 2 regarding Edward Yang's films, especially *The Terrorizer*. The wide use of photography in Yang's films is not only a way of examining

[53] Yeh, Emilie Yueh-yu, and Darrell William Davis. *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island. Film and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
[54] Ma, Jean. *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.
[55] Ibid., 58.

cinematic time but also an active way of seeing and understanding the urban reality of Taipei. These photographs, often taken without the acknowledgement of their subject, add to a kind of modern terror by stripping away the sense of control over the production of images, which hint at the objectification of people in the neoliberal society. They also speak to the overshadowing trauma of the authoritative KMT regime's constant surveillance, questioning the DPP government's approach of "forgetting" history.

James Tweedie's *The Age of New Wave* is the third book that helped me to frame the larger concept of my thesis.[56] This book explores the relationship between youth, cities, and globalization in international new wave films, including Taiwan New Wave. This book largely shaped my analysis of the youth culture in Taiwanese cinema. Tweedie notes that the new-wave film movements chart the rise of youth as a key demographic category and as the principal agent of social and cultural change.[57] His precedent analysis in youth cinema foregrounds a useful model of reading youth culture in a time of turbulence, and in Taiwan's case, the 1980s and 1990s when the Taiwanese society was going through tremendous reforms. Building on his analysis, I aim to argue that the New Cinema in Taiwan documented a moment when upheaval and instability began to overspill the bounds of the nation and resistance took a variety of shapes. The youth in these films, therefore, is one of the resistance forms which boldly challenges a lot of bounds, such as the contested political state of Taiwan, neoliberal expectations, gender and sexuality, as well as the traditional family ideals.

Besides these three books, scholars in film studies and Taiwanese studies are also keen to write on topics such as the dysfunctional families in the neo-Confucian society, the

[56] Tweedie, James. *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
[57] Ibid., 20.

contingency created by the act of cruising, the conflict between the city and the countryside, the nostalgia towards the past, as well as the "modernist" aspect in Taiwan New Wave.[58] All of these scholarships have helped me to re-examine the relationship between cinema and history in Taiwan. While scholars have been focusing on the significance of the Taiwan New Wave in terms of its content as it represents the shift from escapism to realism, this thesis aims to focus on its visual style of slowness and its incorporation of youth culture in light of the directors' urge to break away from the neoliberalism and capitalism. Under the pressure of the Central Motion Picture Company and the censorship of the government (both KMT and DPP), Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-Liang mutually chose static camera, deep focus, long takes, complex depth of field, cool colour scheme, and melancholy atmosphere to portray the youth who should be more active and joyful. This cinematography will be the key aspect of this thesis in order to examine its metaphorical meaning in terms of criticizing the denial of history, neoliberal ideals, and the traditional family structures in Taiwan.

**Organization of Chapters**

This thesis has three chapters for the main part, each part on one director: Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, and Tsai Ming-Liang, respectively. Each chapter will have a short introduction on each director's style, detailed individual analyses of their films, and comparisons of the three directors' works.

Chapter One is about Hou Hsiao-Hsien's unique ability to combine personal memories

[58] Chow, Rey. "The Enigma of Incest and the Staging of Kinship Family Remains in *The River*." Sentimental Fabulations, *Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (2007): 181-96; Neri, Corrado. "A Time to Live, a Time to Die: The Time to Grow." (2008): 212-218; Tay, William Shu Sam. "The ideology of initiation: the films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien." *New Chinese Cinemas*. 1994. 151-159; Wen, Tien-Hsiang, and Gan Sheuo Hui. "Hou Hsiao-Hsien: a standard for evaluating Taiwan's cinema." Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 9.2 (2008): 211-238; Wilson, Flannery. *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving Within and Beyond the Frame*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

and national histories, where he uses the figure of various semi-autobiographical "wandering" youth to challenge the expectations of productivity, success, and filial piety during a time when neoliberalism just started to be implanted in Taiwan in the 1980s. This chapter has three sections. In the first this chapter, I delve into the essence of Hou's leisure spaces, characterized by their lack of productivity and purpose. Specifically, I argue that the pool hall in *Boys from Fengkuei* (1983) and the clubs featured in *Daughter of the Nile* (1987) and *Millennium Mambo* (2001), all predominantly populated by the youth, function as spaces that briefly liberate their inhabitants from the pressures of neoliberal expectations, economic and social reform, cultural infiltration, and the breakdown of family ideals. These spaces mirror the youth's resistance to the rapid pace of capitalism through engagement in unproductive leisure activities, paralleling with Hou's personal evolution from a commercial filmmaker to a low-budget art cinema director. This section is built through the integration of sequence analysis of the pool-playing scenes and Yiming Chen's comprehensive study of the pool players in Taiwan.[59] This methodology allows me to better understand the reason behind Hou's preference for using pool playing as a common youth activity.

Beyond depicting leisure activities as a form of rebellion, Hou introduces an additional layer of political significance by intertwining the military with entertainment spaces. The second part of this chapter examines the depiction of military figures in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985) and *Dust in the Wind* (1986). The reoccurring soldier image in leisure spaces reflects Hou's critique of the KMT's militarization of mundane activities, including schools and sports clubs. Furthermore, Hou criticizes the conscription culture in Taiwan that forcefully interrupted many young men's life through the portrayal of fights and arguments in the supposedly joyful leisure spaces in the barracks. Through the relocation of the pool hall to

[59] Chen, Yiming 陳鎰明. "Study of the pool players and their motives" (撞球參與者參與動機之研究), *休閒保健期刊 Journal of Leisure and Wellness*, 16 (2016).

military barracks, Hou examines this sensitive issue, cleverly challenging the censorship imposed by the authoritative Kuomintang regime.

In the third part of this chapter, I analyze Hou's retrospective works, *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996) and *Three Times* (2005). By revisiting the past, Hou examines national identity among the youth, symbolizing a critique of the government's attempt to overlook the island's traumatic history, particularly concerning the KMT. Offering a rare happy ending in the first story of *Three Times*, "A Time for Love," Hou expresses his optimism for harmony and inclusion in Taiwan under the new regime of the Democratic Progressive Party.

Chapter Two focuses on Edward Yang's Taipei youth in the 1990s which depicts the confusion induced by neoliberalism in the middle class. The theoretical framework of this chapter is primarily shaped by Byung-Chul Han's idea of the fatigue society. In his book *The Burnout Society*, Korean-born German philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that stress and exhaustion are not just personal experiences but social and historical phenomena as well.[60] He further defines contemporary society as an "achievement society" which requires excessive positivity and does not allow failures. For example, in Taiwan, before the implementation of the national health insurance (NHI) system in March 1995, only 57% of people were insured mostly through labour insurance. There was a high level of out-of-pocket payments from patients, which many people without a job could not afford, and there was no welfare that could help them.[61]

I also incorporate Henri Lefebvre's idea of the "counter-space" into this chapter, defined as the space that resists and opposes the rules of the dominant space.[62] I aim to associate the reoccurring night spaces in Edward Yang's films with the "counter-space" in order to further

[60] Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).
[61] Wu Tai-Yin, Majeed Azeem, Kuo Ken N. "An overview of the healthcare system in Taiwan". London J Prim Care (Abingdon). 2010 Dec;3(2):115-9, 116.
[62] Lefebvre, Henri, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and David Harvey. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Oxford, UK, 1991, 281.

examine the construction of the burn-out society. I have divided this chapter into three sections, film by film. The first section is around *The Terrorizers* (1986) and its depiction of the tragedy of a white-collar professional who was left behind by the successes of entrepreneurial and creative class elites. The second section is about *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) and its documentation of the clash of *waishengren* living under the White Terror. The third section analyzes *A Confucian Confusion* (1994), which shows the confusion and alienation faced by the rich youth.

Throughout the three sections, I use Byung-Chul Han's fatigue society theory to analyze Yang's construction of the cinematic "society of tiredness," or "burnout society," wherein the historical incidents lead not only to social catastrophes but also mental collapse for people living in Taiwan. Moreover, this chapter argues that Edward Yang's preference for using night space creates a Lefebvrian "counter-space" that allows emotional venting and resistance towards neoliberal expectations, which provides some potential remedy for depression and tiredness in the burnout society. In addition, Edward Yang's immobile camera further intensifies the alienation among different classes of people in the neoliberal society.

In Chapter Three, I provide a contextual framework for Tsai Ming Liang's reimagining of the concept of family within the context of the contemporary neoliberal society. My argument contends that Tsai not only critiques the traditional Confucian ideals that underpin the family structure and obligation but also presents an alternative model for a new form of household. This new paradigm is characterized by bonds formed not by blood relations but rather through affection, friendship, and emotional connections. Tsai's innovative approach leads him to construct unconventional, queer family dynamics that challenge the prevailing heteronormative norms. He achieves this by deconstructing gender roles and exploring sexuality.

Gender Studies scholar Charlie Yi Zhang has argued in his book *Dreadful Desires: The*

*Uses of Love in Neoliberal China* that neoliberalism is not simply "a world-homogenizing sovereign with coherent intentions that produces subjects who serve its interests, such that their singular actions only seem personal, effective, and freely intentional," but also involves "the messy dynamics of attachment, self-continuity, and the reproduction of life that are the material scenes of living on in the present." Tsai's queer and affective reconstruction of family attachment thus exemplifies how affective forces, especially those related to love, are also powerful tool in defying neoliberal expectations.

In the latter part of this chapter, I delve into this sense of "queerness" and the concept of *flânerie* as manifested in Tsai's films. By *flânerie*, I refer to the act of cruising or wandering in cities with no purpose while constantly observing the surrounding people and spectacles. I argue that the act of flanerie serves as a symbolic representation of various latent social issues within Taiwan, especially the potential harm embedded in the explosion of queer activism in the 2000s. I further argue that the fluidity of Tsai's queer flâneurs acts as his form of resistance against the voyeuristic tendencies of the media and the general public's stereotypical perceptions, both of himself and the broader queer community. I plan to examine *Vive L'Amour*, *What Time Is It There?*, and *Days* to chart how they create a distinctive liminal space, showcasing the rebellious urban lifestyles of solitude and self-sufficiency among Taiwanese youth.

For now, let us dive into the cinematic world of Taiwan, while sensing the sculpting and drifting of time.

## Chapter 1:
## All the Young Dudes: The Wandering Youth in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Cinematic Taiwan

> "And these children that you spit on, as they try to change their worlds, are immune to your consultations. They're quite aware of what they're going through."
>
> — David Bowie, *Changes*[63]

In 1987, fifty-four Taiwanese filmmakers signed a filmmaking manifesto that was published in two major Chinese-language periodicals. In this manifesto, these filmmakers raised three main concerns about Taiwanese cinema.[64] Firstly, they critiqued the Taiwanese government's filmmaking policies, arguing that it prioritized "political propaganda" and "commercial filmmaking" over "cultural activities." Secondly, they criticized the mass media for not recognizing cinema as a significant component of artistic culture. Lastly, they challenged Taiwanese film critics, accusing them of encouraging Taiwanese films to imitate the styles of Hong Kong and Hollywood rather than creating their own.[65]

Among these filmmakers, Hou Hsiao-Hsien is one of the earliest directors to address these problems by exploring slow cinema since the early 1980s. He later became famous for his long takes, long shots, static shots, slight reframing, and empty shots. In addition, to distinguish Taiwanese cinema from the immensely popular Hong Kong and Hollywood films, Hou also chose dedramatized plots instead of action-packed stories. As David Bordwell describes, the characters in Hou's films often move pointlessly. They may play pool, horse around on the beach, cut petty deals, serve their time in the military, or dance at a club. However, politics and society are in turmoil offscreen, often registered through a radio

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[63] Bowie, David. *Changes*. Hunky Dory. London: Trident Studios, 1971.
[64] Berry, Chris, and Feiyi Lu. *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005, 6.
[65] Zhan, Hongzhi, "民國七十六年台灣電影宣言" (Taiwan Cinema Manifesto, 1987), in *台灣新電影* (Taiwan New Cinema), ed. Peggy Hsiung-Ping Chiao (Taipei: Shibao, 1988), 111–18.

broadcast or a voiceover narration.[66] These elements make Hou's films detached and distant, yet they are at the same time, quotidian and compassionate.

Hou focuses on rural settings and male-centred stories almost exclusively, and his characters do not speak English, and rarely leave Taiwan, even during times of political turmoil.[67] Hou's films thus represent the most average and ordinary Taiwanese, who are most relatable to the audience. Beginning with Hou's first feature film, *Cute Girl* (1980), young people, their relationships with their families, and Taiwanese historical incidents have become the main theme throughout Hou's career. As Dai suggests, Hou's films not only express his personal memory but also "wrestle with the ghosts of history."[68] Throughout his oeuvre, we see different generations of his characters, often in their twenties, experiencing the White Terror, neoliberal economic reforms, democratization, as well as the shift of political power in Taiwan. This chapter thus delves into Hou Hsiao-Hsien's distinctive skill in intertwining personal memories with national histories. I examine the portrayal of Hou's semi-autobiographical wandering youth to challenge societal expectations of productivity, success, and filial piety, especially as neoliberalism began taking root in Taiwan during the 1980s.

Once a "wandering youth" himself, Hou often uses leisure activities and leisure spaces as allegories of social issues and political implications. The first part of this chapter examines the unproductive and aimless nature of Hou's leisurely spaces. Specifically, I argue that the pool hall in *Boys from Fengkuei* (1983) and the club from *Daughter of the Nile* (1987) and *Millennium Mambo* (2001), both predominantly inhabited by youth, are spaces that allow their inhabitants to feel temporarily liberated from the anxieties of neoliberal expectation,

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[66] Bordwell, David. *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, 189-190.
[67] Anderson, John. *Edward Yang*. Contemporary Film Directors. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005, 15.
[68] Dai, Jinhua, and Zhang Jingyuan. "Hou Hsiao-Hsien's films: pursuing and escaping history." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9.2 (2008), 243.

economic and social reform, cultural infiltration, and the breakdown of family ideals. These liberating spaces mirror the young people's resistance to the rapid pace of capitalism through unproductive leisure activities. This parallels Hou's own shift from a commercially successful director to a low-budget art cinema director, reflecting his critique of consumerist cinema. In addition to portraying leisure activities as rebellion, Hou further adds another layer of political implication by intertwining the Taiwanese conscription culture with entertainment spaces. By moving the pool hall into military barracks, Hou finds his own way to challenge the censorship of Kuomintang's (KMT) authoritative regime.

Finally, by analyzing Hou's retrospective works, *Three Times* and *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, I contextualize the youth-dominated spaces in Hou's films as "grounds of identification and historical nexuses".[69] By going back in time, Hou examines national identity among the youth retrospectively, with the return to the pool hall symbolizing a critique of the government's urge to forget about the island's traumatic past, particularly in relation to KMT history. With a rare happy ending in the first story of *Three Times*, "A Time for Love," Hou also expresses his hope for harmony and inclusion in Taiwan under the new regime of the Democratic Progressive Party.

### *The Metaphorical Play Time*

Hou Hsiao-Hsien himself has often been described as "playful", and he is keen to create lively young characters who are always having fun, and which remind him of his own youth. As early as *Cheerful Wind* (1982), Hou has represented the pool hall as a designated space for the youth. As he disclosed in an interview, like his characters, he also spent most of his time

[69] Ma, Jean. *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 25.

playing pool when he was young.[70] Hou thus uses his own memories to render his cinematic Taiwan. Since *Cheerful Wind*, characters playing pool, has become an icon that is present in almost all his films since. In *Boys from Fengkuei*, for example, playing pool represents Hou's personal memory as a wasted youth, but it also serves as a signifier of romance. By contrasting the strict social rules in Taiwan that were mediated by the authoritative KMT regime and the neoliberal reform with the playfulness of his characters, this film positions pool playing as the opposite of productive work and a rebellion against the neoliberal and Confucian social expectations.

*Boys from Fengkuei* (1983) marks the beginning of Hou's signature distant, continuous, and immobile shots.[71] The opening credits run over establishing shots of the coast, houses that look out-of-time, and a billiard hall. With shallow focus, the first view of the dark billiard hall separates the group of friends playing pool, including Ah-Ching, from the bright, contrasting outside world. After each of them takes a shot, the camera shifts its focus to the billiard table with a cut to a medium shot. This medium shot leaves the boys out of the frame and the billiard table becomes the centre (See Figure 4&5). With grey, blue, and white being the main colours in the film, the warm colours, such as the red and green of the pool hall, suggests that billiards brings the boys' monotonous life some joy.[72] This shot of the pool table lasts for thirty seconds, where the camera stays still to document their cheerful chats and laughs. These two shots of the pool hall thus construct it as somewhere for the boys to escape from the real world. The boys hence "emerge" from the pool hall.[73]

In fact, playing billiards became a representation of Taiwanese new wave filmmakers,

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[70] Southern Metropolis Daily, "《最好的時光》香港上映 導演主演打造愛情史詩." "Three Times released in Hong Kong; director and the cast crafted a romantic epic." *南方都市報 Southern Metropolis Daily*, 2005.
[71] Hasumi, Shigehiko. "The eloquence of the taciturn: an essay on Hou Hsiao-Hsien." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9.2 (2008), 189.
[72] Cai, Xiao. *The Ethics of Witness: Dailiness and History in Hou Hsiao-hsien's Films*. Springer, 2018, 98.
[73] Udden, James. *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* (version Second edition.). Seconded. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017, 63

especially due to Hou's ambition to challenge stereotypical Taiwanese cinema. Before Hou turned to making art films, he was already a quite successful commercial filmmaker. However, in order to establish a "real" Taiwanese cinema, Hou experimented with his own signatures, which included billiard-playing, one of Hou's personal favourite activities. The new wave filmmakers could often be found "talking and laughing and drinking" in an apartment without a lock because "there was nothing to steal"; the boys in Fengkuei, similarly, are talking, laughing, and drinking in a billiard hall without a door as they too are carefree.[74] Indeed, this suggests Hou's active reflection and introspection on the relationship between his work and his life. Billiards became not only Hou's signature, but also the signature of Taiwanese art cinema and even Chinese-language art cinema more general, gaining its meaning as a rebellion against the mainstream, which we can see in the opening sequence of *Boys from Fengkuei*. By opening with long takes of the poolhall, the film therefore suggests the importance of billiards for both Hou's and the on-screen characters' coming-of-age recollections.

The pool playing happens again towards the end of *Boys from Fengkuei*, when Ah-Ching hangs out with Hsiao-Hsing in the night market, thinking that he might win her love. This scene starts with a long shot of Ah-Ching playing pool and Hsiao-Hsing watching him. With a match-on-action of the billiard balls, the scene cuts to a close-up of Ah-Ching successfully hitting the ball and getting the coin (See Figure 6&7). Cutting back to Ah-Ching and Hsiao-Hsing, the camera now moves closer and portrays them in a medium shot. This reframe visually implies the progress of their relationship: as the audience gets closer to the on-screen characters, the relationship between the two of them has also grown closer. The camera remains still as Ah-Ching cheers and encourages Hsiao-Hsing, then cuts to a similar close-up

[74] Anderson, *Edward Yang*, 7.

of Hsiao-Hsing hitting the ball and getting the coin herself. These parallel actions thus further imply the development of their relationship.

Moreover, this scene, once again, shifts away from the monotonous colour scheme throughout the film, and saturated green and red become the dominant colours. Through editing and mise-en-scene, playing pool becomes the bond between Ah-Ching and Hsiao-Hsing, as well as the embodiment of romance. This is the happiest moment for Ah-Ching in this film as he finally gets someone by his side in the city where he struggles to fit in. However, the film quickly ends after this scene, with Hsiao-Hsing leaving Kaohsiung to join her boyfriend. Thus, the pool playing becomes a melancholic conclusion of Ah-Ching's unrequited love and youthful days. In addition, by opening and ending the film with playing pool, Hou transforms billiards into a nostalgic representation of his adolescence as a wasted youngster. The precise moment of happiness from the leisure of playing pool fleets quickly and reflects Hou's critique of relentless productivity of neoliberalism in 1980s Taiwan.

In 1983, when the film was made, Taiwan was experiencing tremendous social reform with the infiltration of capitalism and neoliberalism. As martial law started to ease in the early 1980s, the opening of the local markets encouraged many people living in the countryside, such as Ah-Ching, to move to the cities to work. Housing prices tripled between 1987 and 1989. There was also a mentality of wanting to "get rich quickly" in society because of the flood of opportunities to make money. There was an urge to live productively and lucratively in this new Taiwanese society. People also picked up a preference for buying European instead of Japanese things to show they were moving up in society and becoming middle class.[75] To be "unproductive", such as hanging around the pool hall or chasing after girls like Ah-Ching was unacceptable. It is noteworthy that even though the group of friends playing

[75] Chu, Jou-Jo. "Taiwan: A Fragmented middle class in the Making," In *The New Rich in Asia*, 207–22. Routledge, 2013, 214.

pool at the beginning of the film later moved to the city together and worked in Kaohsiung, the film spends more time depicting them playing around and wasting time instead of working. For example, there are multiple sequences where the group of friends are eating, drinking, and singing in open-air restaurants. Hou thus articulate his resistant towards the obsession towards productivity and money through his portrayal of the boys' joyful daily life.

These boys represent the group of young people who refused to be assimilated by neoliberal obsessions with money. In fact, in 1980s Taiwan, because of the still effective martial law, the government currency regulations and political fears of China allowed people to invest only in local businesses instead of foreign businesses. However, the excessive amount of business that was established during the neoliberal reform resulted in of unsuccessful investment, especially in the stock and real estate markets.[76] The neoliberal mentality of productivity in terms of money-making thus backfired significantly because many small businesses were facing bankruptcy, which led to a high suicide rate in the 1980s.

This phenomenon is also shown in the film, represented by Hsiao-Hsing's boyfriend Jin-he. Because of Jin-he's urge to make money, he decides to steal materials from the factory and sell them himself to. However, the factory soon finds out and fires him, leading him to leave Kaohsiung in the end and ruining his relationship with Hsiao-Hsing. Jin-He is often portrayed as intense, irritable, and impatient, contrasting with the boys' happiness and relaxation in the poolhall and other spaces of leisure. The boys' fun thus become Hou's reminder to the audience that, in a neoliberal society that is already cruel and isolating, there are many things that are more important than money, such as emotions and relationships.

Among the three boys, Ah-Ching is the least affected by the neoliberal temptations and is also the most nostalgic one. After they move to Kaohsiung, Ah-Rong and Kuo-zai soon

[76] Weller, Robert. "Living at the Edge: Religion, Capitalism, and the End of the Nation-State in Taiwan." In *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, 215–39. Duke University Press, 2001, 219.

start to enjoy “city-style” fun, such as going to bars and playing mah-jong. Ah-Ching becomes the only one who is still playing pool and often gets homesick. Because Ah-Ching is often seen as the embodiment of Hou Hsiao-Hsien himself in this semi-autobiographical film, his continuity in playing pool thus represents Hou’s own nostalgia. If the other boys represent the other New Cinema directors who try to push Taiwanese cinema forward, Ah-Ching who constantly misses the past then represents Hou’s nostalgia for the older Taiwanese cinema. While the healthy realism that dominated Taiwanese cinema often gets criticized as being “escapist,” Hou seems to be suggesting that sometimes it is not a bad thing to “escape” for a while. In *Boys from Fengkuei*, one of the most significant scenes is when Ah-Rong’s sister gives them money to have fun in Kaohsiung. However, they get scammed and tricked into going up an empty building, thinking they would watch an adult film, but instead, they only see the view of Kaohsiung. They stand next to the window and exclaim, “This is indeed a high-resolution film on a big screen.” The camera then portrays them in a long shot standing in front of the window for a long time, taking a break from the overwhelming city life (See Figure 8). After this short break, Ah-Ching decides to put himself together to get a job and learn Japanese for a better future.

This scene critiques the idea that it is wrong to escape the real world at the cinema, justifying that it is useful to take a break to clear up one’s mind. This scene thus represents Hou’s positionality that looking back on healthy realism is as important as pushing forward the new cinema movement. For Ah-Ching, playing pool is still fun for him in the fast-changing city; for Hou, adopting some of the older genre techniques in new cinema films can also still provoke important meanings.

Yet Hou’s films are not always about nostalgia. Even though Fredric Jameson has designated Hou as a historian of the “rural” among Taiwanese New Cinema -- is counterpart being Edward Yang, its “urban” director -- Hou nevertheless also examines the “city life” in

his own way.[77] In 1987, Hou made his first city film, *Daughter of the Nile*, to portray popular culture in Taiwan in a unique way. Instead of portraying the pool room, beaches, and the small villages in the rural area, Hou, for the first time, depicts the daily life of a modern, urban young woman. The year 1987 also marked the end of martial law and the publication of the manifesto of the New Cinema. While Taiwan was going through a major transformation, Hou was also changing his focus on youth culture from the village to the city. With the lift of the martial law, the removal of barriers to overseas investment opened up opportunities, leading Taiwanese entrepreneurs to invest significantly in countries like Vietnam and parts of China. However, this also introduced a new form of uncertainty, with the ever-present risk of political or economic instability, such as the formation of the Democratic Progressive Party against the KMT, potentially affecting these investments. Due to these factors, despite the prosperity achieved by a considerable portion of the population, Taiwan is still not a place where one can easily relax and feel secure. Hou thus tries to reflect these restless social anxieties through his young characters. Similar to the pool hall in *Boys from Fengkuei*, Hou again uses spaces that are dominated by youth to show Taiwanese people's longing for a more stable future.

*Daughter of the Nile*'s the protagonist, Hsiao-yang, spends her days working at the American fast-food joint, KFC, lounges around the restaurant owned by her brother, listens to pop music, goes to night school, hangs around the family's apartment, or pines for a friend of her brother who is dating a gangster's moll. Being Hou's first entry into urban filmmaking, *Daughter of the Nile*'s palette is in a similar vein as the works of Edward Yang, using a visual scheme that is understandably cool, greyish, and drained of colour except for minor punctuations of vibrant neon lights, which distinctly separates it from the burnished, warm

[77] Jameson, Fredric. "Remapping Taipei," in N. Browne, P. Pickowicz, V. Sobchack and E. Yau (eds), *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); pp. 117–50.

nostalgia that pervades the aesthetic tone of Hou's strictly historical films.[78] Similar to Hou's previous films, the protagonist in this film also hangs out with her friend chatting, eating, or drinking in her free time. However, Hsiao-yang does not hang out with her friend in the night market or the pool room but in a restaurant-bar owned by her brother and sometimes clubs.

In the scene where Hsiao-yang celebrates her birthday, the theme song "Daughter of the Nile" sung by Yang Lin, the actress who plays Hsiao-yang, plays in the background as Hsiao-yang dances with her brother, Hsiao-fang. The camera follows them with shallow focus and suddenly cuts to two shots of flashbacks. With Hsiao-yang narrating her brother's life in the background, we get to know how Hsiao-fang started to work in bars, learned English, and opened a restaurant, which was closed in the end. She also narrates the story of Ah-sang, her love interest, who went to the USA after he and Hsiao-fang's restaurant closed. Cutting back to Hsiao-yang's birthday party, the camera first portrays the table of a crowd in a long shot and soon cuts to a medium shot that only portrays her and Ah-sang. The seemly romantic atmosphere is broken when Ah-sang says that the gift he gave Hsiao-yang is purchased by his girlfriend from Japan. The two never got the chance to date because he was always working while Hsiao-yang needed to stay at home and take care of her family, since both her father and brother worked in another city. As J. J. Chu argues, under KMT's regime, a lot of the job opportunities were within the KMT-led Jun-Gong-Jiao group, that is, the military (Jun 軍), jobs in the public sector (Gong 公) and schoolteachers (Jiao 教).[79] This politicization of employment led many people to start their own businesses. However, since the 1980s, the local market has been packed too much, leading many businesses to either close down or seek opportunities elsewhere. Ah-sang and Hsiao-fang exemplify these failed businessemen of the

[78] Kasman, Daniel. "Hou Hsiou-hsien's Urban Female Youth Trilogy," Senses of Cinema, June 9, 2014. http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2006/spotlight-on-hou-hsiao-hsien/hou_urban_female_youth/.
[79] Chu, "Taiwan: A Fragmented Middle Class in the Making," 208.

time.

The scene then suddenly cuts to a club with loud music, where people are dancing happily. The club seems to become the new pool room in Hou's cinematic urban life where it is a space mainly filled with young people to hang out and have fun. Like the camera in the pool room, the camera in the club also refrains from moving and portrays the protagonists in shallow focus, which turns the club into a space where they could escape from the real world. The club scene concludes with a long shot of everybody, including Hsiao-yang and Hsiao-fang, dancing together.

As discussed above, due to the popularity of the foreign market, many young people decided to work outside of Taiwan, including Hsiao-yang's brother and friends. While Hsiao-yang is sad that everybody around her has left her, this club scene thus becomes utopia-like, with all the people that Hsiao-yang cares about together. Throughout this scene, the camera captures them in a static long shot, minimizing the interruption of this dream-like sequence. As the on-screen characters close their eyes while dancing, they can take a break from a society that was full of changes and goodbyes.

While the lift of martial law finally allowed many separated families in Taiwan and mainland China to reunite, the opening of the market also forced many families to be apart because of the rising opportunities overseas. The club scene that creates a short moment of reunion for Hsiao-yang and her loved ones thus represents a certain desire for stability (See Figure 9&10). Through Hsiao-yang's story, Hou criticizes neoliberalism's stress on the "self", where personal growth and money-making are more important than relationships and spending time outside the realm of productivity. Hou, on the other hand, points out the complexity of adopting the Western neoliberal ideals in Taiwanese society that was still heavily influenced by Confucianism and collectivism. Ultimately, family would still be one of the top priorities for a common Taiwanese.

It is also important to note that in the bar and restaurant Ah-sang and Hsiao-fang opened, the Americanized lifestyle is a significant element. There are Marlboro advertisements on the wall, records of American music, and the band in the bar often plays Western pop music. At the club that they frequently visit, the electronic dance music, ecstasy culture, DJ system, and the rave party format, are also products of the West that emerged in the 1980s.[80] Furthermore, Ah-sang and Hsiao-fang often dress in suits, signifying their longing to show their Westernization. As Taiwan grew into its role as one of the four Asian Tigers and American culture flooded the island, many people began to look to the outside and foreign study or immigration to America became the aim for a new generation of Chinese living in Taiwan.[81] Ah-sang and Hsiao-fang also chased this "American dream", however, they ended up "in a mess", as Hsiao-yang claims. The tragic ending of Ah-sang and Hsiao-fang, both dead in the end, thus warns the audience that blindly pursuing societal trends can potentially lead to destructive consequences. While the infiltration of the American culture in Taiwan was mainly due to the KMT's political insecurity where they decided to open up to the US in order to gain their support, Hou seems to be criticizing the Americanization of Taiwanese society as well. The fact that the club scene in this film is not only a leisure space but also a melancholic place that ironically reunites a group of friends and family who are facing goodbyes implies the Americanization of Taiwanese society as a double-edged sword: on one hand, it can provide more opportunities; on the other hand, it could also potentially lead to the destruction of families and lives.

Even though Hsiao-yang faces a lot of difficulties and problems in life, she still finds solace in her day-to-day interaction with her family. The characters in *Millennium Mambo*,

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[80] Chew, Matthew Ming-tak. "Hybridization of karaoke and dance clubbing practices in Chinese nightlife." *Contemporary Asian modernities: Transnationality, interculturality and hybridity*. Peter Lang Publishing, 2010. pp. 287-307, 288.

[81] Berry, Michael. "Immigration, Nationalism, and Suicide: Pai Hsien-yung and Pai Ching-jui's Chinese Obsessions and American Dreams." *臺灣文學學報 Taiwan Literature Journal* no.14 (2009): 47-75, 47.

however, seem to be more hopeless. As Chris Chang describes, *Millennium Mambo* is one long look back at a not-so-sweet coming-of-age transition and a remembrance of time wasted.[82] The life of the protagonist, Vicky, is given a colourful, impressionistic cinematic portrayal. However, it is also cyclical, repetitive, listless, and meaningless like many other characters of Hou's films. Compared to *Daughter of the Nile,* where the club is more like entertainment for an Americanized lifestyle, the club in *Millennium Mambo* is a working and even living space for Vicky. Therefore, while the pool room is the embodiment of the memory of the youth living in the 60s and 70s, the club becomes a signifier of the collective memory of the wasted youth at the turn of the century. For Hou's city films, the club, in which the lone individual becomes part of a crowd, thus reflects the intensive solitude and confusion one feels when facing drastic social changes.

Furthermore, Vicky's family is completely absent from the film, further mirroring the fact that many young people were forced to leave their family for work. Filmmakers like Hou and Ang Lee point out the importance of family in Taiwan's social structures, while new cinema directors such as Yang and Tsai Ming-Liang are more clearly against Confucianism's lingering in contemporary Taiwanese society. Despite this lingering, neoliberalism has interrupted the traditional Chinese family traditions, which has induced a tremendous amount of loneliness among this generation of youth. For Ang Lee, he often uses traditional Chinese dinner rituals to represent the importance of family for Taiwanese. This is in contrast to Hou's representation of the club, a different kind of ritual.

Following its title scene, *Millennium Mambo* opens with a few sequences in clubs. Together with the heavy, beat-driven, and trance-like club music and the hypnotic blue color scheme, these opening club scenes "dislocate and de-specify" youth culturally and socially.

[82] Chang, Chris. "Distributor Wanted Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Millennium Mambo*." *Film Comment* 38 (2002): 18.

Similar to *Boys from Fengkuei,* which opens with a pool-playing scene, the club thus serves a comparable function as the pool room to represent the cyclic, purposelessness of youth lives. Vicky spends endless hours in bars and noisy dance clubs, while many of the significant scenes of conflicts happen in the clubs. For example, toward the beginning of the film, Vicky's voiceover tells her love story with her boyfriend, Hao-hao. While Vicky narrates that she met Hao-hao in a Disco pub, the club space thus first relates to love, similar to the pool room in *Boys from Fengkuei*. However, Vicky's voiceover ironically juxtaposes with a scene in the club where Hao-hao picks a fight with a young man he thinks has a crush on Vicky. In the previous scenes, Hao-hao is portrayed as an excessively paranoid and controlling person. Vicky, on the other hand, tries her best to fix their relationship to have a better life. In one long take, the camera pans around to capture the fight between the guys. The camera always reframes to center Vicky, who wants to stop the fight. However, she keeps getting pushed outside the frame because Hao-hao cannot control himself and refuses to stop. Together with the hyper-saturated lights of the club and the blaring, deadening music, this club scene alienates Vicky from the world around her as she tries to fix her life but always fails.

During the second half of the film, after Vicky leaves Hao-hao, a similar scene occurs in the club in which Hao-hao finds Vicky at the club and fights with other young men there. Using the same cinematography techniques, the camera pans to capture the onscreen space in one single shot, while Vicky's voiceover narrates "She broke up with Hao-hao, but Hao-hao always has a way to find her. He calls her, begging her to come back, over and over again, like a curse, like hypnosis. She cannot run away and comes back again."[83] While Hao-hao once again uncontrollably bursts out to fight the other men trying to protect Vicky, Hao-hao has become a metaphor for Vicky's inability to escape her marginalized identity as the club

[83] This part is my own translation of the original script, which is in Mandarin Chinese.

hostess. After all, Hao-hao has sabotaged Vicky's chance for an education, lied to her, stolen from her, and even beaten her. yet she keeps returning to him.[84] Vicky cannot find other decent jobs but continues socializing with gang members at clubs. She has no choice but to come back to Hao-hao to at least feel less lonely.

Although the film refrains from any overt political statements, the always crowded club space where Vicky hides exemplifies a collective way of escaping reality among young people in the 2000s. While the 2000 presidential election caused enormous social changes in Taiwan, Jinn-yuh Hsu contextualizes *Millennium Mambo* as a recollection that emphasizes 2000s Taiwan's transnational urban setting and youth culture's inability to distinguish the past from the present or the future.[85] The reoccurring club space in this film thus symbolizes a collective memory of the fin-de-siècle confusion and alienation among young Taiwanese people, who struggle to forming a clear self-identity. While the inescapable present is one of the film's main themes, exemplified by Vicky's life, *Millennium Mambo* fills the leisure time spaces with conflicts to touch upon the young people's fearful uncertainty about the future.

In 2000, Taiwan underwent a significant shift in its political landscape, with the presidential election marking the end of the KMT's long-standing rule and the beginning of democratic transitions. Chen Shui-bian, representing the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who won the election, proposed to advocate for a more Taiwan-centric approach. However, this shift led to increased tensions across the Taiwan Strait. Chen Shui-bian's government leaned towards a stance favouring Taiwan's independence, creating discord with China, which vehemently opposed any moves towards separation.[86] This divergence in

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[84] Yip, June. "City People: Youth and the Urban Experience in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Later Films." *藝術學研究 Study of Art* 11 (2012): 85-138.
[85] Hsu, Jinn-yuh. "The Spatial Encounter between Neoliberalism and Populism in Taiwan: Regional Restructuring Under the Dpp Regime in the New Millennium." *Political Geography* 28, no. 5 (2009): 296–308. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.07.008.
[86] Lijun, Sheng. "Chen Shui-Bian and Cross-Strait Relations." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23, no. 1 (2001): 122–48, 123. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798531.

political ideologies and national identities contributed to strained relations and hindered peaceful dialogue and cooperation between the two sides. Internally, Taiwan experienced heightened political division and polarization. The stark differences in political ideologies between the DPP-led government and the KMT fueled public debates and created a deeply divided political landscape. These divisions impacted government efficiency and political stability, influencing policymaking and implementation.[87]

Economically, the uncertainty stemming from the political situation made it difficult to maintain a stable investment climate, discouraging potential investors. On the international stage, the Chen Shui-bian government's inclination towards Taiwan's independence faced opposition from mainland China.[88] China, asserting its One-China policy, sought to limit Taiwan's participation in the international community. These restrictions impacted Taiwan's international engagement, restricting its recognition and participation in various global platforms.

Furthermore, the Chen Shui-bian government maintained a close relationship with the United States; however, this proximity worsened the tensions with China, which had a considerable impact on Taiwan's diplomatic endeavours and its overall international standing.[89] In *Millennium Mambo*, we also witnessed this instability of the economic and political climate of Taiwan through various mentions of failed businesses in both Taiwan and mainland China, especially around the character of Jacky. The conflicts around power structures in gangs, business competitions, and personal relationships in the club scene thus become somewhat allegorical. The club space that is supposed to represent fun times now becomes a place full of fights. There is a huge amount of tension hidden under the music and

[87] Sheng, "Chen Shui-Bian and Cross-Strait Relations," 134.
[88] Clark, Cal. "Prospects for Taiwan-China Economic Relations Under the Chen Shui-Bian Administration." *American Asian Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring, 2001): 27-53.
[89] Sheng, "Chen Shui-Bian and Cross-Strait Relations," 130.

dancing, mirroring the fact that behind the joy that the political change in Taiwan in the 2000s brought, there are also potentially a lot of uncertainties and anxieties, especially for the young people who were coming of age and did not know what to expect.

***The Politicized Leisure Space***

*Millennium Mambo* was made in a democratic time where political implications were more tolerated, and as a result, Hou Hsiao-Hsien was never afraid of expressing his political critique. Under the White Terror, Hou found his own way to reflect politics in a metaphorical sense. For example, In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hou cleverly uses a few shots of a tank's tracks imprinted in the mud to represent KMT's authoritative regime on the island. As an autobiographical film that continued the visual style and countryside narratives of *Boys from Fengkuei*, *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* used pool playing again as a main leisure activity. Going beyond the representation of the personal coming-of-age memory, billiards in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* also embody generational conflicts between the older generation of mainland immigrants -- who are mostly KMT soldiers -- and the newer generation who were born and raised in Taiwan, or immigrated to Taiwan at a young age. The reoccurring soldier image in leisure spaces reflects a certain critique of the KMT's militarization of mundane activities, including schools and sports clubs.

In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, there are two significant moments of pool-playing that are related to the military. The first one is towards the middle of the film. The scene starts with a long shot that stages the location of the pool room, the Fengshan Friends of Armed Forces Association. In deep focus, the audience sees that Ah-Hsiao is juggling with the billiard balls, which contrasts with the sound of the radio broadcasting Vice President Chen Cheng's funeral in the background. The scene then cuts to a long shot portraying former soldiers sitting still and listening to the radio (See Figure 11&12). This long shot juxtaposes,

through the window, the pool cue sticks with the soldiers who have agony on their faces, while the noise of Ah-Hsiao and his friends playing pool and chatting disturbs the sound of the radio. Cutting back to Ah-Hsiao and his friends, the camera is now located inside the pool room and frames them in a long shot. The boys continue to play pool and laugh louder and louder while the sound of the funeral continues to play in the background, which intensifies their inappropriateness. Tension and conflicts start to build up. In the same long shot, one of the soldiers scolds them and drags Ah-Hsiao outside to educate him. The window then divides the screen into two spaces: the foreground, the pool room that the rest of the boys are in, and the background, outside where the soldiers are. The soldiers, as well as the propaganda signs and the photo of Sun Yat-sen on the wall thus represent the older generation and official authorities. At the same time, the boys represent the rebellious of young people. The mise-en-scène thus visually expresses the gap between these two generations.

Intriguingly, in the following shot-reverse-shot, the window bars are always present in front of the camera, imitating how the boys and the soldiers observe each other through the window (See Figure 13). These window bars represent the barriers between the two groups of people, both physically and ideologically. Chen Cheng's death signals the end of an era for the soldiers, the older generation, who had fought for the KMT. As they are waiting to "retake the mainland", they are eager to go back to the mainland like Ah-Hsiao's father and grandmother.[90] However, Chen's death diminishes their hopes again. As Chiang Kai-shek writes for his funeral, "The retake has reached its final moment, this is the suffering moment of the country. During the stage of revolution, how can my best assisttant get taken away."[91] With Chen Cheng's death, the mainland immigrants and the KMT soldiers had to start

[90] Cheng, Isabelle. "Saving the Nation by Sacrificing Your Life: Authoritarianism and Chiang Kai-shek's War for the Retaking of China." *Journal of Current Chinese Affair*s 47.2 (2018), 76.
[91] Qi, Gaoru 漆高儒. "蒋经国的一生 (The Life of Chiang Kai-Shek)." *名人传记: 上半月 Celebrity Biographies (First Half)*, no. 8 (2012).

accepting the fact that it had become impossible for Taiwan and the mainland to reunite again. For the boys who were born and raised in Taiwan, it is impossible for they to relate to the soldiers. Party identification is weak among the second-generation Taiwanese.[92] Many of them have trouble blending their experience into a coherent worldview because they grew up under the control of martial law.[93] Therefore, Ah-Hsiao and his friends soon run away and smash the glass window of the pool hall with stones, expressing their rebellious disapproval of the older generation's political and authoritative ideologies.

In the 1960s, Taiwanese society was highly militarized, with school students wearing military uniforms, holding daily flag-raising, military training courses, and music lessons on military anthems.[94] Children in the public school system from age 6 to 18 were taught military songs such as "Fight our way back to the mainland," "I am a Chinese," "China will be Strong," "I love China," and "The Plum Blossom."[95] Furthermore, there were also designated areas called "Military villages" that only KMT soldiers and officials' families could live in. The KMT also prohibited the spreading of culture from other countries, including mainland China and the West, hoping to keep the young Taiwanese loyal to the party. Therefore, choosing a Western pool hall as the setting of the conflict reflects the young Taiwanese's curiosity in exploring different cultures suppressed by the KMT.[96] It also shows their desire to break free from the KMT's plan to shape everybody into a KMT soldier. Paralleling the development of the Taiwanese New Cinema, where filmmakers including Hou Hsiao-Hsien were eager to find an authentic Taiwanese cinema, the boys that were rebelling

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[92] Rigger, Shelley. "The Democratic Progressive Party: From opposition to power, and back again." *Taiwan's Politics in the 21st Century: Changes and Challenges*. 2010, 26.
[93] Ibid., 39.
[94] Chen, Ketty W, "Disciplining Taiwan: The Kuomintang's Methods of Control during the White Terror Era (1947–1987)," *Taiwan International Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (2008): 185–210, 202.
[95] The Plum Blossom is the national flower of Taiwan.
[96] Zhao, Yuan 赵远. "《童年往事》中的台语与台球" (The Taiwanese Language and Pool in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*), *文教资料 Literary and Educational Materials* 34 (2015), 151.

in the pool hall were also trying to figure out an authentic Taiwanese identity that is not just the replica of the older generation Chinese.

Later in the film, billiards once again connect to conflicts. After Ah-Hsiao and his friends beat up a guy who cut the line in a movie theatre, the other gangsters come to the place where they were playing pool to fight with them. Following the gangsters, the camera pans and then stops to reframe, in a long shot, the gangsters interrupting Ah-Hsiao and his friends playing pool. They suddenly start to push each other and are blocked by the trees and the movie poster, leaving the pool table in the middle of the frame. Instead of reframing to let the audience observe the fight, the camera stays and waits for the boys themselves to reconcile and return to the center in front of the pool table. This cinematography thus makes billiards a silent observer and participant of the gang.

As Chen writes, in the early days, due to the deep-rooted gambling culture in the pool room, it became the representation of the gangster and "problematic youth" (不良少年). In the 1960s and 1970s, the government listed pool rooms as one of the "eight industries" that are usually related to illegal acts.[97] Billiards in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* thus also reflect a collective "marginalized youth subcultural lifestyle."[98] As Neri writes, the undermining political message in this film is the issue of national identity differences caused by KMT's debacle in 1949.[99] The marginalization embedded in billiards thus parallels the young Taiwanese's alienation, further representing their resistance against KMT's authoritarianism. During the White Terror, the KMT's censorship policy was everywhere in society, and they prohibited every kind of behavior that potentially misaligned with the government's

[97] Chen, "Study of the pool players and their motives", 89.
[98] Yang, Xiaobin 楊小濱. "在鏡像自我與符號他者之間: 侯孝賢電影的精神分析學觀察 (Between Mirrored Self and Symbolic Other: Psychoanalytic Observations on Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Films)." *中正漢學研究 Chung Cheng Chinese Studies* 25 (2015): 127–55, 139.
[99] Neri, Corrado. "A Time to Live, a Time to Die: The Time to Grow." (2008): 212-218, 155.

ideology.[100] To stage resistance in socially unacceptable spaces such as the pool hall, then, reflects Hou Hsiao-Hsien's own disapproval of KMT's authoritative control. These marginalized and rebellious youth, therefore, go beyond being mere autobiographical figures and also work as a tribute to the people who fought for freedom and democracy during Taiwan's darkest time.

A year after the release of *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's 1986 film *Dust in the Wind*, once again has a significant scene that intertwines pool playing and the military. *Dust in the Wind* tells the story of a boy, Wan, and his girlfriend, Huen, who are from a small Northern mining town and decide to go to Taipei to look for work in the early 1970s. Compared to *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *Boys from Fengkuei*, *Dust in the Wind* is much slower. The average shot length jumps from around 20 seconds in *Boys from Fengkuei* and 25 seconds in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, to 37 seconds in *Dust in the Wind*. Even though this film has a lot more depiction of city lives compared to the previous two films, the supposedly "faster" urban lives intriguingly become slower under Hou's camera. As James Udden suggests, *Dust in the Wind* is a primal return to the very basic qualities of human life. This return lies not in simply longer, more distanced, more static, and more intricate shots, but in how they are tied together in an ingenious, and arguably unprecedented fashion.[101] The exceptional long takes and long shots in this film thus blend political implication into daily activities more naturally, implying the subtle and pervasive infiltration of KMT politics into everyday life.

The pool-playing scene happens toward the end of the film when Wan is in service. The pool-playing scene is composed of only one static long shot. The camera is positioned at the end of the pool table, providing the audience with a clear deep focus of all the soldiers

[100] Roy, Denny. *Taiwan: A Political History*. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, 89.
[101] Udden, *No Man an Island*, 82.

playing pool. In the foreground, there is a group of soldiers smoking and playing pool. In the midground, we see Wan sitting still on a chair with his eyes closed. In the background, there is another group of soldiers playing pool on another pool table (See Figure 14). The static camera, refraining from moving throughout this entire long scene, makes the pool hall box-like, intensifying a sense of boundedness and stagnation. From their conversation, the audience learns that these soldiers went to the prostitutes before they came back to play pool. We also get to know the reason why Wan is acting sad is because his girlfriend, Huen, has not written him a letter in two months. His life seems to be going nowhere in the military camp, which mirrors the critiques of the conscription system in Taiwan.

The conscription system in Taiwan is still subject to various criticisms. One major concern is the limitation it imposes on personal freedom. The mandatory nature of conscription means that young men within the eligible age range are obliged to interrupt their regular lives, employment, and education to join the military service. Back in the 1980s, the service was three years long, which significantly disrupted the young men's personal choices and freedoms, restricting their ability to follow their preferred life paths during this period. For example, for Wan, the life he built with Huen was on the right track, as they worked hard to build a life together in Taipei. Wan's military service not only ended his job but also ended his and Huen's relationship, where Huen decided to marry another man.

Studies have shown that the conscription process can also give rise to physical and mental health issues.[102] The demanding nature of military life, including rigorous physical training and the stress associated with it, can adversely affect the well-being of those in service. Prolonged exposure to these conditions can lead to physical fatigue, mental health

[102] Chang, Hsin-An, I-Shin Shiah, Chuan-Chia Chang, Chih-Lun Chen, and San-Yuan Huang. "A Study of Prematurely Discharged from Service and Related Factors in Taiwanese Conscript Soldiers with Mental Illness." *Journal of Medical Sciences* 28, no.1 (2008): 15-25.

problems, and, in some cases, injuries. Additionally, Shang-Su Wu and Shu-Huang Ho have argued that the conscription system is inherently unfair. It tends to disproportionately burden youth from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and low-income families. On the contrary, individuals from more affluent families may find ways to waive conscription through financial means or influential connections.[103] People like Wan in the film, who come from poor families in the countryside, have no chance to avoid conscription.

Furthermore, the conscription system was implanted by the KMT government not only to form armies to "defend" their land but also to minimize the legacy of Taiwan under Japanese governance, enshrining the KMT regime's legitimacy in Taiwan in order to spread the "Chinese identity". During the three years of service, conscripts learned the official language, Mandarin, which many locals, such as Wan, were unable to speak. Additionally, an extensive curriculum of political education that emphasized the Chinese identity was taught by the General Political Warfare Department.[104] The sad stories around Wan and the long shot together with the deep focus that blurs the individuality of the soldiers criticize the assimilation function of military service in 1980s KMT ruled Taiwan. The soldiers' conversations around prostitution and their act of idling in the pool hall further questions the "formalism" that focused more on the act of training and strict rules rather than conduct actual military operations. Therefore, following his critique of the militarization of everyday life in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hou Hsiao-Hsien goes on to implicitly criticize the military system through the mundane story of Wan's unrequited love in *Dust in the Wind*.

[103] Wu, Shang-Su, and Shu-Huang Ho. "Conscription in Taiwan: A Problematic Evolution." In *National Service in Singapore*, 229–49. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte, 2019.
[104] Wu and Ho, "Conscription in Taiwan: A Problematic Evolution," 231.

***The Retrospective Hou***

While the KMT-led government, as discussed above, was pushing for a "Chinese identity" through national programs such as schools and the military system, Hou Hsiao-Hsien is eager to construct a "Taiwanese identity" that could speak for more Taiwanese people including himself. In his retrospective works, *Goodbye South, Goodbye* and *Three Times*, the pool-playing occurs again to extend billiards' meaning to Taiwan's social problems lingering between the past and the present. By combining the use of pool-playing in *Boys from Fengkuei*, *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, and *Dust in the Wind*, billiards has become the main drive of narrative and a nostalgic identity in *Three Times*. Billiard's metaphors hence become a conjunction between "personal archives of the past" and a "shared and recorded past."[105] With the main male protagonist in this story is portrayed as a conscript, the pool hall that embodies various critiques towards the KMT government now becomes a window to examine the turbulent history in the 2000s DPP-led Taiwan. Hou also returns to the club to recap his urban exploration of the Taiwanese youth in the third story of *Three Times*. The present-day Taiwan of 2005 still reprises the same aimless and confused youth from *Daughter of the Nile* and *Millennium Mambo*.

As in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, in *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1995), Hou continues to connect billiards with the "marginalized" people. This film, as Wen suggests, overthrows Hou's tendency to film the "past" and his own memories. It is a story about people trapped in their past who are at a loss in this contemporary world.[106] The pool room appears in the background throughout a sequence where Xiao Kao and his gangster members are collecting debts. This sequence consists of only one long take that depends on panning and reframing to

[105] Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 30.
[106] Wen, Tien-Hsiang, and Gan Sheuo Hui. "Hou Hsiao-Hsien: a standard for evaluating Taiwan's cinema." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9.2 (2008), 227.

drive the narrative. In this long take, the camera first pans to follow Xu, the debtor, as he walks into the room, and then quickly shifts its focus to Xiao Kao. The camera continues to pan to follow Xiao Kao as he sits down next to Xu. The noise from the pool hall overlaps with their conversation, and in deep focus, the motion of the people playing pool is also visible in the background. Their movements of stroking and the sound of billiard balls clashing intensify the rising tension in the room. When Xiao Kao goes to answer the phone, the camera dollies to track him and reframes him in a middle shot. However, the camera stops outside the pool hall, separating the audience and Xiao Kao with a glass door (See Figure 15). The pool hall thus turns into a private space for him where he deals with his personal family issues. The camera soon hovers back to frame Xu arguing with the other gangster members about his inability to pay the debt, while Xiao Kao, who loses control over the conversation, stands in the background silently. The juxtaposition of the pool hall in the background and the fighting of the debt collection in the foreground thus connects billiards to the gangsters' banished lifestyles.

In late 1980s Taiwan, because industrialization had just started, both the government and the public advocated that everyone should work hard and contribute to society. The sport of billiards was seen as the opposite of hardworking. At that time, people who played pool all day were the dropouts, gangsters, and unemployed people, leading to the stigmatization of billiards.[107] Thus, billiards share some similarities with Xiao Kao. Many of the economic activities in Taiwan toy with legal boundaries, which historically were not well-enforced by the KMT.[108] Xiao Kao cares a lot about his family and wants a normal life. He does not want to earn money by hurting and killing people anymore.

[107] Chen, Kuan-Ming 陳冠名, "台灣花式撞球史 (The History of Taiwanese Pool)," PhD Thesis, 體育研究所 Sports Research Institute, 2008, 2.
[108] Udden, *No Man an Island*, 140.

However, the economic situation at the time refrains him from doing so because of his background as a gangster member. While billiard is still sometimes viewed as an "unhealthy" sport nowadays because of its link with law-breaking behaviors, Xiao Kao also cannot run away from his past. As Wen suggests, Xiao Kao's character in large represents Hou's deep feeling about "a chivalry that no longer fits into the contemporary world."[109] Therefore, the pool hall as Xiao Kao's private space aligns with his psychological world, which further indicates the pool hall's metaphorical meaning as a clash between the past and the present. Xiao Ka's silence in the pool hall, that always lingers in the background of the fights where the younger and crueller gangsters take control suggest many *benshengren*'s struggle and alienation in the new society of the 1990s. With the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) being established in 1986 and gaining more and more support in the 1990s, the KMT domination in Taiwan ended. The character of the left-behind Xiao Kao and the nostalgic pool hall that is now filled with new kinds of entertainment reflect a sense of fear and anxiety about the "moving on" agenda of the DPP. While the DPP is eager to declare Taiwan as independent and differentiate itself from the mainland, Hou reminds us of the importance of looking back on the traumatic history of Taiwan, which is the foundational base of a real Taiwanese identity.

Ten years after the production of *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, Hou's new millennium film *Three Times* pushes the significance of billiards to an extreme. *Three Times*, also known as *The Best of Times*, is a 2005 tripartite film that can be seen as a conclusion of the "best" of Hou's films. More consistently, as Udden notes, the first part of the films reminds the audience of Hou's early autobiographical films, such as *Boys from Fengkuei* and *Dust in the Wind*; the second part of the more distant historical backdrops such as *Flowers of Shanghai*;

[109] Wen, "Hou Hsiao-Hsien: a standard for evaluating Taiwan's cinema," 228.

and the third, of the contemporary portrayal of Taiwan in *Millennium Mambo*. Hou seems to be "taking stock of his entire career as if this was intended to be his last film."[110] Billiards that serves as a narrative motif throughout the first part of the film, "A Time to Love," not only serves as a conclusion of its metaphors in Hou's cinematic world but also is a symbol of the national identity of Taiwan, like himself who had become the "representation of Taiwanese cinema" by the time he made this film.

*Three Times* opens with a one and a half minute long take, where the camera smoothly pans, and racks focus between the protagonists and the billiard balls. It first pans between Chen and May as they sequentially take the lead to play pool. The shallow focus and close-ups immediately communicate a sense of intimacy and romance between them. The camera also spends a lot of time tracking the balls in a similar shallow focus and close-ups, which equates the importance of billiards with the two protagonists (See Figure 16). Billiards, then, is also a "main character" of the film, driving the narrative development. The structure of this sequence is quite similar to the scene in *Boys from Fengkuei,* where Ah-Ching and Hsiao-Hsing play pool in the night market. Both take place in Kaohsiung, and the camera in these two scenes similarly moves between the motion of the billiard balls and the protagonist. The billiard balls then become the bond between the two protagonists in each scene. The use of billiards as the medium of romance thus is already present in the opening sequence of *Three Times*. As the hit English song *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* plays in the background, the pool room is full of a "mood for love." Interestingly, *Three Times* and Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* did share the same cinematographer, Mark Lee Ping-bin, who successfully extended the amorous moods to Hou's film through his portrayal of everyday pool-playing.[111]

[110] Udden, *No Man an Island*, 175
[111] Warner, Charles R. "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: Hou Hsiao Hsien's Optics of Ephemerality". *Senses of cinema* (2006)

By 2005, playing billiards was no longer a "gangster-only" sport. In the 1990s, the "Republic of China Pool Sports Association" (中華民國職業撞球會) organized various domestic and international competitions in order to change the public's negative opinions towards pool, and actively participated in international billiard competitions.[112] The Asian Pocket Billiard Union and World Pool-Billiard Association introduced Taiwan to pool enthusiasts from all over the world and also provided opportunities for the domestic pool community to observe, learn, communicate, and improve their skills.[113] Therefore, in addition to leisure and entertainment, billiards has also become a professional sport. With the rising trend of pooling, as well as the continuous Westernization of Taiwan, more and more people are aware of the "royal" nature of billiards in Western countries.[114] After the excellent performance of Taiwanese players in the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games, pool became a national sport that everyone was eager to play.[115] Even though the story is set in 1966, Hou puts a contemporary lens on pool, making it a more positive figure in *Three Times*. For example, pool is no longer associated with marginalized people, but becomes quotidian in the routines and activities of daily life, such as May opening and closing the pool hall.

In addition, sports have long been recognized as useful tools for forging feelings of national unity, as they both celebrate national unity and employ powerful national symbols.[116] Therefore, in *Three Times*, Hou takes advantage of billiards' bursting popularity in Taiwan and shapes it into a national identity symbol within Taiwan's rapid social development. Both KMT and DPP rulers were keen to "erase" some part of the history of Taiwan: the KMT was eager to erase the history of Japanese colonialization in order to argue for a "pure" Chinese

[112] Chen, "History of Taiwanese Pool," 14
[113] Ibid.,15
[114] Zhao, "The Taiwanese Language and Pool in A Time to Live, A Time to Die," 151
[115] Chen, "History of Taiwanese Pool," 199
[116] Lemus-Delgado, Daniel. "International sports events and national identity: the opening ceremony of the Taipei Universiade." *Sport in Society* (2021): 24:7, 1093-1109, DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2020.1732929, 1095

identity; while the DPP was trying to encourage people to forget about the traumatic White Terror in order to claim a democratic Taiwan. However, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's retrospective pool hall reminds the audience that it is precisely all the hardships that Taiwan had gone through that built the Taiwanese identity, just like pool playing which grew from an illegal leisure activity to a world-leading national sport.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien is also not reserved when talking about the component of American culture in Taiwanese identity. The pairing of pool halls and English-language pop tunes undoubtedly exemplifies the rapid influx of American culture and its Westernizing discourses.[117] However, Hou refrains from addressing this history and its difficulties explicitly. Instead, he mashes Western culture into a local romantic story, leaving the audience to reflect on this combination freely. The two English songs that reoccur in the film are *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* and *Rain and Tears*, which are both major hits in the West. *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* is paired with a montage sequence where Chen travels to the pool halls in different cities, trying to locate May. This sequence crosscuts between different road signs stating all the villages' names that Chen travelled to, and the different pool halls that he visited. The road signs and the sceneries that represent the "authentic" Taiwan contrast with the English music and billiards that represent Western culture. Billiards' association with the divergences between the local and Western cultures emerges.

Back in 1966, Taiwan was experiencing remarkable economic growth, ideologically participating in Cold War politics, and serving as a short-term military base for the U.S. during the Vietnam War.[118] Also, Taiwan was still under the White Terror in 1966, which made society at the time highly unstable. The sense of displacement generated by the juxtaposition of iconic Taiwanese sceneries and English songs in the film signifies the

[117] Warner, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: Hou Hsiao Hsien's Optics of Ephemerality," 2006
[118] Ibid.

emergence of local and Western cultures in 1960s Taiwan. Owing to its historical context, Taiwan's culture is a blend of traditional Chinese with significant Japanese and Western influences from the Netherlands, Spain, and the U.S.A.[119] The pool hall, where the English songs emerge into the Taiwanese dialects, full of locals and travellers, is thus a miniature of Taiwan's diverse society. Billiards then becomes the embodiment of the regional and cultural identity of Taiwan, because of their similar complex social status. Forty years later, in the 2000s, when *Three Times* was made, Taiwan was going through similar social instability, where the Democratic Progressive Party won the presidency and marked the first transition of power in Taiwan.[120] Therefore, the parallel between these two eras allows the audience, especially the local audience, to generate meaning self-reflexively. The pool hall from 1966, hence, applies a nostalgic gaze on contemporary Taiwan and continues to reinforce its attachment to the Taiwanese people's novel identity-making under the new political regime, helping them to understand the history behind the diverse culture that composed Taiwanese identity.

Throughout "A Time for Love," Hou Hsiao-Hsien often stages pool playing in front of doorways, where the doors are always open, with people going in and out of the pool room freely, highlighting the division of interior and exterior space. The exterior space is often in shallow focus or blurred with cigarette smoke from inside the pool room. Unlike the window that serves as a barrier between the inside and the outside space in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, or the glass door that physically isolates Xiao Kao in the pool room in *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, in this film, the boundaries between the inside and outside are diminished. Therefore, in Hou's earlier films, these barriers turn the pool room into a private sphere

[119] Ho, Wai-Chung. "A historical review of popular music and social change in Taiwan." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 34.1 (2006), 122.
[120] Rigger, "The Democratic Progressive Party: From opposition to power, and back again," 46

where individuals, either Ah-Hsiao or Xiao Kao, can shortly resist authority under the radar of the KMT. However, in *Three Times*, the pool room becomes a harbour for the masses where time is slowed down. Everyone, locals or travellers, can all walk inside the room and seek a moment of peace away from the chaotic social change outside. In addition, whenever the camera is inside the pool room, it always drifts slowly from the protagonists to billiard balls, creating a space where bodies and objects are equally capable of prompting camera movement. This boundaryless pool hall, which welcomes everybody thus represents Hou's hope for Taiwan's future under DPP's rule. Compared to the third story of this film, "A Time for Youth," which once again uses clubs as the dominant leisure space, where loud music and flashy lights keep people distanced from one another, the pool room in this story provides a much calmer atmosphere.

Even though the neoliberalism and globalization under DPP's rule were inducing stress on people because of market changes and a competitive emphasis on success, the party also brought Taiwan a lot of positive changes. One of the significant contributions of the DPP was the promotion of political reforms. They advocated for a more open and transparent government, seeking to reduce the concentration of state power and enhance public participation in decision-making processes. This also reduced the inequality between KMT-supporters and non-supporters, as KMT officials used to fill the majority of the top and upper middle job positions.[121] The DPP also took initiatives to address social disparities and promote inclusivity. They advocated for social welfare policies aimed at improving healthcare, education, and social security, with the goal of enhancing the overall well-being of the Taiwanese population.

Additionally, the party championed gender equality and women's rights, aiming to

[121] Chu, "Taiwan: A Fragmented Middle Class in the Making," 209.

create a more inclusive and equitable society by actively involving women in various spheres of public life. Just like the boundaryless pool hall in "A Time for Love" that welcomes everybody to join the pool table, Taiwan in the 2000s under DPP's lead similarly opened its door to people with all kinds of political backgrounds and ethnicities. The diversity that DPP promoted is shown in Hou's pool hall, where there is soldiers, workers, seniors, and immigrants.

However, this retrospective aspect of the pool hall also reminds the audience of the KMT's contribution in Taiwan's development, since the criticism around its authoritative regime has dominated its reputation. The KMT advanced Taiwan's infrastructure development, including roads, bridges, ports, airports, etc. These initiatives improved transportation, enhanced the quality of life, and built the foundation for Taiwan's economic development.[122] Furthermore, the KMT emphasized social welfare, advocating for certain healthcare policies to improve the health standards of the population. Intriguingly, Hou Hsiao-Hsien has been a supporter of the Democratic Action Alliance that supports the unification of Taiwan and mainland China.[123] His constant retrospective view is thus his way to argue that the "Chineseness" brought by the KMT is also a significant and essential part of Taiwanese identity.

### *Conclusion*

While film scholar Jean Ma argues that in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's film, trauma signals a refusal to forget and a resistance to a narrative that selectively remembers history in the

[122] Hsu, Jinn-Yuh. "State Transformation and Regional Development in Taiwan: From Developmentalist Strategy to Populist Subsidy." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 3 (2011): 600–619, 602.
[123] Chen, Yang-Cheng. "向政治操弄說不！民主行動聯盟成立 民間制衡執政（台灣立報）" (Say No to Political Manipulation! Democratic Action Alliance Established for Civilian Checks and Balances on Governance (Lihpao)), May 5, 2004. https://www.nsysu.edu.tw/p/404-1000-59033.php?Lang=zh-tw.

interests of the state, this chapter oppositely argues that the recurring leisure spaces, including the pool hall and the club, serve a similar function of remembering.[124] The theme of "leisure" in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's film symbolizes the intricate social and political dynamics of various eras in Taiwan. The pool halls and clubs depicted in his films are spaces where characters deal with societal challenges related to changes in economic transformation, cultural identity, and personal freedom. In *Boys of Fengkuei*, the billiard halls serve as a refuge for the young characters, allowing them to temporarily escape from the pressures of a rapidly evolving society. The pool hall embodies their resistance to neoliberal culture, which focuses excessively on wealth and productivity. The autobiographical element of this film also brings Taiwanese New Cinema into the conversation, where the "boys" from the New Cinema were also resisting the commercial filmmaking. Hou nostalgically looks back on Taiwanese cinema through the pool hall, trying to find the "authenticity" of Taiwanese cinema. In *Daughter of the Nile*, through a new form of leisure space: clubs, Hou Hsiao-Hsien delves into the impact of Western pop culture and neoliberalism on Taiwanese society, as well as the complexity of human relationships and the desire for stability amidst social and political change. He continues to intensify these themes in *Millennium Mambo* and uses the club to further represent the uncertainties and anxieties faced by young people under the rule of the DPP in the 2000.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien's voice is always active on the political stage, with him supporting the Democratic Action Alliance that provides oversights on the democratic progress of the government. Even under martial law, in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *Dust in the Wind*, Hou manages to critique the KMT's authoritative regime through the pool hall's relationship with the military. Hou not only challenges the older generation's obsession to maintain "pure

[124] Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 28.

Chineseness" but also critiques the forced conscription system. Furthermore, in Hou's retrospective work, *Goodbye South, Goodbye* he once again uses the pool hall to portray stagnation and further represents the *benshengren*'s confusion in a fast-developing 1990s Taiwan. As Neri writes, Hou's filmic world invites the audience into "a time for reflection and a time for memory."[125] Dwelling through the different historical and political backgrounds, Hou's on-screen characters travel from the 1960s to the 2000s in Taiwan. From pool rooms to clubs, young people always find a way to survive the chaos and randomness of life. In *Three Times*, Hou concludes that pool room is a space of solidarity and shared experience which transcends temporal and social divides, offering some hope for Taiwan's future. The retrospective and introspective leisure spaces in Hou's films thus remind the audience of the importance of reflecting on history. An authentic Taiwanese identity can only be fully built when taking all parts of politics, culture, and memory into the narrative.

[125] Neri, 217

## Chapter 2:
## The Cinematic Burnout Society: Edward Yang's Urban Generation

> Desperation is the raw material of drastic change. Only those who can leave behind everything they have ever believed in can hope to escape.
>
> — William S. Burroughs, *The Western Lands*[126]

As film studies scholar James Tweedie noted, Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien, the two directors who became synonymous with the new cinema over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, both reflect the rise of an urban generation in Taiwanese cinema and society.[127] While Hou emphasizes the clash between the city and the rural areas, Yang is obsessed with the narratives of a new urban generation, which repeatedly characterizes himself and his films in relation to the city of Taipei in the global scene. Unlike Hou, whose long takes and stationary camera nostalgically depict Taiwan's countryside and bygone history, Yang deployed postmodern, self-reflexive aesthetics to portray the contemporary social issues of alienation, corruption, globalization, capitalism, and familial relationships in the city of Taipei. Taipei is hence depicted to be at the crossroads of a residual, "old-fashioned" modernism, and a late capitalist neoliberalism.[128]

As Korean-born German philosopher Byung-Chul Han suggests, societies geared around achievement and activeness, such as neoliberal reform, competitive labor market, and high educational expectations, are generating excessive tiredness and exhaustion.[129] In addition, in terms of the Sinophone world, the infiltration of neoliberalism was picked up by the government to integrate with the widely accepted Confucian philosophy to form a cultural-

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[126] Burroughs, William S. *The Western Lands*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1987, 116.
[127] Tweedie, James. *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 183.
[128] Ma, Jean. *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 85
[129] Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 31.

specific political bureaucratic ideology.[130] On the one hand, Confucian tradition valued communal over individual desire, rejected material gain as a moral ideal, and considered self-interested motivation to be base. On the other hand, neoliberalism promotes that economic progress is best achieved by liberating individuals to pursue their own initiatives. This opposing approach of Confucian philosophy and neoliberalism allows the governments, including the Taiwanese government, to claim control over the people and identify collective interests with state interests. The state devalued individual freedom, opting instead for a paternalistic relation to the population inculcated through education and corporate culture. The young people living in such societies under forced expectations and implemented goals are, therefore, facing extreme amounts of stress and fatigue.

Edward Yang is one of the directors who are keen to depict this neoliberal fatigue on screen. His preference for using slow-cinema aesthetics such as immobile camera, long takes, long shots, and deep focus, visually recreates a sense of claustrophobia and tiredness among the youth. This chapter thus aims to analyze the young urban generation's burn-out fatigue in Edward Yang's three films: *The Terrorizers*, *A Brighter Summer Day*, and *A Confucian Confusion*. While much of the scholarship on Edward Yang's films focuses on the relationship between Taiwan and the world system, or even as the "third-world cinema", this chapter builds on this relationship to expand on the people – young people, who are unable to keep up with the times. Yang's representation of cinematic slowness works well with his character setting of people who often live in stagnation during the fast-paced economic change, such as business owners who fail to adapt to the neoliberal reforms. This parallel self-reflexively shows how the promises of prosperity, stability, and security of the "economic miracle" starting from the 1960s in Taiwan have turned into a fear of "falling

[130] Park, Bae-Gyoon, Richard Child Hill, and Asato Saito. *Locating Neoliberalism in East Asia: Neoliberalizing Spaces in Developmental States*. Studies in Urban and Social Change. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

behind" with the implantation of the neoliberal reform among young Taiwanese.

Focusing on the narratives of characters from different classes, *The Terrorizers* tells the tragedy of a white-collar professional who was left behind by the entrepreneurial and creative class elites that fit most of the ideals of neoliberal individuals by pursuing personal interests while being successful financially; *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) documents the negative emotions of the lower-middle class family living under historical incidents, namely the White Terror; *A Confucian Confusion* observes the members of the young, rich, current generation, which has one of the highest standards of living in the world. This chapter thus uses Byung-Chul Han's fatigue society theory to analyze Yang's construction of the cinematic "society of tiredness," or "burnout society," wherein the historical incidents lead not only to social catastrophes but also mental collapse for people living in Taiwan.

Moreover, by drawing from political scientist Robert Williams's discussion of the relationship between nighttime and social structure, this chapter also argues that Edward Yang's preference for using night space creates a Lefebvrian "counter-space" that allows emotional venting and resistance, which also provides some potential remedy for the depression and fatigue in the burnout society. Yang's unique ability to put compositional emphasis on isolated individuals adrift within modern cityscapes in the on-screen spaces makes his cinematic devices powerful in terms of visually and metaphorically revealing the problems of neoliberalism in Taiwan.

### *The Terrorizers*: The Middle-Class Struggle

*The Terrorizers* opens with a brief shot of the city of Taipei while a police siren breaks the seemly peaceful dawn. The recurring sound of the siren is a significant motif in this film as it connects the protagonists and the different areas of Taipei where they live. While the siren shifts between on-screen and off-screen sounds, the different protagonists' lives have

been gradually connected together. With the camera moving along with the police siren, we are introduced to three groups of people in Taipei. The first group is a pair of young lovers. The boyfriend, a photographer, wakes up to discover that his girlfriend has stayed up all night reading novels. The film quickly cuts to the second pair, a middle-aged married couple. The wife is a writer who struggle to write her new book and suffers from an unhappy marriage, and the husband is a doctor who slanders his friends to advance his own career and who appears to be unsympathetic to his wife's problems. The third group involves a Eurasian girl named "White Chick" and her gangster boyfriend. As noted by acoustic ecologist Murray Schafer, "The general acoustic environment of a society can be read as an indicator of social conditions which produce it and may tell us much about the tendency and evolution of society."[131] The police siren throughout this film is thus not only a sign of urban apprehension but also a metaphor for the 1980s Taiwan which is going through number of crises.

During the latter half of the Cold War, Taiwan had a complicated positionality: its ghostly, extralegal existence, combined with rapid economic growth, gave the island an unsteady and phantasmatic quality, an extreme version of sped-up development that put every relationship to the past and the future in flux. The growing strength of the Taiwanese middle class led to the collapse of the KMT military dictatorship in 1987; however, the city of Taipei was scarred by the murders and the subsequent government cover-up. Furthermore, in October 1971, the UN General Assembly recognized that the People's Republic of China would be the only lawful representative of China to the UN and expelled the representatives of Chiang Kai-Shek from the UN.[132]

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[131] Schafer, R. Murray. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1994, 7.
[132] Hsu, Joseph Y. K. "On Taiwan's United Nations Membership." *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs 16*, no. 3 (2007): 39–43. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26591062.

Opening with the police siren ringing across the city thus not only foreshadows the filmic protagonists' inability to keep up with the time later in the film but also indicates a sense of fear among the Taiwanese as their legislation status is facing denial. The police siren successfully recreates the high tension in society during the 1980s Taiwan as it was facing crisis internally and externally. Globally, the unrecognition of Taiwan (Republic of China) as an independent country has worsened the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC, leading to more support for liberalization. Locally, a new middle class has emerged, which is made up of professionals and the owners of small and medium-sized businesses. They were the main initiators of the opposition movement and the key catalysts for the 1987 political liberalization. The increasing demand for changing the leading party has caused anxiety among members of the old middle class as many of them come from a KMT background. The depiction of the contrast between the "old" and "new" in *The Terrorizers*, therefore, reveals the struggle and tiredness of living in such a tumultuous and fast-changing society.

In *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han argues that stress and exhaustion are not just personal experiences but social and historical phenomena as well. He contextualizes our contemporary society as an "achievement society," which does not allow negativity and stagnation.[133] The inhabitants of this "achievement society" become "achievement-subjects" who are forced to be productive and successful. This creates depression and tiredness, ultimately burning people out because of "the excess work and performance" they must accomplish.

In the mid-1980s, Taiwan began to shift from its previous embedded model to a neoliberal strategy which aimed to sustain growth through economic liberalization. However, as Ming-Chang Tsai argues, as opposed to other Asian countries such as Korea, the neoliberal

[133] Han, *The Burnout Society*, 8.

reform of Taiwan's trade regime and financial industries was more a strategic reaction to improve the potential trade relationship with the USA and its weak position in international politics than it was to rescue a troubled economy.[134] Taiwan in the mid-1980s was, therefore, facing both economic reforms and power redistribution. The emergence of the newer capitalist class, which consists of younger generations of native Taiwanese, had induced a lot of pressure on the older middle class, which is represented by KMT-led mainland immigrants. The KMT, however, responded to this crisis with authoritative control over public and private sectors, leading to many labour-intensive manufacturing factories leaving Taiwan and relocating to developing neighbouring countries in the early 1980s, resulting in a high unemployment rate.

According to Ruoning Wu and Yawen Cheng's study on trends in suicide mortality in Taiwan, there was an increase in the suicide rate in the 1980s and early 1990s, especially for middle-aged men. This increased rate is highly correlated with the high unemployment rate as these men fail to meet the neoliberal expectations of being financially successful and providing for their families.[135] Made in 1986, the world of *The Terrorizers* sharply reveals the anxiety and fatigue faced by the middle class in the cultural-specific neoliberal "achievement society" in Taiwan, situated between politics and economy. While the potential harm of neoliberalism on the individual, such as mental health, was not widely discussed in the 1980s, Edward Yang uses the tragic stories of his characters to warn the audience of the consequences of living in a state of constant burn-out in neoliberal society.

Li Lizhong and Zhou Yufang are probably the most iconic representation of the middle-class struggle in the neoliberal burn-out society. In fact, Li embodies the tragedy of a white-

[134] Tsai, Ming-Chang. "Dependency, the State and Class in the Neoliberal Transition of Taiwan." *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2001): 359–79, 367.
[135] Wu, Ruoning, and Cheng, Yawen (吳若寧, 鄭雅文). "Trends in Suicide Mortality in Taiwan, 1959-2006." *台灣公共衛生雜誌 Taiwan Public Health Magazine* 27, no. 2 (2008): 110–20, 113.

collar professional left behind by the successes of entrepreneurial and creative class elites like his wife Zhou Yufang and her lover. The interaction between Li Lizhong and Zhou Yufang usually happens indoors, which often creates a sense of suffocation that mirrors this couple's troubled relationship. For example, when the audience is first introduced to the couple, Li Lizhong is preparing to go to work, and Zhou Yufang is depressed about her inability to finish writing. This sequence consists of a series of shot-reverse-shot, which refrains from framing Li Lizhong and Zhou Yufang together. The clash between the couple is already exposed to the audience, as the camera work visually separates them and frames them in different middle shots. Byung-Chul Han suggests in *The Burnout Society* that tiredness in achievement society is solitary tiredness; it has a separating and isolating effect.[136] Consequently, Li Lizhong and Zhou Yufang are both trapped in their own worlds, unable to understand each other's problems. In the scene where Li tries to find the missing Zhou, he claims that nothing unusual has happened except that she was having a hard time finishing her writing. Li clearly does not understand the importance of the novel to Zhou, while Zhou also refrains from sharing her emotions and real thoughts with Li. For example, she tries to hide the fact that she started to smoke again in order to stop her husband from worrying about her mental state. The couple's daily interaction thus exemplifies the isolation and lack of communication of people living in the neoliberal society.

Except from the storyline construction, Edward Yang also utilizes his unique composition of mise-en-scène to construct urban spaces on-screen in order to visually recreate the restless atmosphere lingering in neoliberal Taipei. As Henri Lefebvre argues in *Rhythmanalysis*, the city has its own cyclical rhythm: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles, etc. He further suggests that the city could be divided into

[136] Han, *The Burnout Society*, 31.

daytime and night-time spaces, where the night slows down the rhythm of the day as there are fewer pedestrians or cars on the street and activities slowly die down as it gets later and later.[137] While Lefebvre argues that no camera, no image or series of images, can show these urban rhythms, I argue that film as a moving image, especially urban films like Edward Yang's, has the potential to not only recreate these rhythms but also use them metaphorically. *The Terrorizers* has a clear divide between the day and the night in terms of its mise-en-scène and cinematography. The daytime spaces are often associated with public spaces and activities, such as driving on the street and working in the office. The nighttime spaces, on the other hand, are often more intimate and private, such as residing at home. The few moments where the couple opened up to each other with their real emotions happened during the evenings.

While the majority of the cinematography used in this film is Italian-neorealism-style of "objective" camera such as long shots and immobile shots that are frequently more observational than participatory, the scenes during the nighttime often oppositely encourage psychological introspection and identification with the characters through close-ups and shallow focus. As Andre Bazin commented, objective camera movements are rid of all sentimentality.[138] This emotionless camera during the daytime thus contrasts with the intimate camera during the nighttime, emphasizing the hidden struggle of living in a machine-like neoliberal city.

This significant nighttime scene starts after Zhou Yufen cheats on her husband with her former lover and decides to leave her husband. Zhou comes back home in the middle of the night, and she reveals all her dissatisfaction with her husband over the years. The breakup

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[137] Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*. Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers. London: Continuum, 2004.
[138] Bazin, André. "Germany, Year Zero", *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism*. New York: Continuum, 2011, 57-61, 61.

scene lasts for seven minutes, starting with a medium shot of Li Lizhong ranting about Zhou Yufen's unstable mental state. While Li looks directly into the camera, this point-of-view shot allows the audience to feel sympathy towards him. Indeed, he has tried his best to make his wife happy. When the kettle starts to whistle, Zhou gets up and walks into the kitchen to turn off the stove. The film cuts from a long shot of Li in the dining room and Zhou in the kitchen to a medium shot of Zhou's back in front of the stove (See Figure 17). The cut from room to room can be viewed as a visual metaphor of Zhou and Li's broken relationship. The division of the rooms first visually separates the couple and then excludes Li from the frame by moving the camera into the kitchen, suggesting Zhou has made up her mind to leave Li no matter what. A three-minute long take in medium shot of Zhou's rant against Li immediately follows. Zhou accuses her husband of not being able to understand her and support her emotionally. Without a single shot/reverse shot, Zhou's rant appears as a monologue, while she looks directly into the camera. The well-lit Zhou contrasts with the dark room, which allows the audience to identify with her emotional turmoil (See Figure 18). The night space in this scene thus allows the couple to remove the masquerade they put on during the daytime and reveal their real emotions. While Yang's camera imitates the rhythm of the city by using faster shot changes and story pace during the daytime, as well as fewer cuts and more immobile cinematography in the nighttime, the slowness embedded in the night also shows their desire for a less overwhelming life.

The couple's different attitudes towards the failure of their marriage lead to their different fates at the end of the film. The self-reflexive nature of this sequence also invites the audience to reflect on our own lives. We are left with the question of how to cope with tiredness in neoliberal society. It is important for us to understand that the main disagreement between the couple is between efficiency versus emotions. While Li believed that he had devoted a lot to this family by working non-stop, Zhou wanted him to put in more "affective

labour", to use the term borrowed from Michael Hardt.[139] Through Zhou's monologue, Yang reflected on the idea that "affective labour" of human contact and interaction should also be considered when we talk about productivity.

Intriguingly, Li Lizhong is a doctor, who at work performs a certain level of affective labour as he needs to take care of his patients and provides emotional support. The fact that he still underestimates the importance of affective labour reflects the overall ignorance of one's emotions and mental health in the 1980s neoliberal Taiwan. Taiwan in the 1980s was in the middle of the "economic miracle", which was the age of conspicuous consumption, the private automobile, and luxury housing, as the heavy industrialization of the 1970s gave way to an information-based, technology-driven, and consumption-oriented economy.

By the end of the 1980s, a period of unprecedented economic dynamism, Taiwan had become a manufacturing hub specializing in various high-tech industries, especially the production of computers and semiconductors.[140] Therefore, efficiency and productivity rather than human relationships become more important in this age of technology because of the fear of machines replacing human labour. As a mainlander in his character setting, Li Lizhong represents the KMT-led middle class who gradually lost their socio-economic status during this economic reform as the KMT was more interested in the development of heavy industry while in contrast, light industries such as computers were becoming more popular. Like Li, many of them have a hard time coping with the "feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, or fear of failure" that resulted from unemployment, as well as failures in family and marriage.[141] The double ending of this film, first presented as a dream where Li takes violent actions against those he believes have harmed his life, and then as a real-life scenario where Li takes his own

[139] Hardt, Michael. "Affective Labor." *Boundary* 2 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100. http://www.jstor.org/stable/303793.
[140] Tweedie, James. *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 157.
[141] Han, *The Burnout Society*, 26.

life, illustrates violence as an unavoidable means of response and self-assertion in a self-centred, excessively individualistic modern consumer society.

Except from depicting the struggle of the middle class, *The Terrorizers* also discusses the neoliberal life of the youth, exemplified by the interesting relationship between the photographer, Xiao Qiang, his girlfriend, and White Chick. Xiao Qiang observes the city of Taipei through his camera, reminding the audience of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A City of Sadness*. In Hou's film, the deaf brother played by Tony Leung, Wen-ching, similarly observes the world with his camera. While Jean Ma argues that Wen-ching's relationship to photography constitutes a rich mediation on image technology's framing of time, presence and absence, memory, and amnesia, Xiao Qiang, on the other hand, has a more hierarchical relationship with photography. His photos are often taken without the acknowledgement of his subjects, used for his own pleasure, and hint at the richer class's objectification of people in the neoliberal society.

For example, in the scene where Xiao Qiang and his girlfriend have a fight where she believed that he has cheated on her, it happens because he took a lot of photos of another girl, White Chick. Starting with a few close-ups of Xiao Qiang's photos of the White Chick, who was on the police incident site and ran away successfully, Xiao Qiang's girlfriend furiously tears down all the photos on the wall. The fast-cutting montage that shows the girlfriend throwing the photos, books, and the camera visually reflects her anger. She then tears down his dark room, where in this shot, the films of the photos are in the foreground, his girlfriend in the mid-ground, and Xiao Qiang silently standing in the background. Throughout the scene, a piece of American pop music, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes", plays in the background and the conversation between the characters are inaudible to the audience. This arrangement of mise-en-scene then refrains from building any attachments between the on-screen characters, which implies Xiao Qiang's inability to provide emotional support. He seems to

be a younger version of Li Lizhong, but even more detached and lacks sentimentality.

Later in the film, the audience gets to know that Xiao Qiang is actually from a very rich family. He goes back home because he is "out of money" and the audience sees that he has a maid. He is used to being on the top of the pyramid, therefore, tends to reduce other people into his photographic objects including his girlfriend and White Chick. Throughout the film, it is hard to tell if he actually likes his girlfriend, or if he is just pleasing himself. His obsession with White Chick is also often shown through his lifeless black-and-white photos. He hangs an enlarged, mosaic wall of photos of White Chick in his dark room, where this photo collage of her face reoccurs in the film many times. The fact that Xiao Qiang falls in love with an image further shows his objectification of people. Xiao Qiang's character thus contrasts with Li Lizhong, where the younger Xiao Qiang is the person who objectifies others while the older Li Lizhong is the object. This contrast further criticizes increased class differences in Taiwan due to neoliberalism in the 1980s.

According to Hsin-Muang Michael Hsiao, one of the researchers in Academia Sinica, the problem of class differences started in the 1980s, and continue to rise. Before the 1980s, the economic differences between classes were relatively under control because of the land reform policy that allowed rural Taiwanese society to grow steadily, as well as the vigorous development of small and medium-sized enterprises that enabled good employment rates and shared growth in urban Taiwanese society. However, after the 1980s, because of rapid urbanization and the opening of the overseas market promoted by the neoliberal reform, the application of these two conditions lost its effect of "suppressing social inequality".[142] The rich class becomes richer, and the older middle class tends to start struggling. Xiao Qiang's

[142] Hsiao, Hsin-Muang Michael 蕭新煌.〈台灣社會的貧富差距與中產階級問題〉 "Reflection on Income Inequality Problem and the Middle Classes Issue in Taiwan".《臺灣民主季刊》第 4 卷第 4 期 *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 4, no.4 (2007): 143-150. doi:10.6448/TDQ.200712.0143.

habit of objectifying people around him can also be seen as a metaphor for the KMT government that reduces its people to labours without distributing proper welfare. Xiao Qiang's idleness and indifferent attitude towards everything juxtaposes with Li Lizhong's hard-working but failed life, criticizing the irony of 1980s Taiwan where inequality dominates the society.

Furthermore, Yang's reflection towards class differences is also shown through Xiao Qiang's photos. Xiao Qiang's detachment from the world around him embodies some of that youthful, irresponsible sense of freedom promised by economic security and political stability, while the streets of Taipei captured by his camera give off a sense of menace and coldness. For example, in the scene where Xiao Qiang takes photos on the bridge, his camera swings back and forth from a strap. His playfulness contrasts with the apathetic workers and white collars walking past in his viewfinder. With deep focus and long shots that decrease these people into objects of Xiao Qiang's photography, their faces without any affective expressions signify the "burn-out" and "tiredness" of the average Taipei people (See Figure 19).

In addition, the fact that Xiao Qiang takes people's hustle for fun by trying to capture them on camera seems to hint at the government's ignorance towards certain social issues while knowing about them. For example, in the mid to late 1980s, the KMT government proposed the second agricultural land reform, demanded the implementation of proactive social welfare policies, and advocated further reform of the income tax system.[143] However, the calls for these social reforms had never been effectively implemented during KMT's time in power, which caused social inequality to worsen year by year. From 1980 to the time when the KMT stepped down from power (2000), the income gap between high and low earners

[143] Hsiao, "Reflection on Income Inequality Problem and the Middle Classes Issue in Taiwan", 145.

increased from 4.17 times to 5.54 times.[144] Xiao Qiang's irresponsible and somewhat reckless personality, therefore, represents Yang's criticism of the government's inability to address the issue of social wealth inequality and the class gap. Many people in the 1980s Taiwan, like Li Lizhong, expended substantial effort, burned out by the stress neoliberalism had caused them, only to find themselves failing to attain an enhanced socio-economic standing. Through the title of this film, Edward Yang indicates a complex group of "terrorizers" that led to the tragedies of the older middle class: the neoliberal reforms, the shift in the economy, the rigorous achievement society, the rich class's ignorance, as well as the incompetent legislative policy.

### *A Confucian Confusion*: The Bourgeois Capital

While *The Terrorizers* touches upon the criticism of the objectification of modern life among rich people through the character of the photographer, Edward Yang continues to reflect on this social issue in his Taipei Trilogy. *A Confucian Confusion* (1994) is the first film of Yang's Taipei Trilogy, capturing the lives of urban residents in Taipei during the post-Martial Law era in Taiwan. The film explores the themes of societal pressure, family obligations, and the search for personal identity. Through a series of interconnected stories, Yang delves into the ways in which Confucian principles have come to shape the lives of contemporary Taiwanese citizens and the often comical and chaotic consequences that arise from their attempts to reconcile these principles with modern-day realities. Taiwan saw both the increased globalization of capitalism and the decline in the political clout of the nation-state during this time.

In Yang's city film, such as *A Confucian Confusion*, Taipei is depicted as a bustling,

[144] Hsiao, "Reflection on Income Inequality Problem and the Middle Classes Issue in Taiwan", 144.

noisy metropolis where the main characters loudly declare their survival strategies, which ultimately prove to be false, deceptive, and self-delusion. This film shows the intertwined betrayals between romantic partners and friends, with the audience having an omnipresent view of the events while the characters remain unaware of what's happening behind their backs. Larry is a self-centred, two-faced individual, pretending to be an advisor to his friend, Ah-King, a Taiwanese businessman who travels across the strait, while secretly seducing Ah-King's fiancée, Molly, with false promises of business opportunities and living with Hsiao-feng, Molly's subordinate. On the other hand, Hsiao-po, a lustful film director, has manipulated at least seven women into sleeping with him by promising to make them lead actresses. Molly's college friends, Qiqi and Ming, have been dating for a long time. They also always fight because of Molly and their different career goals. As *Sight and Sound* editor Tony Rayns describes the characters in *A Confucian Confusion*: "None of these characters is based on an actual individual, but all of them are highly recognizable urban types, especially in Taipei."[145]

Different from *The Terrorizers* that focuses on the older KMT-led middle-class people's life struggles and inability to keep up with time, *A Confucian Confusion* explores the new rich class who are mostly native Taiwanese background, living in the extremely capitalized metropolis of Taipei. One of the central themes of the film is the tension between traditional Confucian values and the individual economic success in the capitalist society. In the film, characters find themselves grappling with the conflicting demands of family and personal desires, as they attempt to balance their obligations to their elders and to society with their own needs and aspirations. This is particularly evident in the relationship between Ah-king, a successful businessman, and his fiancée Molly. While Ah-king is committed to upholding

[145] Rayns, Tony, "Yang's Comedy: On the Set of 'A Confucian Confusion'," *Sight and Sound 4*, no. 7 (July 1994): 24–26, 26.

traditional family values, Molly struggles to reconcile her own desires with the expectations of her future husband and her role as a traditional wife. Another central theme of the film is the question of identity. Characters struggle to define themselves in a rapidly changing world and often find that their beliefs and values are at odds with one another. This is exemplified by the character of Larry, who presents himself as a savvy businessman but is actually a fraud. Despite his superficial confidence, Larry is lost and struggling to find his place in the world.

The film's Chinese title, "Duli Shidai" (獨立時代), which translates to "Time of Independence," is a phrase strategically chosen to provoke government scrutiny in Taiwan. On the surface, it suggests a yearning to liberate oneself from current social, occupational, and familial obligations, echoing the sentiments of many Taiwanese. However, the title also alludes to Taiwan's historical advocacy for independence, previously considered illegal. In 1994 when the film was made, martial law was officially lifted after Lee Teng-hui succeeded Chiang Ching-Kuo as president. While the film did not explicitly engage with this political movement, its central argument emphasizes the urgent need for Taiwanese individuals of Chinese descent to reconsider their connection with China's conventional social frameworks—specifically, their Confucian heritage. Through his witty and often absurd depictions of the various characters, Yang exposes the flaws and inconsistencies of Confucian principles, showing how they often clash with the realities of contemporary life. Rather than merely representing the past and traditions, the term "Confucian principles" in my usage refers to an ideology that is still very present in the contemporary Taiwanese society. This ideology is frequently promoted by the Taiwanese and Chinese governments as a major representation of Chinese identity and a tool for maintaining hierarchical social order, as well

as to discipline the citizens' behaviour, including fidelity.[146] *A Confucian Confusion* thus suggests that while Confucianism may have once been a source of stability and order, it has now become a source of confusion and turmoil, as people struggle to reconcile its demands with the ideals of neoliberalism.

It is also important to note that as opposed to KMT's previous leaders Chiang Kai-Shek and Chiang Ching-Kuo, who retreated from mainland to Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui was the first president to be born in Taiwan, and therefore, was one of the native Taiwanese that *A Confucian Confusion* considers. Given the nickname "Mr. Democracy," Lee was recognized for his role as the president who successfully guided Taiwan through its transition into the democratic era.[147] Through the combination of the "Confucian Confusion" in the English title and the "independent" in the Chinese title of this film, Yang seems to be arguing that in order for Taiwan to become fully "independent", it is important, in this new and democratic era, to reconsider the narratives of Confucianism in public sectors such as education.

The new rich class who emerged in the late 1980s and established themselves in the 1990s were known for their lavish lifestyle. What made them stand out as the "new rich" in the 1990s was not just their high salary, but the way they acted self-centred and consumption-oriented, as well as their interests in investing in self-improvement. They were into flaunting their status and focusing on personal growth. Primarily comprised of individuals from recently urbanized townships with Taiwanese family roots, this group played a significant role in Taiwan's political landscape, especially emerging as a force of opposition in the late 1970s. A critical turning point occurred in 1986 with the formation of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The DPP advocated for a Taiwanese identity, marking a shift where

[146] Zhuang, Tengteng, and Xiangyuan Kong. "Shaping Personal Worldviews When Neo-Liberalism Meets Confucianism and Patriotism: Insights from Chinese Postgraduate Students." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 44, no. 4 (May 19, 2023): 687–702. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2023.2195088.
[147] Kagan, Richard C.. *Taiwan's Statesman: Lee Teng Hui and Democracy in Asia*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014, 13.

the influence of Taiwanese locals took precedence over that of Chinese mainlanders. This transformation was a pivotal moment in Taiwan's political history after 1949, shaping the trajectory of the island's political landscape.[148]

While sociologist J. J. Chu suggests that compared to the new rich class, it is the middle class who is more interested in practicing family-related duties in a reciprocal manner, Yang argues through *A Confucian Confusion* that the new rich class of the 1990s also tends to be trapped by the Confucian ethics. Traditional Chinese culture values family ethics and reciprocal responsibilities. In Taiwan's economic development, family support has been crucial, absorbing surplus labor and providing economic aid. The family system, based on savings, lessens the need for extensive state welfare. The new middle class, influenced by this familial support, maintains Chinese familism. Intellectuals appreciate it due to parental support for education, while small business owners rely on family assistance for growth. This phenomenon has led to the prevalence of numerous small and medium-sized family businesses in Taiwan, illustrating the strength of the Chinese family system. Molly, one of the main characters in *A Confucian Confusion*, is thus a classic example of a new rich-class woman struggling to maintain both independence and virtue in a Confucian sense.

Molly is a self-aware independent woman who runs her own production company funded by her fiancé Akeem. However, their marriage was prearranged by their parents to financially benefit both families. Even though she has agreed to this old-fashioned arrangement, Molly finds it difficult to achieve her dream of being independent and unique. Similar to *The Terrorizers*, *A Confucian Confusion* also tends to use the night space to intimately reveal the "burn-out" faced by the protagonists in the neoliberal society. As Henri Lefebvre noted on the urban functions of the night, the body, sex, and pleasure are often

[148] Chu, J. J. "Taiwan: A Fragmented Middle Class in the Making." in *The New Rich in Asia*, edited by Richard Ropbinson and David Goodman. London: Routledge, 1996, Pp. 207-222.

accorded no existence, either mental or social, until after dark, when the prohibitions that are obtained during the day, during "normal" activity, are lifted.[149] As a strong and self-determining businesswoman during the daytime, Molly is often required to hide her doubts and desires during the day since she is expected to be the perfect role model. She can only reveal her "abnormal" thoughts during the night with her most intimate friend, Qiqi, such as her will to leave her husband or her wish to close down her business, as Lefebvre described. Therefore, Molly's struggle towards the difficulties of balancing between the neoliberal ideal of independence and productivity at work and the Confucius virtue of being a good woman is shown through a series of sequences of her and Qiqi at night.

The first significant sequence happens towards the first quarter of the film. It is composed of a single one-minute-long take. Yang frames Molly and Qiqi in a static medium shot, where they rant about work during the day. Molly also reveals that her husband, Akeem, was originally arranged to marry her sister, but her sister pursued "free love" with an author. Her father then asked Molly to marry Akeem. However, her sister and her husband are also preparing to get a divorce. Ironically, this shot is juxtaposed with the previous shot of a television show that talks about "model couples" and "happiness in marriage." The big smile of the anchor on TV and the bright light shining on her contrast with Molly and Qiqi's worrisome faces sitting in the dark, intensifying the collapse of expectation among many people (See Figure 20&21). The hypocrisy, represented by the construction of a "happy family" image on TV, has been exposed to people. As John Anderson writes, the film was made before Asia's mid-decade meltdown, when Taipei's wealth was as rampant as its apparent paranoia.[150] It is the time when people are crazy about money, fame, and success.

[149] Lefebvre, Henri, and David Harvey, *The Production of Space*, Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford, (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 320.
[150] Anderson, John. *Edward Yang*. Contemporary Film Directors. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005, 5.

One of the characters even declares “Don’t you think emotions are dangerous nowadays?” He further states that Qiqi’s multiple charms, her “innocence, loveliness, tenderness, vivacity”, can all be faked for the sake of money. This approach of humans as emotionless machines in the neoliberal ideals, as Byung-Chul Han suggests, reduces well-being by promoting a sense of social disconnection, competition, and loneliness. Molly and Qiqi’s numerous late-night car rides, therefore, provide them a safe space to reveal their genuine emotions and tiredness of working non-stop in the neoliberal capital.

The relationship between Molly and Qiqi is intriguing to examine as the two of them maintain an intricate relationship. They are not only co-workers and friends but also have a slightly ambiguous intimate relationship. Confucianism presents challenges to homosexuality, primarily stemming from its ethical principles. Within Confucian ethics, marriage and procreation are fundamental values.[151] Mengzi, a prominent Confucian philosopher, asserts that “there are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them.” (不孝有三，無後為大.)[152] Same-sex relationships, inherently unable to produce offspring, are viewed as disruptive to marriage, as exemplified in accounts such as *Songshu*.[153] This contradiction places same-sex relationships in direct conflict with two fundamental Confucian ethical values, rendering them irreconcilable. Molly and Qiqi’s subtle romantic tension, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to be “independent” from the constraints of Confucianism.

Following the car ride scene, the next time we see Molly and Qiqi is at Molly’s house during the same night. The camera frames Molly and Qiqi chatting near the pool in a long

[151] Shi, Liang. *Chinese Lesbian Cinema: Mirror Rubbing, Lala, and Les*, Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2014, 13.
[152] Mengzi. *Mengzi: Li Lou I*. Chapter 26. Translated by Donald Sturgeon. Chinese Text Project.
[153] Shen, Yue. “Wuxing [Five Elements].” In *Songshu (History of the Song Dynasty)*, Vol. 34. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1974, 1006.

shot. Molly hugs Qiqi and apologizes to her for asking her to come in the late evening. Molly seems to have a kind of possessive emotion over Qiqi more than just friendship as the camera moves with Molly's motions. She also often gets jealous when Qiqi favours other people and when Qiqi wants to quit her job in Molly's company. Later in the sequence, Molly uses her cigarette to light Qiqi's cigarette, intensifying the intimacy between them (See Figure 22). Furthermore, the gentle blue light reflected from the swimming pool, which is also a site that many films favour to use for romantic moments, surrounds them and further adds a kind of amorous atmosphere. We also see Qiqi, who is considered to be the "model girl" smokes and curses when she is with Molly. Later in the film, even though they had some disagreements, they resolved their conflict in a backlit sequence during dawn, where Molly rested her head on Qiqi's shoulder, creating another hazy yet romantic scene The happiness and relaxation shown in Molly and Qiqi's intimate and trusting relationship at night thus challenges the heterosexual Confucian norms, suggesting the insufficiency and outdated nature of Confucianist ideologies in 1980s Taiwanese society.

In fact, throughout the film, Edward Yang portrayed most relationships, either intimate relationships or friendship as full of lies, deceptions, schemes, arguments, and hypocrisy. For example, the "golden boy and jade girl" (金童玉女), Qiqi and Ming, are the model couple in front of other people. However, they actually hold very different perspectives towards life and argue about everything, resulting in their break-up in the end. Ming is obsessive of the idea of being successful, and he cares about other people's opinions and social expectations too much. Qiqi on the other hand, desires to be independent and has her own way of dealing with business and relationships. Ming tries to quit Qiqi's job for her in the name of doing what is best for her, resulting in Molly's misunderstanding and Qiqi's awkward situation. Ming also turns his back on his colleague, Liren, who often stands up for Ming and looks after him, causing him to get fired. For Molly and her husband Akeem, their relationship is

also somewhat of a failure. Because their marriage is arranged, they do not love each other and in the end become enemies, even causing financial losses to their company. Larry, one of Akeem's assistants, manoeuvres between two women for status and money; however, he loses everything in the end. He also plays tricks on Akeem, leading to his own total destruction and failure.

In terms of these emotional relationships, neoliberal culture requires subjects to work on their characters and psychic dispositions. It also attempts to shape the subjective and emotional life of individuals, influencing ways of being and feeling as well as rationalities.[154] These failed relationships in *A Confucian Confusion* therefore criticize this affective impact of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism uses the promise of sexual tolerance, flexibility, and pluralism in order to fulfill its agenda to reduce state interventions in economic and social activities.[155] However, the interpersonal and intimate relationships shaped by neoliberalism that overly stress the "individual" in this film ended up with selfishness and paranoia. Edward Yang then cleverly makes the "independent" in the film title paradoxical, as excessive independence among humans might also backfire.

### *A Brighter Summer Day*: The *Waishengren* Clash

The narrative of unstable adults in films like *The Terrorizers* and *A Confucian Confusion* mirrors the experiences of those who grew up during the 1960s in *A Brighter Summer Day*. This generation, reaching their late 20s or 30s in the 1980s, faced a series of challenging transitions and societal shifts. One way to understand this association is to perceive it as a shared failing of the generation, symbolizing a generation that struggled to establish strong

[154] Ehrstein, Yvonne, Rosalind Gill, and Jo Littler. "The Affective Life of Neoliberalism: Constructing (Un)Reasonableness on Mumsnet." *Neoliberalism in Context*, 2019, 195–213, 198.
[155] Ludwig, Gundula. "Desiring Neoliberalism." *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 13, no. 4 (2016): 417–27, 417.

ethical norms. Another way is to contextualize it in Taiwan's distinct circumstances, particularly the shift from the late White Terror era to a post-Martial-Law society. Psychologically, these individuals were abruptly propelled from an unstable youth into an equally unstable adulthood. During their youth in the 1960s, they grappled with an insecure societal status due to oppressive state control, which delegitimized parents and teachers as role models for youthful rebellion. Transitioning into adulthood, they encountered a different form of instability driven by postmodern consumer culture, challenging their established identities and traditional social values. *A Brighter Summer Day* thus examines the birth of this burn-out society phenomenon. It explains the "tiredness" rooted in Taiwanese history: the clash between *benshengren* and *waishengren*.

Set in 1960s Taipei under the shadow of martial law, Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* focuses on immigrants from the mainland who are projecting their fear and uncertainty onto their children. The film's visual style superimposes the world of secondary education onto the larger political repressions of the White Terror period, where schoolyard politics become a microcosm of the militarized and authoritarian civil society.[156] Using a cast of teenage actors, including Chang Chen, Chang Han, and Lawrence Ko, and natural locations, Yang brings two street gangs, the Little Park Boys and the 217 Boys, to the screen. Although the film spends a lot of time narrating the love and hate between these two gangs, the boys' struggle to find identity is the central theme of this film. Si'er, who is forced to attend night school after failing a test, and his classmates, form street gangs to search for identity, strength, and a sense of belonging. The film ends tragically with Si'er stabs his love interest, Ming, to death due to his excessive stress that he cannot cope with. Adapted from a real-life murder of a 13-year-old girl killed by a 14-year-old boy, this film signifies the complex

[156] Yeh, Emilie Yueh-yu, and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*, Film and Culture, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 104.

emotions of the anxieties and fears faced by people living in constant changes and exile. This murder contrasts with the suicide in *The Terrorizer*, reminding the audience of the aftermath of KMT's political repression of the generation who was born right after KMT took power in Taiwan. While this film is Edward Yang's only historical film that does not necessarily have an urban setting, this tragic murder still warns us of the influences of the history of White Terror on the neoliberal reform that was happening during the 1990s Taipei when the film was released. It further suggests that the social anxiety and the burn-out phenomenon in contemporary Taiwan has their roots in the traumatic past of the island.

The White Terror refers to the Kuomintang's suppression of political dissidents following the February 28th anti-government uprising. This period of martial law lasted 38 years, from 1949 to 1987.[157] Kuomintang (KMT) labelled most of the prosecuted dissidents as "communist bandits" and punished them as such. The White Terror led to 90,000 arrests and about 45,000 executions by the KMT throughout 38 years.[158] The film's protagonist, Si're, and his family are immigrants, or *waishengren*. The *waishengren* came from the mainland during the Kuomintang retreat at the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The term *waishengren* is often seen in contrast with *benshengren*, which refers to ethnic Chinese people in Taiwan who arrived before 1945 and had lived under Japanese colonial rule. Finding themselves destitute in a foreign land with no local connections, some *waishengren* turned to violent crime or suicide. In the late 50s, *waishengren* crime rates and suicide rates were double that of the *benshengren*, especially for the youth because they had a hard time processing their parents' intense nostalgic emotions and their own confusion.[159] Wu and

[157] Lin, Sylvia Li-chun. *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan: The 2/28 Incident and White Terror in Fiction and Film.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 4-6.
[158] Manthorpe, Jonathan. *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 204.
[159] Yang, Dominic Meng-Hsuan. *The Great Exodus from China: Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Modern Taiwan*. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 70-71.

Cheng have suggested in their ethnographical research around suicide rate in Taiwan that there is a significant increase in suicides during 1960s.[160]

The rapid migration of the mainland immigrant after the KMT retreated to Taiwan over a short period brought substantial demographic shifts, along with social, political, and cultural clashes in Taiwan, which had been a Japanese colony in the first half of the 20th century, triggering alterations in family structures, values, and lifestyles. While the *waishengren* and *benshengren* may came from very different backgrounds, they faced similar challenges coming from the political and economic reforms during this time. Their study also pointed out that different from any other time period's results, in the 1960s group, young people, especially those between 15-24 years old, exhibited particularly high mortality from suicide.[161] The Chinese title of the film, *Guling Jie Shaonian Sharen Shijian*, literally translated as "Youth Homicide Incident on Guling Street" thus sets the stage for a story about these "burnout" youth who did not receive sufficient social and familial support due to the internal political tension on the island.

The boys in *A Brighter Summer Day* living in 1960s Taiwan were facing two main tensions: one is at home and in school, where they are expected to achieve good grades and behave well while coping with their parents' agony and nostalgia towards the mainland, and the other one is the Taiwanese society under KMT's authoritative regime where they have to "perform" as they are not bothered by their *waishengren* identity. Under such a complex setting, Edward Yang was keen to use deep spaces to recreate the sense of "burnout" in 1960s Taiwan.

As film scholar Emilie Yeh suggests, tunnel vision is a characteristic style convention in *A Brighter Summer Day* that is composed of long shots through arches, doorways, windows,

[160] Wu and Cheng, "Trends in Suicide Mortality in Taiwan," 117.
[161] Ibid.

and various other frames, promoting active exploration of deep space.[162] One significant deep space throughout the film is a passageway that connects the school and the outside world. This space both connects and separates the school from the actual city. The passageway is always depicted using deep focus like a tunnel, leading to a dark, mysterious space inside. The Victorian style of this passageway, presumably built by the Imperial Japanese during the colonial era, also provokes a nostalgic sentiment, which signifies a sense of uncertainty for the future under the new ruling of the KMT (See Figure 23&24).

While the KMT did end the colonialization of Japan in Taiwan people on the island, especially *benshengren*, were unsure how to adapt to the new "Chinese" society as they were educated by the Japanese culture for the past fifty years. This "liminal space" that lies trapped between the two burnout societies, a school that is full of discipline and a city haunted by the White Terror, becomes an inescapable place. While the boys' school uniform is also somewhat a military uniform, the passageway witnesses them repetitively transform themselves into "solider-like" both in school and at home. Indeed, the boys never expressed happiness in the passageway. Instead, the passageway is full of their complaints about the rules at school, as well as exhaustion caused by their parents' high hopes for their academic achievements. The boys have become "performance-machines," where excess performance escalates into self-exploitation.[163] The passageway thus becomes a participant, as well as a container, of the boys' tiredness.

For example, toward the end of the film, Si'er drops out of school. He spends all of his time in the passageway, trying to find opportunities to kill his love interest's boyfriend. Si'er's good friend, Cat, tries to convince him to give up and start studying again. In a

[162] Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 104.

[163] Han, *The Burnout Society*, 35.

medium shot, the camera stays still to portray this conversation. The deep focus highlights the reaction of the people passing by him. Everybody watches him with pity because he fails to achieve success at school. The claustrophobic nature of the passageway then signifies that he is tired from "behaving well", leading to his moral degradation and self-destructive violence. Si'er comes to the passageway again at the end of the film with a knife. The passageway is portrayed as deep and dark, conveying unspeakable horror. Si'er hides in the dark, waiting for his opportunity to attack. He has completely given up on his future now because he is stuck between the two burnout societies this film portrays. On the one hand, he is unable to cope with his intense stress because of his parents' high expectations. On the other hand, he still cannot find a clear identity for himself as his family is interrogated because they are *waishengren*, causing his father, whom he has respected the most, to lose his job and power.

During the White Terror many *waishengren* like Si'er's father were interrogated by the KMT for suspecting them to be "communist bandits" because they tried to exchange letters with people living in mainland China, often their family members, or read books that are considered "ideologically incorrect."[164] This kind of unfair targeting leaves many *waishengren* family living in fear and anxiety, where they do not know if they would go home one day, finding their family member to "disappear." Similarly, for Si'er, the endless darkness in the passageway visually represents Si'er's deep fear and perplexity which he cannot share with anyone because complaining about martial law itself might get his family into bigger trouble. The long shot and minimal lighting also make Si'er almost invisible in the deep passageway, manifesting his psychic infarction and mental breakdowns, as Han defines as the negative results of the burnout society.[165] The deep space of the passageway

[164] Chang, Hui-ching, and Richard Holt. *Language, Politics and Identity in Taiwan: Naming China*. Routledge Research on Taiwan, 14. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015, 40.
[165] Han, *The Burnout Society*, 31.

thus becomes the embodiment of the "burnout society" for the Taiwanese youth where they cannot see any bright lights in their future, trapped between the traumatic past and the hopeless future.

There are also many other deep spaces in *A Brighter Summer Day* that serve a similar function as the passageway, including the street that Si'er bikes to home every day, as well as the classroom that is confined with windows and doors. One other place that Si'er visits often is a film studio's rooftop. He and the Little Park Boys go there and escape from the real world. The film studio is usually portrayed in a bird-eye view long shot from the rooftop, matching the boys' perspective. The architecture of the studio, including the almost expressionist use of the pillars and the girds, visually dissects the film crew and the boys into different spaces. It works well with the bird-eye view shots, which intensifies the hierarchical nature of the film studio (See Figure 25).

These sequences at the film studio remind us that the films we watch to relieve our tiredness from our own real-world experiences are also nothing but capitalist worlds. For example, the film studio is always filled with arguments between the ambitious director, the actors, and the producers who provide the money and want to control the filmmaking. Also, the sequences in the film studio often use extreme long shots, which dehumanizes the film crew to machines. The film studio thus becomes a microcosm of the burned-out Taiwanese society where the human subject has willingly subjugated its needs to the infrastructure of the capital.[166] The deepness created by the high-angle shots and the deep focus also creates a sense of surveillance, implying the KMT's control over the Taiwanese film industry during the White Terror.[167]

[166] Gandy, Matthew. "Urban Atmospheres." *Cultural Geographies* 24, no. 3 (2017): 353–74, 36
[167] Hong, Junhao, and Jungkuang Sun. "Taiwan's film importation from China: a political economy analysis of changes and implications." *Media, Culture & Society* 21.4 (1999): 531-547, 534

Before the rise of new cinema in the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema was predominantly composed of Healthy Realism, made by the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), a studio owned by the KMT. It claims lineage to postwar Italian Neorealist film but purposely avoids realism's dark and pessimistic themes. This genre is often seen as an escapist propaganda tool for the KMT to limit the audience's ideology and erase its traumatic authoritative regime.[168] In 1981, Edward Yang quit his job as a computer engineer in the US and came back to Taiwan to make films, not only because it was his dream but also because he was eager to change the current status of Taiwanese cinema. In Edward Yang's first film made in 1982, *In Our Time*, he has already tried to explore the story of 1960s. However, censorships are still imposed by KMT martial law, especially regarding historical topics. While this film incorporates elements of the 1960s, such as clothing and contextual set, it primarily delves into the emotional world of its protagonist—a young girl experiencing the early stirrings of romantic desire. It was until the official lifting of martial law in 1987 that the New Cinema filmmakers could start making actual historical pictures, exemplified by Hou Hsiao-Hsian's *A City of Sadness* in 1989 and *A Brighter Summer Day* in 1991. Therefore, the deep spaces of the film studio in *A Brighter Summer Day* artistically and visually reflected Edward Yang's own tiredness and hardship as a filmmaker trying to reconstruct and improve Taiwanese cinema in the 1980s, mashing his real-life fatigue and tension into his cinematic burnout society.

In order to construct the cinematic burnout society more extensively, *A Brighter Summer Day* also creates a certain atmosphere to make the on-screen spaces more affective. As cultural, urban, and environmental geographer Matthew Gandy suggests, the political salience of urban atmospheres is most strikingly revealed through "atmospheric events" such

[168] Chiang, Mei- Hsuan. "Healthy Realism: Paradoxical Aesthetics, Ideology, and Nationbuilding in Taiwan Cinema 1964-1982." Order No. 3629190, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013.

as fog, smog, or the effects of extreme temperatures.[169] Japanese media studies scholar Paul Roquet further argues that ambient media, which includes atmospheric sounds, can work as mood regulation while providing compelling material for open-ended reflection, as well as to intensify the isolation and uncertainty of the emerging social situation.[170]

*A Brighter Summer Day* uses heavy rain as the atmospheric background during the most violent on-screen moments. Intriguingly, following Edward Yang's preference of utilizing nigh spaces during moments of emotional explosion, these heavy rain moments also always happen during the night. As political scientist Robert Williams suggests, darkness breaks down social borders because social codes of conduct can be more easily broken when we are wrapped in the night.[171] Similarly, this film uses the night space to portray socially unacceptable events such as fights or murder. However, different from Williams' idea that nights "reterritorialized" the urban spaces in order to reinforce conventional order and regulation, the night space in this film is an "unterritorialized" space that is accessible for venting, escaping, and resisting. While Williams argues that night spaces reorganize social order and minimize the "undesirable elements" by implanting urban planning strategies such as prohibiting certain businesses (dance clubs and bars) or dwellings in certain areas, the nights in *A Brighter Summer Day* oppositely created a space that is free of the government's control, surveillance, or hierarchy.[172]

One of the film's climaxes and the most violent sequence happens during a typhoon night. This sequence happens two hours and twenty minutes into the film. It uses parallel narratives where it intercuts between the Little Park Boys and their enemy gang, the 217

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[169] Gandy, "Urban Atmospheres," 364.
[170] Roquet, Paul. *Ambient Media: Japanese Atmospheres of Self*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 4, 44.
[171] Robert Williams, "Night Spaces: Darkness, Deterritorialization, and Social Control," *Space and Culture* 11, no. 4 (2008): 514–32, 519.
[172] Ibid., 523.

Boys. It starts with a soldier taking advantage of the Little Park Café's owner and abandoning her. In a long shot, the camera quickly follows the soldier as he leaves the café and continues to follow the military car that he is driving while juxtaposing the Taiwanese and American flags inside the café. As the military car leaves the on-screen space, the camera shifts to follow three suspicious, presumably Little Park Boys' tricycles while they stop in front of the Little Park Café. All of these are done in one shot with deep focus, implying that militarism and nationalism have infiltrated people's lives during the White Terror. Similar to Hou Hsiao-Hsien's critique of the militarization of mundane life under KMT's rule as discussed in the previous chapter, this shot here also reproduces a sense of "burnout" since people cannot run away from military surveillance even when they are having fun in the café. The heavy rain constantly blurs our vision, which induces a kind of suspenseful atmosphere and intensifies the depressive on-screen emotions.

The scene suddenly cuts to the 217 Boy's lair, which is a long room with two pool tables set end to end. Presiding over this narrow space is the gang leader, Shandong. He is at one end, the pool tables are in the middle, along with various characters conducting the business of intimidation, and in the far background, the room opens out on the street where people pass by. The place is plunged into darkness as a result of a power outage caused by the typhoon. The darkness and the flickering candles give the room an eerie and frightening atmosphere. It also makes the 217 Boys vulnerable, letting the Little Park Boys penetrate the space and take violent revenge for their leader Honey's death. With a long static shot pointing towards the opening door, the sound of the rain once again dominates the scene to induce despair. Han argues that there is "systemic violence" in the burnout society, which would lead to exhaustive depression.[173] He further explains that depression often stems from a lack of

[173] Han, *The Burnout Society*, 10

strong emotional connections, which is a consequence of the growing fragmentation and isolation prevalent in society. The pressure to not only possess self-identity but also to meet certain standards can lead to severe and all-encompassing depression. While the Little Park Boys' status as *waishengren* made them difficult to establish a clear attachment to Taiwan, it caused them to constantly feel isolated, lonely, and ultimately, depressed. This scene thus embodies the possible backfire of extreme tiredness. The Little Park Boys, who are seen as "failures" at home and among gangs, decide to burst out their emotions in a brutal, extreme way.

Interestingly, this scene does not explicitly show the actual bloody fight. The fight bursts out after Shandong blows out his candle, and the flashlight suddenly shines on his frightened face (See Figure 26). The fight is depicted through the frantic movements of the flashlight and the sound of screaming. The flashlight presumably belongs to Si'er, who stole it from the movie studio, appears here as aggressive and defensive. It moves up and down and bounces off the blades, paralleling the action of the Little Park Boys beating and stabbing the 217 boys. This only light source in the dark visually represents the Little Park Boy's anger. As Gandy writes, the varied properties of light, and its affective realm, can serve as the focal point for specific kinds of cultural and political mobilization.[174] The chaotic flashlight in this scene then visually represents the trauma and tiredness of the Taiwanese masses under martial law, given that people were as disordered as the lighting. The static and slow camera that moves only minimally contradicts the violence and mobility on screen with its stillness and "affective lethargy," manifesting the resistance towards "growing up" and "moving on."[175] The affective atmosphere provoked by the rain and the flashlight thus further intensifies the burnout society on-screen built by the deep spaces, as these elements visually recreate the

[174] Gandy, "Urban Atmospheres," 366.
[175] Çağlayan, *Poetics of Slow Cinema*, 195.

boys' eagerness to vent their confusion and tiredness.

The invisibility of the darkness also turns the pool hall into "a space of resistance and also a space of representation."[176] Different from Hou Hsiao-Hsien's pool hall which is connected to leisure activities and resistance towards productivity as discussed in the previous chapter, Edward Yang's pool hall in *A Brighter Summer Day* is more violent and political. On a narrative level, the space of the pool hall is a space of power as the base for the 217 Boys. There are several scenes in the pool hall where the 217 Boys bully the Little Park Boys. For example, the 217 Boys beat Si'er's brother up because he wins the pool game, and they are unhappy about it. There are also several moments in the daytime where 217 Boys defeat the Little Park Boys. For example, one of the leading members of the Little Park Boys, Er Tiao, is beaten up by the other gang at school because he was hanging out with one of the 217 Boy's girlfriend. The daytime, or the well-lit spaces, seems to be dominated by the 217 Boys. The Little Park Boys thus take advantage of the darkness to attack the 217 Boys, who also killed their leader. The dark pool hall allows them to get revenge, which would otherwise be dangerous for them otherwise since the 217 Boys usually outnumber them and win. On a metaphorical level, because of the juxtaposition between the pool hall and the military tanks during the daytime, as depicted through deep focus shots, the pool hall at night then becomes a Lefebvrian "counter-space."

As Henri Lefebvre defines, counter-spaces resist and oppose the rules of the dominant space.[177] He further argues that the counter-spaces arise by making visible claims and behaviour normally suppressed in mainstream public space. In counter-spaces, mainstream norms, such as productivity and hard-working are openly transgressed. Different from the daytime cinematic world that is filled with orderly corridors, intersections, and windows,

[176] Williams, "Night Spaces," 516.
[177] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 281.

suggesting the on-screen spaces as a rigid imposition of control and surveillance, the night spaces with heavy rain blur all of these boundaries.[178] The pool hall at night then also becomes an "unterritorialized" counter-space where social control and surveillance are not present, and where resistance towards hierarchical social power is possible.

During the White Terror, The KMT's censorship policy was everywhere in society, and they prohibited every kind of behavior that potentially misaligned with the government's ideology.[179] People could only secretly resist KMT's control by forming underground clubs hiding in the dark. It then parallels the Little Park Boys' inability to fight back during the daytime and their resistance during the night in the pool hall. Therefore, people living under the White Terror can only fight against the hierarchical "authority", represented by the 217 Boys in the film, in the concealed darkness. Their inability to fight then strengthens the sense of "burnout" among the Taiwanese people because they must hide their inner thoughts and perform as they have no complaints about martial law. Released in the 1990s when the political atmosphere in Taiwan was drastically changing, exemplified by the emergence of other political parties like the Democratic Progressive Party, the counter spaces in *A Brighter Summer Day* mirror the fights for democracy and independence in post martial law Taiwan. By reminding the audience of the unspeakable horror of KMT's regime, Edward Yang adds his own voice to Taiwan's long-term struggle for freedom.

While Lefebvre considers night as a modifier of diurnal rhythms that slows them down, the night spaces in *A Brighter Summer Day* similarly "slow down" the society of tiredness during the daytime and attempt to provide some remedy for the neo-liberal fatigue.[180] Around the middle of the film, there is a scene where Si'er bikes to go home, and the camera

[178] Yeh, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 117.
[179] Roy, Denny. *Taiwan: A Political History*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 103.
[180] Lefebvre, Henri, Eleonore Kofman, and Elizabeth Lebas. *Writings on Cities*. (Cambridge, Mass, USA: Blackwell, 1996).

tracks him to go through the alley at night. As he runs into one of his neighbors who is clearly drunk, the camera quickly shifts its focus to track the neighbor. As he continues to drink from the bottle in his hand, he walks in a wobbly line while looking very happy. He smiles and shouts, “I love the night!” He then throws out his alcohol bottle and dances (See Figure 27). This neighbor is portrayed as serious and uptight during the daytime because he needs to provide for his entire family. The darkness that embraces him while he enjoys himself positions the night space as a potential shelter for the burned-out people who are too tired to think about their responsibilities. This moment parallels with the other night spaces in Yang’s previous films such as *The Terrorizers* and *Confucian Confusion*, therefore, making an allegorical comparison between the burn-out syndrome during the White Terror and the neoliberal reforms. The similar fatigue between these two time periods is shown through their similar suicide rates as Wu and Cheng suggest, stressing the importance and necessity of taking care of one’s mental health in turbulent times.

**Conclusion**

In 2023, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum curated a special exhibition, “A One and A Two: Edward Yang Retrospective”. The exhibition features Yang’s manuscripts, documents and archives organized and well-researched during the past three years, arguing that Yang’s creative works are still relevant to Taiwan nowadays as Yang demonstrates insights and critical visions ahead of his time in terms of urban representation, gender power, political reflection, historical violence, and social change. This chapter therefore takes a similar stance by delving into the theme of burnout and exhaustion as depicted in *The Terrorizers*, *A Confucian Confusion* and *A Brighter Summer Day*. It sheds light on the detrimental effects of neoliberalism and the lingering historical trauma of the White Terror on Taiwanese society, particularly on the younger generation. In addition, Yang skillfully conveys the characters’

feelings of claustrophobia and exhaustion by purposefully utilizing slow-cinema techniques, such as immobile camera shots, long takes, long shots, and deep focus. These visual techniques serve to recreate the oppressive atmosphere and the overwhelming pressure faced by individuals living in a society driven by expectations and goals.

One of the most significant social issues discussed throughout Yang's films is the class difference and social inequality in Taiwan. With *The Terrorizers* representing the KMT-related old middle class and the more liberal new middle class, *A Confucian Confusion* representing the new rich class, and *A Brighter Summer Day* giving voice to the lower-class immigrants, Yang builds a cinematic burnout Taiwan that exemplifies everybody's tiredness. Yang also explores the juxtaposition between Confucian philosophy and neoliberalism, highlighting the conflicting ideologies that shape the Taiwanese government's control over its people. They devalue individual freedom and force young people to meet certain expectations and goals, causing a lot of stress and tiredness. Additionally, Yang is also keen to use night space as a temporary respite from the pressures and constraints of the burnout society. The use of atmospheric elements, such as heavy rain and darkness, creates an affective atmosphere that intensifies the characters' emotions and reflects their desire for escape and introspection. Through Yang's sharp capture of the burn-out syndrome in different time periods, he further stresses the importance of recognizing the historical context and trauma that continue to impact individuals and communities until nowadays. Taiwan in the 2020s is also going through a turbulent time with the worsening relationship with mainland China, 2022 Chinese military exercises around Taiwan caused by the visit of Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, as well as the upcoming Taiwan presidential election in 2024. A retrospective look on Edward Yang's films therefore sheds light on ways to prevent the fault lines of history from happening again.

## Chapter 3:
## The Lost Boy: Tsai Ming-Liang's Reconstruction of Family and Queer Flâneurs

> He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds.
>
> — Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man of the Crowd*[181]

"Why has the pleasure of slowness disappeared?" Quoting from Milan Kundera, film theorist Lim Song Hwee questions the hustling lifestyle in contemporary Asia in regard to Tsai Ming-Liang's films. He further notes that auteur cinema like Tsai's filmmaking is perceived as box-office poison in Taiwan.[182] Tsai's films are marked by their slow pacing, long takes, and minimal dialogue, which together create a meditative and introspective viewing experience. To some extent Tsai's technique show continuities with those of the Taiwan New Wave, such as Edward Yang's compositional focus on isolated characters lost in a metropolis and Hou Hsiao-Hsien's pronounced use of long takes.[183]

As feminist and queer film scholar Domitilla Olivieri notes, films that work with slowness and provoke a mode of attention that has the political potential to activate a different way of seeing, and therefore a different way of relating to the world and to our social reality.[184] For example, Tsai's films emphasize mundane moments and, through his framing, editing style, and use of sounds to slow down the cinematic time, create a self-reflexive sense of "being there." Emilie Yeh further describes Tsai's filmic style as "camp," which Jean Ma also described to be "simultaneously celebrating the 'crass' and

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[181] Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Man of the Crow*. Originally published in December 1840.
[182] Lim, Song Hwee. *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016, 62.
[183] Ma, Jean. *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 83.
[184] Olivieri, Domitilla. "Slowness as a Mode of Attention and Resistance: Playing with Time in Documentary Cinema and Disturbing the Rhythms of the Neoliberal University." *Contention* 10, no. 1 (2022): 99–114, 107.

kitschy aesthetics of Taiwanese vernacular culture and subtly exploring gay sexuality."[185]

Tsai's films often deal explicitly with themes of existential alienation, with loneliness being the signature obsession that runs through his feature films to date. The protagonists in his films are often loners who wander in the city with no clear purpose and are detached from industrialized society. They can hence be described as "the man of the crowd," which Walter Benjamin, quoting from Edgar Allan Poe, uses to refer to the so-called *flâneur.*

Through representations of flâneur, Tsai's films often highlights the absence of love and care among family members and the contrary kindness offered by strangers, thus challenging the categories of the kinship-based family, such as the norm of marriage and its set relations of filiation, as well as the categories of heterosexuality, exemplified by the responsibility of biological reproduction.[186] In this chapter, I aim to contextualize Tsai Ming-Liang's redefinition of family in the contemporary neoliberal society. I argue that Tsai not only criticizes the Confucius ideals of the family but also provides a model for a new kind of home that is bonded together not by blood relations but instead affection, friendship, and emotions. He creates novel, queer family structures that challenge heteronormative standards by playing with gender roles and sexuality. In the second part of this chapter, I aim to elaborate on how this queerness and the act of *flânerie* in Tsai's films operate as symbols of many hidden social problems in Taiwan, especially the potential harm embedded in the explosion of queer activism. I argue that the fluidity of Tsai's queer flâneurs represents Tsai's rebellious resistance of the voyeuristic media and the mass's stereotyping of himself and the queer community in

[185] Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 96.
[186] Lim, *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, 98.

general. By focusing on *Vive l'amour* (1994), *What Time Is It There?* (2001), and *Days* (2020), I aim to map Tsai's films as a unique liminal space, showing the new urban lifestyles of solitude and self-sufficiency among Taiwanese youth.

**Redefining the Ideals of Heteronormative Family**

Born in Malaysia and of Chinese descent, Tsai Ming-Liang, who later immigrated to Taiwan, has a complex identity. While rejecting the label of "gay film director," Tsai sees queerness as a plural identity that contradicts the straight, normative society, both for himself and his on-screen characters. Similarly, Petrus Liu points out in *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* that queerness is a political paradox in Taiwan.[187] As Taiwan tries to differentiate itself from PRC, embracing queer rights and queer culture has been associated with the Democratic Progressive Party's policy actions to win votes from the young Taiwanese. Liu further argues that the specificity of Taiwan has made the "ethnic model of politics" a condition of public speech and civic participation. This means that one must first declare one's alliance with either the DPP or the KMT before one's political opinion can be heard.[188]

Hence, supporting the LGBTQ community or making queer art for Taiwanese artists would be seen as the equivalent of supporting the DPP among the masses. However, the fact that Tsai is Malaysian makes his film free from such political implications. He does not need to stand with either the DPP or the KMT because of his foreign identity. Yet, Tsai does have Taiwanese origin, having lived in Taiwan since his teenage years, which provides him with the ability to examine Taiwanese society introspectively and self-reflexively. His films' unique in-between positionality makes

[187] Liu, Petrus. *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 524.
[188] Ibid., 534.

them different from Hou Hsiao-Hsien's and Edward Yang's films, which often embody political meanings.

In her analysis of the global complicity of Tsai Ming-Liang's works, film and media scholar Erin Huang further notes that even though Tsai became known internationally as a Taiwanese filmmaker influenced by postwar French New Wave cinema, because of his identity as an immigrant, Tsai's films are rarely discussed for their Taiwaneseness.[189] While Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC, 中影公司) funded Tsai Ming-liang's first two art-house films, *Rebels of the Neon God* (1992) and *Vivre l'amour* (1994), Tsai's later films are mostly funded by international film companies, especially French, film companies. In her analysis of Sinophone slow cinema, Jean Ma also notes that Tsai's film not only reflects his "individual cinephilic sensibility" but also points to a broad collective culture memory that ranges from Hollywood to Hong Kong cinema and New Wave art films. Tsai's unique identity "in between" the Taiwanese and international cinema, as well as the queer subculture and heteronormative society, allows him to examine the production of urban space in a distinctive way. Tsai Ming-Liang's filmic world centers around the natural and "normal" life of the people who are considered "abnormal," and by dealing with themes of affect, desire, shame, and loss in general, it creates a universal "youth" identity for young people lost in the metropolis.

In *The Production of Space*, French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre disrupts the notion of a given domestic dwelling as "discrete, solid, immovable space," suggesting that once the semblances of solidity have been peeled away, such a dwelling "would emerge as permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run in

[189] Huang, Erin Y. *Urban Horror: Neoliberal Post-Socialism and the Limits of Visibility*. Sinotheory. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, 190.

and out of it by every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio, and television signals, and so on. Its image of immobility would then be replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits."[190] The domestic space for Lefebvre is not an independent private space but is modified by many public factors. The quality of the domestic spaces depends on the communal infrastructures and the social context, such as the economic environment, inflation, political parties, and so on. The definition of "home" is thus fluid and ambiguous as someone can view many places as "domestic" as long as they find a certain sense of belonging.

Similar to Lefebvre's description, the domestic spaces in Tsai Ming Liang's films are often not a "safe home" as the audience would imagine, but a social space for "encounter, assembly, simultaneity."[191] Tsai is keen to play with the ambiguity of spaces, such as by blurring the boundaries between domestic and public space. This unconventional approach to portraying the "home" further communicates the emergence of a novel conception of "family" among young people. As Rey Chow comments on *The River*, the families depicted in Tsai's films are often "tragic, work-burdened, and politically victimized."[192] Kinship by blood is no longer the sort of bond and identification that the audience is looking for. Starting with his feature film directorial debut, *Rebels of the Neon God*, in which the protagonist Hsiao-Kang accidentally falls for the thief, Ah Tze, while running away from his patriarchal father, the contrast between the distanced and suffocating family relationships and the playful incidental encounters has become a reoccurring theme throughout Tsai's works. Through a

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[190] Lefebvre, Henri, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and David Harvey. *The Production of Space*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Oxford. 1991, 93.
[191] Ibid., 101
[192] Chow, Rey. "The Enigma of Incest and the Staging of Kinship Family Remains in *The River*." In *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility*, 181–96. Columbia University Press, 2007, 194. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/chow13332.14.

combination of medium shots and deep focus shots, Tsai often portrays the traditional home space like a cage that traps the protagonist and in which they have a hard time revealing their real emotions and opinions. By contrast, the affect, mutual understanding, and attraction that are roused through Tsai's depiction of the accidental and replaceable relationships depicted by Tsai seems much more enjoyable and comforting.

One of the most noteworthy representations of the domestic spaces in Tsai Ming-Liang's films is in *Vive l'amour* (1994), which centers around an apartment that three young people secretly share. This film refrains from introducing any personal backgrounds or stories for the three characters. Instead, the focus is on contingency, which for Tsai is the foundation of human relationships in neoliberal society. Hsiao-Kang, a young salesman, discovers a key to an apartment in its lock ((See Figure 28). Without a place to stay, he takes the key and moves in to live in one of the rooms. The key belongs to Mei-Mei, a real estate agent who is struggling to sell apartments. Even though she has her own apartment, she often brings back different men to the apartments she is selling, including the one at which Hsiao-Kang is secretly staying. Meanwhile, Ah-Jung, a young man who illegally sells clothes on the street, has a one-night stand with Mei-Mei and steals her keys. He also moves in to live in this apartment. As the three characters live together, their lives become intertwined, and they each experience loneliness and alienation in their own way. In the end, the three characters are left to confront their feelings of emptiness and loneliness, with the film offering no easy solutions or happy endings.

*Vive l'amour* opens with a close-up on a key hanging on a door lock of an apartment. In the background, out of focus, we see a young man, Hsiao-Kang, delivering mail to the apartment next door. He then looks around to make sure nobody is watching

him and quickly takes the key away. The camera stays on the empty door lock for a while, with the sound of the elevator leaving in the background. Throughout this opening scene, Tsai uses shallow focus to emphasize the key. The key thereby becomes the center of attention in this sequence, implying that it is going to be a significant motif in the film. Soon after the title sequence, Hsiao-Kang moves into the apartment and settles down. He takes a bath as if it were his own home. Hsiao-Kang's "homelessness" and choice of "home," which seems to be random and arbitrary, is striking. His casualness in this apartment that he chooses to call "home" traces the denial of the traditional Confucian family-centred (以家為本) ideology. As film and cultural studies scholar Fran Martin suggests, along with Taiwan's rapid industrialization and urbanization, the structure and practice of the family/home (*jia* 家) have transformed over the past decades.[193] While in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's films of the 1980s the dismantling of the traditional *jia* comes from young people's sudden exposure to unfamiliar and unsympathetic city lifestyles during their migration from villages to big cities, Tsai Ming-Liang's films foreground the resultant crisis and reconfiguration of the jia in 1990s and 2000s Taiwan.

Geographically separated from mainland China by the Taiwan Strait, and culturally steeped in the legacy of Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945), Taiwan represents an "in-between" space.[194] Taiwan's continuous struggle to balance an internationally recognized political sovereignty and the revitalization of a stagnating economy leads to identity crises among the Taiwanese youth as they struggle to figure out where to call "hometown." The space of the apartment in *Vive l'amour,* which also signifies a certain

[193] Martin, Fran. "*Vive L'Amour*: Eloquent Emptiness." In *Chinese Films in Focus: 25 New Takes*, edited by Chris Berry, 175–82. London: British Film Institute, 2003, 176.
[194] Huang, *Urban Horror: Neoliberal Post-Socialism and the Limits of Visibility*, 189.

"in-betweenness" that challenges the segregation between public and private space, is thus allegorical. The key to an apartment that is supposed to be the embodiment of family thus becomes a metaphor for the unstable perception of the *jia* among young people. It is also worth noting the connections with Taiwanese society in the portrayals of queer characters like Hsiao-Kang in *Vive l'amour*. It is striking to see that approximately 28% of LGBTIQ+ youth report having experienced homelessness or housing instability, with likely much higher rates in Asia according to Equal Asia Foundation's data.[195] Because of the lack of knowledge around and attention to the LGBTIQ+ community, the exact rate remains unknown. The queer youth often find themselves struggling between being obedient to filial piety and trying to be themselves. The homelessness of the young people and the redefinition of family in Tsai's films hence become somewhat metaphorical. Their lifestyles can be seen as a critique of the ideal heteronormative family in society. The "homeless" youth in Tsai's films, and specifically LGBT youth, find themselves inhabiting a space outside the boundaries of what is thought to be "normal" *jia*, in terms of their social relationships, sexual identity, and sense of home and belonging.

For example, for Hsiao-Kang, when he enters the apartment, the way he skillfully rings the bell to make sure there is no one home suggests that this is probably not the first time he has stolen keys to apartments. The definition of *jia* for him is no more than just a place to sleep without any deep bonding. The domestic dwelling in this film is thus mobile and detached, signifying not only the breakdown of the "traditional Chinese family" in 1990s Taiwan but also the rethinking of the family's significance in relation

[195] DeChants, Jonah P, Amy E Green, Myeshia N Price, and Carrie K Davis. "Homelessness and Housing Instability among LGBTQ Youth." The Trevor Project: West Hollywood, CA, USA, 2021.
Equal Asia Foundation. "Sheltering Solutions — Innovating to Address Homelessness in LGBTIQ+ Persons in Asia," May 7, 2022. https://equalasiafoundation.medium.com/sheltering-solutions-innovating-to-address-homelessness-in-lgbtiq-persons-in-asia-121d611178ae.

to current transformations in Taiwanese society and culture. Besides the neoliberal turn and economic crisis as discussed in relation to Edward Yang's films in Chapter 2, Taiwan in the 1990s is also marked by the rise of controversies around the queer movement.

As Taiwanese queer theorist Ni Jiazhen argues, the queer movement in Taiwan after the martial law period revolves around a complex interplay between liberal gains and conservative backlash. While liberal reforms have led to increased visibility and acceptance of queer culture, this visibility has also brought new challenges. Queer individuals now find themselves compelled to seek political recognition by presenting their social differences as a "cultural performance," strategically aligning with Taiwan's emerging liberal pluralism.[196] Tsai Ming-Liang, who is Malaysian and hence free of having to put on such political performance, thus boldly creates the three "queer" characters who refuse such performances. Their homelessness can be seen as Tsai's statement of his own homelessness: he does not belong to either political party, KMT or DPP. He represents a certain group of young people for whom "house" and "home" are a source of confusion and precariousness. They refuse to define who they are through taking up political stands or sexual identities. They form their own "home" to defy normativity, where friendships can become the new family through a sense of community and where "home" is a process that carries with it a set of feelings, "lived as well as imagined."[197] The relationships portrayed in *Vive l'amour* are thus depictions of this lived and imagined family.

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[196] Ni, Jiazhen 倪家珍."九零年代同性戀論述與運動主體在台灣 (The Subject of the 1990's Homosexual Discourse and Movement in Taiwan)."In *性/別研究的新視野—第一屆四性研討會論文集 (上)* (*Visionary Essays in Sexuality/Gender Studies: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Sexuality Education, Sexology, Trans/Gender Studies and LesBiGay Studies*). 125–48. Taipei, Taiwan: Meta Media International, 1997, 144.

[197] Tunåker, Carin. "'No Place Like Home?' Locating Homeless LGBT Youth." Home Cultures 12, no. 2 (2015): 241–59, 253.

This sense of family is most present during the few moments in which sexual encounters occur. These encounters often challenge the committal relationship and traditional privacy of *jia*. The first encounter between the three characters happens during the first night Hsiao-Kang is staying in the apartment. The sequence starts with Ah-Jung and Mei-Mei sitting next to each other in a coffee shop. They follow each other around while going to the washroom, making phone calls, and wandering around on the street. The sequence then cuts to Hsiao-Kang, who sits on his bed, preparing to commit suicide. He turns off the lights and cuts his wrists in the dark. The camera shows us this action implicitly through a close-up of the knife on the ground and his dripping blood. The sequence then cuts to Ah-Jung and Mei-Mei coming into the apartment. In the well-lit bedroom, Ah-Jung and Mei-Mei make out and later have sex. The juxtaposition of the close-up of their naked bodies and the close-up of Hsiao-Kang lying on the bed with blood signifies a sense of dislocation. They are all releasing their loneliness and stress in intimate, albeit completely different, ways.

However, none of them have privacy any longer. Right after the close-up shot of Ah-Jung and May's naked bodies, we see Hsiao-Kang walking out of his room to peek at them with the sound of them having sex in the background. There is another similar scene towards the end of the film where Hsiao-Kang hides under the bed to masturbate while Ah-Jung and Mei-Mei are having sex (See Figure 29). The character of Hsiao-Kang is unique among these three characters because he is the most silent and isolated. Ah-Jung and Mei-Mei do not discover him until much later in the film, yet Hsiao-Kang knows about their existence from the beginning and is even somewhat of a "participant" in their sex life. The three of them have established an intimate relationship that is neither friendship nor love, while this shared apartment has become an ambiguous liminal space between a home and a hotel.

It is noteworthy that Hsiao-Kang is a ghostlike character to the couple because they can sense his presence through the mundane changes in the apartment but rarely see him. Hsiao-Kang's "invisible" presence in this apartment thus hints at a kind of critique of heteronormative society. He only dares to show his desire for Ah-Jung by crawling on his bed in his sleep and kissing him on the cheek. However, Ah-Jung's feelings for Hsiao-Kang remain unknown. The invisibility of Hsiao-Kang can also be seen as the representation of the invisible struggles of the queer community in Taiwan in the 1990s.

Taiwan is often referred to as the most progressive place for sexual rights and gender equality in East Asia.[198] For example, a series of social movements for sexual and gender minorities emerged in Taiwan around the 1990s after the abolition of martial law in 1987. Moreover, the first preliminary discussion on gay and lesbian rights and equality was at a public hearing held in the Legislative Yuan in 1993.[199] However, because of the rise of queer activism, there was persistent police discrimination, and a hostile environment was created for queer people in private businesses.[200] In addition, the new DPP sought to use queer culture to show their openness and morality in order to gain votes. Considered in this context, Hsiao-Kang's character becomes Tsai's critique of such "politicization" of the queer community while ignoring their needs. In Taiwan, coming out is not only an individual's choice -- it is a family affair. Traditional Asian and Taiwanese cultures have always put an emphasis on the obedience of children to their parents, which includes their responsibility to fulfill their parents' wishes. Once their families learn of their gender identity or sexual orientation, teens would usually be

[198] Lee, Po-Han. "Queer Activism in Taiwan: An Emergent Rainbow Coalition from the Assemblage Perspective." *The Sociological Review 65*, no. 4 (2017): 682–98, 684.
[199] Kuan, Hsiaowei. "LGBT Rights in Taiwan—The Interaction between Movements and the Law." *Economics, Law, and Institutions in Asia Pacific*, 2019, 593–607, 596. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0350-0_33.
[200] Kong, Travis S. K., Hsiao-wei Kuan, Sky H. L. Lau, and Sara L. Friedman. "LGBT Movements in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Jan. 22, 2021.

grounded at home while being denied financial support and contact with people outside their families. Hsiao-Kang's instinct to hide himself and his invisibility in this apartment mirrors many young people's, and especially the queer youth's suffering and fear of the ideal *jia*. The apartment in *Vive l'amour* is an imagined alternative queer variation of *jia*: a space for liberated sex and revealed identities with no rules or judgement.

Intriguingly, the occupations of the characters in *Vive L'amour* are also related to family/home. Mei-Mei is a real estate agent while Hsiao-Kang is a salesman for a columbarium (納骨塔). As Jiang Xun notes in his critique of the film, if Mei-Mei sells homes for the living, then Hsiao-Kang sells homes for the dead.[201] In 1980s and 1990s Taiwan, a short housing boom led to a rapid burst in housing demand, and the suspension of the public housing program led to an acute shortage of supply. While the regulatory regime and policy rhetoric have treated land as an incompletely commodified good, land and housing are in fact almost totally commodified in Taiwan, which has one of the most speculative land and housing markets in Asia.[202] For many young people, *jia* becomes something they cannot afford, exemplified in the film by Hsiao-Kang's and Ah-Jung's to ability to afford rent. Due to the impact of the global economic downturn in the 1980s and 1990s, the stock market and real estate markets in Taiwan were also not experiencing a boom. As a result, investing in a columbarium had become another choice for investors.[203] The homes for the dead, which people used to keep distance and respect, have now also become a commodity and investment target. *Jia* becomes

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[201] Jiang, Xun, "體溫與救贖心 (Body Heat and Salvation)." *愛情萬歲Vive L'Amour* (screenplay). Taipei: Wanxiang, 1994. 144–151, 149.

[202] Grange, Adrienne la, Chin-oh Chang, and Ngai Ming yip. "Commodification and Urban Development: A Case Study of Taiwan." *Housing Studies* 21, no. 1 (2006): 53–76, 72. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030500391114.

[203] Wei, Hung Chin. "先生，買個塔位吧！An Interesting Investment."台灣光華雜誌 Taiwan Panorama | 國際化,雙語編排,文化整合,全球華人的雜誌 An international, bilingual magazine for Chinese people around the world, April 1, 1993. https://www.taiwan-panorama.com/Articles/Details?Guid=2d3cf830-1b8d-463d-919f-479947c18dd9.

commercialized in contemporary society, ironically contrasting with the Confucian family model that stresses the importance of family and filial piety. The traditional *jia,* which refers to a nuclear family that owns a house or apartment, has become a hard-to-reach goal and even a burden for many young people. The shared apartment in *Vive l'amour* thus further indicates the transformation of the importance of family among young people.

As Chinse studies scholar Thomas Shaw notes in his study that surveyed Taiwanese young people's leisure activities in the 1990s, in Chinese culture the family had once been the broad locus of identity, and selfhood was closely associated with service to the family. However, the 1990s youth in Taiwan began to center the self and private pleasure.[204] Similarly, in the film there are many scenes that show how the protagonists "have fun" on their own. For example, Hsiao-Kang entertains himself by staging a one-man bowling game with a watermelon. He also models a black dress, feather boa and heels in front of the mirror. Ah-Jung, for his part, masturbates with a porn magazine and takes a bath in the jacuzzi, while Mei-Mei takes naps and eats her lunch. Even though the three characters are living in the same apartment simultaneously, they all prefer to be alone, which aligns with what Shaw called the "new individualistic youth culture" that caters to a sense of autonomy and self-determination divorced from the sanctions of parental and family authority.[205] Intriguingly, the 1990s are also when neoliberal reforms took hold in Taiwan, reinforcing individualism and self-made relationships. Mei-Mei, Hsiao-Kang, and Ah-Jung hence form an individualistic and neoliberal *jia* that refrains from Confucian social prejudice, where the three of them are bonded not by

[204] Shaw, Thomas A. "'We Like to Have Fun': Leisure and the Discovery of the Self in Taiwan's 'New' Middle Class." *Modern China* 20, no. 4 (1994): 416–45, 422.
[205] Shaw, "We Like to Have Fun," 437, 438.

familial responsibilities but through the pleasure they get from each other.

*Vive l'amour* also stresses the importance of "affective labour" for young people when it comes to identifying their families. The character of Ah-Jun can be seen as the key moderator of emotions and "immaterial labour" in this socially constructed household. American literary theorist Michael Hardt argues that there are two types of "immaterial labour": computational and affective.[206] What affective labour produces are social networks, forms of community, and biopower. While it is often referred to as "women's work" -- Hardt explains that affective labour is disproportionately required of women, both at work and at home -- the affective labour is carried out by a male character in this film, transgressing the traditional family division.

Ah-Jung's unconventional character thus provides another possibility of family. He can be seen as a "mother" figure who provides emotional support and close-knit social relationships. Ah-Jung is the only one who does not have a proper job among the three characters. Most of the time, he lies in bed reading magazines. He is like the housewife of this apartment, who waits for Mei-Mei to get off work and accompanies her. He also takes care of Hsiao-Kang after they discover each other. He eats hot pot with him and drives him to work. His presence helps Mei-Mei and Hsiao-Kang to better cope with their loneliness, which bonds the three characters together to form an unconventional family. This constructed family treats the apartment they are living in as a combination of "work space, leisure space and living space," challenging Lefebvre's spatial model that suggests different spaces would hold different meanings and different people.[207] This multifunctional space of *jia* in *Vive L'amour* is, therefore, a rebellious manifesto

[206] Hardt, Michael. "Affective Labor." *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100. http://www.jstor.org/stable/303793.
[207] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.

that confronts the traditional ideals and constructions of family, which allows the young people to defy heteronormativity and gender and sexual stereotypes.

This redefinition of the home space is also present in many of Tsai Ming-Liang's films. Similar to *Vive L'amour*, Tsai's 2001 film *What Time Is It There?* also comments on the dysfunctionality of the traditional Confucian family in contemporary society. *What Time Is It There?* follows the story of a young watch vendor named Hsiao-Kang. After selling a watch to a woman who is about to leave for Paris, Hsiao-Kang begins to be fascinated by time and obsessed with the idea of synchronizing his watch with Paris time. Meanwhile, the woman Shiang-Chyi is also struggling to adjust to life in Paris. As the film progresses, the story becomes more and more surreal, with the boundary between reality and fantasy getting increasingly blurred. Time passing, in fact, becomes the very question in *What Time Is It There?* While in *Vive l'amour* the empty apartment is the metaphor for the absence of the traditional family ideology, in *What Time Is It There?* the breakdown of *jia* is shown through the death of Hsiao-Kang's father and his tense relationship with his grieving mother.

"In memory of my father and Hsiao-Kang's father," Tsai Ming-liang writes in the postscript of the film. This film can be seen as a tribute to the older generation and a lament for the father. While the film portrays the pain of losing a father in an ordinary Taiwanese family, "my father and Hsiao-Kang's father" represent the fathers of the generation of Taiwanese youth like Tsai Ming-Liang and Lee Kang-sheng. The father's image is symbolic and spiritual, making this film a political allegory of Taiwan after Chiang Kai-Shek. For example, the calligraphy hanging in the hall of Xiao Kang's home has the words "Beloved and Sincere" (親愛精誠), one of Chiang Kai-Shek's slogans. The calligraphy is located in the center of the family's home, making it no longer an apolitical space of warmth, comfort, and belonging but a microcosm of Taiwanese

society, full of political tension. Chiang Kai-shek proposed this slogan in response to the chaotic situation of the Cultural Revolution in mainland China in the 1970s. It was an attempt to use Confucian ethical and moral concepts to improve the social environment of Taiwan and establish a contrasting cultural advantage.[208] However, this political ideal was declared to come to an end with the passing of the father (Hsiao-Kang's father and Chiang Kai-shek as the father of Taiwanese society). While Hou Hsiao-Hsien also tends to portray the absence of the father in his films, in Tsai's films there is no associated sweetness and nostalgia.

The often absent and even problematic father in Tsai Ming-Liang's films operates as a criticism of the heteronormative patriarchy embedded in the traditional Taiwanese *jia*. Hans Tao-Ming Huang writes in *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan* that queer people are seen as "perverse men and women" in opposition to the "morally upright gentlemen" (正人君子) who represent patriarchy in the heteronormative society.[209] The collapse of the father figure in Tsai's films thus argues against the Confucian hierarchy that positions the father at the top of the idealized family structure. He even pushes this critique to an extreme by depicting a father-son gay sex scene in *The River*. The recurring motifs of the gay son and absent father further destabilize the patriarchy embedded in *jia*. While the homophobia and misogyny rooted in patriarchy often see gay men as "feminine" and "not man enough," in both *Vive l'amou*r and *What Time Is It There?*, the queer son, while facing the death of the father, quickly takes up

[208] 中正文教基金會 Chung Cheng Cultural and Educational Foundation. "對陸軍官校四十四週年校慶紀念訓詞 (Memorial Address to the 44th Anniversary of the Memorial Address to the 44th Anniversary of the Republic of China Military Academy)." 1968, http://www.ccfd.org.tw/ccef001/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1354%3A0007-46&catid=195&Itemid=256.

[209] Huang, Hans Tao-Ming. *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan*. Queer Asia. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012, 21.

responsibility and becomes the backbone of the family.[210] The fact that he fails in his "reproductive duty" does not make him unqualified to be a "morally upright gentleman." Tsai thus breaks down the necessity of upholding a patriarchal family, reclaiming the importance and social contribution of queers that often gets denied by the public.

**The Queer Flâneur**

Even though Tsai Ming-Liang's films have contributed to the reconstruction of the traditional family that encourages the inclusion of all groups of people, in both *Vive l'amour* and *What Time Is It There?*, the characters of the two Hsiao-Kangs can still be seen as somewhat "homeless." Because of both characters' lack of bonds with their "real" home, they decide to cruise around the city to find people they can treat as "family." In "The *Flâneur* in Social Theory," David Frisby describes the flâneur as someone who engages in a specific mode of observation, carefully examining individuals, social dynamics, and urban landscapes. This enigmatic figure reads the cityscape, interpreting its architectural and spatial imagery, as well as the intricate tapestry of human interactions that shape it.[211]

Hsiao-Kang's character is often such a flâneur, leading the audience to observe the different kinds of young people in the city. Hsiao-Kang's character is also always somewhat queer, with ambiguous sexual identities. Queer cruising is frequently described in two distinct yet interconnected manners: first, as the act of wandering or lingering in public spaces with the intention of seeking anonymous and casual sexual encounters, and second, as a peripatetic journey through the labyrinthine urban

[210] Huang, Hans. "From Glass Clique to *Tongzhi* Nation: *Crystal Boys*, Identity Formation, and the Politics of Sexual Shame". *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*. 18 (2010): 373-98, 387.
[211] Frisby, David. "The Flâneur in Social Theory." *The Flâneur (RLE Social Theory)*. Routledge, 2014. 81-110, 93.

landscape through which one derives transgressive delight and excitement from chance encounters with people, objects, and architecture that merge in the modern metropolis.[212] The queer flâneurs in Tsai's films strive to do both, which shows, on the one hand, the loneliness and confusion among the youth and, on the other hand, the vibrant urban culture in Taiwan during the 1990s.

One of the most important indices of Taiwan's political liberalism in the late twentieth century is indeed its queer movement: queer literature has blossomed in Taiwan since the 1990s, producing mainstream and internationally acclaimed titles such as Qiu Miaojin's *Notes of a Crocodile*. In addition, the popular gay TV series *Crystal Boys* aired in 2003 to much attention. Taiwan was also the first Chinese community to hold a Gay Pride parade in 2003.[213] However, it is also true that the homonormative movement is not an equality-based movement but an inclusion-based assimilation politics with exclusionary results.[214] As sociologist Po-Han Lee argues, queer activism has caused some backlash. For example, some in the queer community found it humiliating to be associated with kinds of eroticism considered to be degrading and taboo, such as incest, chemsex, polyamory, and BDSM, which were advertised as a significant source of representation of sexual minorities in the queer movements. As these "liberations" were not something they wished to identify with, they adhered to assimilation into the mainstream and rejected alternative forms of intimate relationships.[215] Tsai Ming-Liang is obviously aware of the potential harms embodied in this generalization of "homonormativity" and thus tries to emphasize plurality, diversity,

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[212] Newman, Eric H. "EPHEMERAL UTOPIAS: Queer Cruising, Literary Form, and Diasporic Imagination in Claude McKay's 'Home to Harlem' and 'Banjo.'" *Callaloo 38*, no. 1 (2015): 167–85, 169. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24265107.
[213] Liu, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas*, 17.
[214] Ibid., 2.
[215] Lee, Po-Han. "Queer Activism in Taiwan: An Emergent Rainbow Coalition from the Assemblage Perspective." *The Sociological Review 65*, no. 4 (2017): 682–98, 685.

and curiosity. His queer characters often epitomize different groups of youth who are "out of the mainstream" and facing various societal problems. The queer flâneurs in his films are hence important to consider as representing certain unspoken social issues in Taiwan.

When it comes to *What Time Is It There?*, Flannery Wilson suggests points out that there are many small, interior spaces, such as hotel rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, cars, and underground stations.[216] These spaces all convey an overall sense of ahistoricism and placelessness. Furthermore, the camera stays still for the entire duration of the film, which does not contain a single shot with camera movement.[217] This cinematography pushes the theme of alienation of the queer youth to an extreme. This begins with Hsiao-Kang's bedroom, where he frequently stays alone to pretend to be living on Paris time. The fixed medium shots produce a sense of constraint and claustrophobia, implying Hsiao-Kang's unhappiness in this so-called home with his mother, who is obsessed with the idea of connecting with the dead father's spirit (See Figure 30). This predesignated "home" for Hsiao-Kang is nothing but a place to sleep because there are no deep bonds between him and his family. He soon starts his flâneur life by sleeping in cars, cinemas, hotels, and so on, to feel more at "home." Hsiao-Kang's sexuality is kept ambiguous as he seems to show desire for both women and men. Another character, Shiang-Chyi, is also a queer flâneur who has no definite place to live. She even travels to France, hoping to find a sense of "home" there, but in the end feels even more lonely as her approach to a woman she meets in France is rejected. Homelessness, familial and kin complications, and creating links with nonkin while moving from one "house" or "home" to another are

[216] Wilson, Flannery. "4. Tsai Ming-Liang's Disjointed Connectivity and Lonely Intertextuality" In *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving Within and Beyond the Frame*, 97-125. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 103. https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1515/9780748682027-008
[217] Lim, *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, 81.

all things that, as Tsai's characters remind us, happen more frequently among LGBTQ youth. Perhaps their notion of "homeless" refers more to living outside the norm of a heterosexual, nuclear family setting than to the physical idea of having shelter, a place to live. Being "homeless," to LGBTQ youth, implies a whole set of complex ideas of living outside the boundaries of what they perceive as the norm in the society that surrounds them.

In his analysis of the bathhouses and movie houses in Tsai's film, Guo-Juin Hong has described the act of cruising in Tsai's films as a kind of cat-and-mouse game.[218] He also suggests that there is a sensation of "coldness" and "darkness" in these cruising scenes. This "hide-and-seek" nature of the queer flâneur thus hints at the unspoken hardship faced by the queer community when they were seen as "dirty" and "immoral" in the nineties, even alongside the rise of the queer movement. The increased exposure of the queer community actually induces more fear in individuals that those close to them will discover the sexuality they have been hiding. In Qiu Miaojin's 1994 novel *Notes of a Crocodile*, she uses the metaphor of a crocodile who wears a human mask to hide its identity while cruising around the city to parallel her own struggle of pretending to be straight during her youth. The act of cruising, or flânerie, is also often connected to queer people, especially gay men, in film and literature. For example, Pai Hsien-yung's 1983 novel *Crystal Boys* follows the character A-Qing spending time at New Park, a cruising area and hangout for gay men, where he meets the man he falls in love with. Chen Cheng-Tao's 2006 film *Eternal Summer* also depicts the act of cruising for sex in parks, public bathrooms, and hotels. Flânerie for queer people is thus a complex combination of hiding, leaving no trace behind, and seeking pleasure.

[218] Hong, Guo-Juin. "Theatrics of Cruising: Bathhouses and Movie Houses in Tsai Ming-liang's films." In *Queer Sinophone Cultures*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 149-59, 156.

In terms of Tsai Ming-Liang's films, his slow-cinema artistic choice of static cameras, deep focus, and long shots often intensifies his queer flâneur's complicated and contradictory intentions. His queer characters cruise around not only because they are afraid to leave any traces behind but also because they desire to find someone to ease their loneliness. For example, in *What Time Is It There?*, Hsiao-Kang and Shiang-Chyi travel around the city, meeting many people but avoiding establishing any deep bonds with them. This is especially the case for Shiang-Chyi, who is always portrayed as an observer instead of a participant. She often appears in a static medium shot with deep focus, where her silence and individuality contrast with other people in the background who usually show up in crowds and are constantly engaged in conversation. Furthermore, in the scene where she gets rejected by the woman in the hotel, she keeps herself under a quilt, refusing to make any conversation or eye contact with the woman, suggesting a sense of humiliation at being "discovered" (See Figure 31). In general, in queer studies, there is a sense of "lesbian erasure" due to the prominence of both homophobia and misogyny in society, including in Taiwan.[219] While the act of cruising is often connected with gay men, Tsai Ming-Liang's incorporation of a female queer flâneur reminds the audience of the often ignored lesbian or bisexual community, echoing his emphasis on "sexual plurality." His diverse on-screen characters thus allow the audience to follow their flânerie route self-reflexively, leading to a better understanding of their alienation.

Another factor that leads to backlash about this kind of erasure is what Fran Martin

[219] Wilton, Tamsin. *Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda.* London: Routledge, 1995, 60, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203419885.a

has called “media voyeurism” (媒體偷窺).[220] Martin suggests that this kind of voyeurism can be attributed to the fact that prime-time television news, news magazines, and variety shows played a central role in Taiwan’s mass media, fostering a sensationalist and generally homophobic obsession with homosexuality. In 1992, a significant news incident known as the “TTV News incident” (台視新聞事件), unfolded when a female reporter from TTV, one of Taiwan’s three free-to-air stations, covertly entered a lesbian bar with a concealed camera. She proceeded to film the bar’s patrons without their consent or knowledge. The recorded footage, along with the reporter's homophobic commentary on the women, was later aired during TTV’s evening news broadcast, resulting in an unforeseen and disastrous outing of several women to their families.[221] This kind of incident continued to happen across the 1990s and 2000s. For example, in August 1998, CTS News (華視新聞) reporters hid a camera in a bag to secretly film a lesbian bar. Afterwards, a report titled “Lesbian Bar, Alternative Paradise” was broadcast on CTS Night News.[222] On the evening of March 22, 1997, during the 6:00 p.m. primetime slot, CTS also aired a televised “coming out” by a male university student named Liu Junda.[223] Furthermore, in August 2004, the in-depth reporting unit of Sanli News (三立新聞) reported on the intimate behaviour of lesbian couples in Yanping Park in Taipei by way of candid shots. The narration is accompanied by words such as “Homosexuals haunts openly.”[224] The voyeurism that is often

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[220] Martin, Fran. “The Crocodile Unmasked: Toward a Theory of *Xianshen*”, In *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2003, 215-36. muse.jhu.edu/book/5759.
[221] Martin, “The Crocodile Unmasked,” 221.
[222] Zheng, Meili 鄭美里. “有了馬賽克，一切O.K.? With Mosaic, everything O.K.?”, *女朋友Girlfriend*. no. 24, 1998, 9.
[223] Martin, “The Crocodile Unmasked,” 220.
[224] Beijing LGBTQ Centre Psychology Column 北同泛心理专栏. “不敢说，又想要: 被窥探的同志性爱 Afraid to Say, but Wanted: Spied on Gay Sex.” September 11, 2020. https://posts.careerengine.us/p/5f6f377ccb8b5d6e30b763a5.

characteristic of Tsai Ming-Liang's queer flâneur thus delivers a criticism that may be aimed at this "media voyeurism."

For example, in *What Time Is It There?*, there is a significant sequence for Hsiao-Kang that combines the act of cruising and voyeurism in a movie theatre. Around one-third of the way into the film, Hsiao-Kang enters a movie house, taking a seat in the foreground of the frame while the movie plays. He begins his habitual act of adjusting his recently acquired Paris timepiece. After a few moments, another man enters the frame in the same shot and sits right next to Hsiao-Kang. This man stares at Hsiao-Kang with a look of desire, trying to flirt with him. After exchanging some glances, Hsiao-Kang becomes intimidated and moved one seat away from the man. Suddenly, the man takes the clock from beneath Hsiao-Kang and rushes out. The subsequent shots, all long takes in deep focus, reveal the strange and ambiguous dynamics between them as Hsiao-Kang follows the man around in the cinema as they play a game of hide-and-seek. The scene unfolds through the cinema and into the hallway and ultimately concludes in the men's room. Their act of tagging along with each other parallels the act of cruising for sex among gay men. For Tsai, the erotic of spectatorship is inextricably tied to the gay subculture of the movie theatre, irreducible to a singular and personal aspect of reception. Inside the theatre, darkness invites the body into a state of ease, a relaxing of activity and appearances that, in turn, foregrounds the release of erotic availability and the "glow" of desire.[225]

The men's room is also a meaningful location signifying male desire. After Hsiao-Kang enters the men's room, he looks around and peeks into each stall and discovers the man that he is looking for. The man places the clock in front of his exposed crotch, and

[225] Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 110-111.

during a moment of silence, Hsiao-Kang and the man glance at each other, exchanging their unspeakable voyeuristic desire (See Figure 32). Hsiao-Kang then storms out of the men's room and closes the door of the stall, putting the man "back into the closet."

This somewhat comical moment reveals the vulnerability of the queer community before the exposure and voyeurism of the public. The reappearance of the stolen clock and time represents a sense of losing control, the "exposed" individual's helplessness before mass media. The half-naked man also works as an allegory for the media's cruel exposure of ordinary people's personal lives. The ticking clock in front of his crotch operates as a symbol of many queer people's yearnings for an immediate, real-time, and intimate connection with another body that, however, the involuntary exposure of their identity often forces them to relinquish as they go back into the closet, hiding. The character of Hsiao-Kang in this scene, despite engaging in a kind of experimentation with his ambiguous sexuality, also represents the curious public who craves to peep into "queer lifestyles" to witness their "abnormality." However, just like Hsiao-Kang, who metaphorically pushes the man back into the closet, the voyeuristic public also causes the people they are peeping on to run away, forcing them to adopt a flânerie lifestyle as they try to protect themselves and their family.

This theme of voyeurism is also present in *Vive l'amour* and is portrayed in this film in an even more ironic way. As discussed earlier, in *Vive l'amour*, there are two significant scenes in which Mei-Mei and Ah-Jung have sex and Hsiao-Kang is also a "hidden participant." During the first time, Hsiao-Kang peeks from behind the unclosed door, and the second time he hides under the bed. In precise opposition to "media voyeurism," in which straight reporters crave to observe "queer sex," Hsiao-Kang is a gay man who desires to observe "straight sex." This is especially the case for the second time, for which Tsai Ming-Liang cleverly adopts a medium shot and long take with no

cut to show the entire sequence. The discomfort and awkwardness of watching this long sex scene forces the audience to self-reflexively understand the harm that voyeurism can cause to the people who are being looked at.

While Lucas Hsien-Hsiu Lin's writing on the Taiwanese queer movement proposes that the regulated portrayal of an enticing queer narrative in the media functions akin to a "peep show" into a closet whose door remains shut, I argue that the reversed straight "peep show" in this scene criticizes and satirizes the mass media, including television and film that depict queer lives on the basis of many assumptions and imaginings.[226] As Fran Martin argues, mass media during the 1990s in Taiwan served as the "keyhole to the closet," providing a "controlled spectacle" of homosexuality.[227] The half-hidden and half-seen glimpses through that keyhole seem to be thrilling and captivating for the audience like porn. The recurring unclosed doors, forgotten keys, and close-ups of keyholes in *Vive l'amour* are thus all metaphors for the "media voyeurism" that constantly reaffirms the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of queer people, causing them to be objectified and intensifying stereotypes.

This intertwined relationship between voyeurism and the act of flânerie or cruising is still an ongoing theme that Tsai Ming-Liang explores. In his most recent film, *Days* (2020), he uses his signature minimalist long takes to follow the encounter between Hsiao-Kang and Non. This film combines his earlier attempts to explore porn, such as *The Wayward Cloud* (2005), with the themes of human alienation and loneliness that we see throughout his films. In *Days*, like in any other of Tsai's films, Hsiao-Kang cruises around the city to find someone to accompany him. However, this time he is also finding

[226] Lin, Lucas Hsien-Hsiu 林賢修, 1997. "同志運動的無頭公案. The Unsolvable Problem of the Queer Movement" *騷動 SaoDong* (4):62-66, 62.
[227] Martin, "The Crocodile Unmasked," 223.

someone to ease his physical pain because he suffers from strange neck pain. He soon finds Non to give him a massage. This massage is, of course, not only to ease his neck pain but also involves sex. This erotic sequence lasts for a whole twenty minutes and is almost like a scene of gay porn. The medium close-ups and deep focus throughout this sequence push the voyeurism and intimacy to an extreme. This time, Tsai Ming-Liang boldly makes his audience "participants" of Hsiao-Kang and Non's sex life. This shocking, although natural, sex sequence is Tsai's unapologetic rebellion against the "homophobic gaze" embedded in film and television, as well as the hostile mass spectator or collective "eye" that takes homosexuality as an object.[228] As Tsai discloses in an interview, the purpose of including this sex scene is to convey the message that such acts are perfectly ordinary.[229] It is human nature, and there is nothing "performative" in it. Intriguingly, this film is shot in Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Taipei although it depicts just one day in the life of Hsiao-Kang and Non, contributing to a sense of placelessness. The fact that both characters fail to call any of these places home returns to Tsai's redefinition of family and the queer flâneur's invisibility and instinct to hide. After narrating queer stories for over twenty years, Tsai continues to invite the audience to appreciate "abnormality." The act of flânerie has not only become a signature theme in his films but also a symbol for seeking affective companionship and freedom under the light.

[228] Martin, "The Crocodile Unmasked," 224.
[229] DeepFocus深焦. "专访蔡明亮：告别语言，种下四年影像它自会长出寂寞和思念 Interview with Tsai Ming-Liang: Farewell to language, seeding the four years of images and it will grow loneliness and longing themselves." 新浪微博 Sina Weibo, Feb. 28, 2020.
https://weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309404477268142457111

**Conclusion**

If Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang once shaped an eternal aesthetics for the Taiwanese people in terms of land and family ties after the 1970s, with the commodification of land values, the dissolution of families, and economic transformation including neoliberal reforms, Tsai Ming-Liang has searched for a completely different aesthetic for Taiwan as individuals became floating wanderers in the city isolated from society, opening up a new path of rebellious and subversive aesthetics. Tsai does not attempt to distance himself from the tradition of popular commercial film; instead, he exhibits a more nuanced and ambivalent attitude toward this tradition. He incorporates its conventions, forms, and familiar icons into his filmmaking style while simultaneously departing radically from its narrative approach.

This chapter has focused on Tsai Ming-Liang's bold reconfiguration of the traditional family ideal, as well as his queer characters' engagement in a kind of flânerie that acts as a symbol in his critique of the Confucian *jia*. Through staging the casually constructed family in *Vive l'amour* and the randomly bonded strangers in *What Time Is It There?*, Tsai Ming-Liang invites the audience to reflect on the question of what qualifies as family. For his detached characters, affect, communication, mutual understanding, and attraction are all much more important than blood relations. *Jia* is a socially constructed concept instead of a predefined obligation.

Tsai Ming-Liang repeatedly emphasizes in interviews that his films are "not about dysfunctional families, and they are not about gays. They are about human beings and the difficulties of being human. They are about the pain of not being able to control your body, your emotions, and your fate." The depiction of flâneurs in Tsai's films is thus a window to understanding the helplessness of not having control of one's own life. Through the character of Hsiao-Kang in *Vive l'amour*, *What Time Is It There?*, and *Days*, Tsai criticizes the

obsession of the media and the masses with the “sexual minority.” He satirizes “media voyeurism” and the homophobic gaze while also pointing out the potential harm of exclusionary “homonormativity” and queer activism. The “homelessness” of many of Tsai’s characters provokes a feeling of incompleteness or betweenness. Even though Taiwan has been seen as one of the most successful places in Asia in terms of LGBTQ rights, Tsai reminds the audience that there are still many unspoken and invisible problems embedded in its complex political composition. While the flâneurs cruise around the city of Taipei with Tsai’s signature style of minimal dialogue, deep focus, long takes, and cool colour scheme, the rather empty cinematic space on screen provides room for contemplation and reflection, attuning to the future of the nonconforming and disobedient youth. As one of the main figures of slow cinema, Tsai Ming-Liang’s rejection of the conventional cinematic rhythm symbolically displays the young generation’s rebellion and anxiety towards all sorts of normativity and societal expectations, inviting the audience to interrogate the entanglements of affect, capital, labour, markets, and the state in contemporary Taiwan.

## Conclusion

> 收在角落的畫架，沒再開過的音響。他忘了些什麼，日子還是一樣過。
> The easel in the corner, the stereo that never turned on again. He had forgotten something, but life still needs to go on.
>
> — "His Glasses" by No Party for Cao Dong
> 《他的眼鏡》，草東沒有派對[230]

As discussed in pervious chapters, the social history of Taiwan is grounded in anxiety. The islands' most influential population after 1949 was more or less made up of forced political refugees: the *waishengren* who retreated with the Kuomingtang army, hoping to get a better life. As portrayed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang, the native Taiwanese population (*benshengren*) was forcibly mixed with a massive influx of mainland Chinese who would continue for years to consider their new home a temporary haven, while still awaiting breathlessly the overthrow of Chairman Mao. Understandably, the *waishengren* were also resented by the native Taiwanese, while being cruelly misled by the Americans, dealing with tremendous social change when KMT gradually lost its power. The immigrants' children would grow up having their parents not acknowledging Taiwan as their homeland, causing confusion for the young generations who were born and raised in Taiwan. Therefore, I picked the group of young people who are at the crossroads of many Taiwanese social issues, including authoritative regimes, neoliberal reforms, democratization, and activism, as the focus of my thesis. The New Cinema films in the 1980s and 1990s, exemplified by the works of Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward, Yang, and Tsai Ming-liang, act as a critical mirror reflecting the youth's subtle resistance to neoliberal expectations of individualism and Confucian ideals of collectivity in Taiwan.

Taiwan during the neoliberal reform starting in the 1980s expected people to achieve

[230] No Party for Cao Dong is a Taiwanese indie band who often sings about the fatigue and anxiety among young people in Taiwanese society. "His Glasses" sings about the young people who gradually abandons their dream under the neoliberal pressure. No Party for Cao Dong also made one of the theme songs of the horror game, *Devotion*, which I will discuss later.

success, independence, and adaptability, while simultaneously adhering to the principles of filial piety. Hou, Yang, and Tsai, intriguingly, all used slow-cinema aesthetics, such as static cameras, deep focus, long takes, complex depth of field, cool color schemes, and melancholic atmospheres, to portray the sense of stagnation and restraint experienced by the younger generation. This thesis thus also examines the function of this delayed cinematic rhythm in these films, intertwined as they are with Taiwan's history, politics, economy, and people, illuminating the power of slow cinema as a timely medium for reflecting and addressing social and political issues. Through my three chapters, I have argued youth culture depicted through Taiwan New Cinema, including the pool hall and clubs as resistance towards neoliberal ideals of productivity. I examined the political significance of these youth-dominated spaces in terms of Taiwan's martial law, conscription culture, and economic reforms. I also saw these youth spaces as "counter-spaces" that allow emotional venting inside the "burn-out society" that excessively stresses achievement and success. Furthermore, I defined these spaces as the embodiment of a reconstruction of "queer" family, where the queer flâneurs reside, moving away from the cultural-specific anxiety of Confucian familial responsibilities and social stigmas. Hou, Yang, and Tsai thus construct a "time for youth" and "time for resistance" through their unconventional filmmaking of slowness.

The idea of a cinema of time finds a further resonance in contemporary Taiwan cinema beyond the work of Hou, Yang, and Tsai. Taiwanese cinema in the 2010s and 2020s continues to inherent the styles of slow cinema. One example is the filmmaker Chung Mong-Hong. His film, *A Sun* (2019), nominated 11 times and winner of 6 Golden Horse Awards, is often compared with Edward Yang's *A One and A Two* and Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* because of its slow rhythm and static camera. Like Hou, Yang, and Tsai, the family is also an important element in Chung's films. Chung often employs aesthetics of unease and everyday banality to explore children's repressed memories, exposing the

"unhomely" state of the drifting children, migrants, and marginalized people. As film scholar Ivy I-chu Chang argues, Chung's films investigate how global capitalism has caused sociopolitical anomalies and intruded the familial space, the individual body, and personal memory, blurring the boundaries between the public and the private and corroding the traditional base of "home" and "nation."[231]

*A Sun* centers around the lives of a family confronted with a series of challenges. The father, Ah-wen, endeavors to maintain stability for his two sons, Ah-Hao and Ah-Ho. However, their familial equilibrium is disrupted when Ah-Ho becomes embroiled in a significant incident that results in his imprisonment. Ah-Hao, the younger son, navigates his own journey of self-discovery amidst the family's upheaval. Ah-wen, determined to provide support and structure, finds himself facing mounting pressures and dilemmas. Similar to the New Cinema films, youth culture once again becomes a significant narrative drive. While the reoccurring driving scenes and the gangsters fooling around remind the audience of Hou Hsiao-Hsien, the tragic ending of Ah-Hao's suicide resonates with many of Edward Yang's characters, such as Li Lizhong in *A Confucian Confusion* discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, one of the main themes of this film, the father-son relationship, further reminds the audience of Tsai Ming-Liang's portrayal of problematic family relationships.

For Chung, one of the most substantial issues in contemporary Taiwan is still the anxiety faced by young people as they navigate between neoliberal and Confucian societal values. Over the past few decades, the average age of the individual experiencing anxiety is becoming increasingly younger, exemplified by Ah-Hao from the film *A Sun*. Ah-Hao is a senior high school student preparing his exams for medical school. He spends most of his

[231] Chang, Ivy I-chu, "Repressed Memories and the Unhomely in Chung Mong-Hong's Children Trilogy," In *Taiwan Cinema, Memory, and Modernity*, edited by Ivy I-chu Chang, 189–229, Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3567-9_7.

time in cram schools, which have been criticized for inducing stress and anxiety in students. Studies have shown that while cram schooling increases the student's academic achievement, it raises the risk of depression and anxiety as well.[232] Similar to the depiction of school in *A Brighter Summer Day*, Ah-Hao is also living in a "burn-out" society where his parents do not allow him to fail. The excessive care and discipline his parents force on him overwhelm him and lead to his tragic suicide. As opposed to Si'er, who's anxiety is generated from an authoritative regime and his identity as an immigrant, the contemporary youth of Taiwan living in a democratic society, like Ah-Hao, suffer more from the extremely competitive college entrance exams and the tight job market.

Except for Chung, many other films, TV shows, and even video games have focused on this topic. For example, the 2018 TV series *On Children* satirizes distorted parent-child relationships and educational challenges within the Taiwanese education system. Through five stories, this TV series touches upon the misperception of mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and ADHD, as a sign of failure among Taiwanese parents. Similarly, Red Candle Game Studio's *Devotion* (2019) also examines the demonization of mental illness among the older generation through the form of a horror game. Furthermore, TV series *The Magician on the Skywalk* (2021) criticizes, through the narration of a child, repressive education and touches upon sensitive topics such as queer suffering and the conscription system. It is noteworthy that this TV series is heavily influenced by Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Dust in the Wind*. The main site of this TV series is the same shopping mall where Wan and Huen went shopping in Hou's film. Furthermore, in the sci-fi part of this TV show, the young protagonist mysteriously enters the film set of *Dust in the Wind*, which is a utopian space for

[232] Kuan, Ping-Yin. "Effects of Cram Schooling on Academic Achievement and Mental Health of Junior High Students in Taiwan," *Chinese Sociological Review* 50, no. 4 (2018): 391–422; Chen, Su Yen and Luo Lu. "After-School Time Use in Taiwan: Effects on Educational Achievement and Well-Being," *Adolescence* 44, no. 176 (2009): 891.

him to escape from his abusive father (See Figure 33). Films such as *The Great Buddha+* (2017), *The Bold, the Corrupt, and the Beautiful* (2017), and *The Falls* (2021) all share similarities with New Cinema films in terms of the youth culture theme and cinematic style

Taiwan New cinema has also influenced numerous filmmakers across Asia, including mainland China filmmaker Bi Gan and Jia Zhangke, Japanese filmmaker Hirokazu Kore-eda, and Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Kore-eda made a documentary *When Cinema Reflects the Times: Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang* in 1993, which he commented as a "big turning point" for his career. For Jia Zhangke, Jean Ma argued that his observational long take aesthetic exemplifies Hou's influence upon a younger generation of Chinese directors, as well as the popularity of an "on-the-spot realism" in 1990s independent PRC filmmaking.[233] Bi Gan and Apichatpong Weerasethakul are both contemporary masters of slow cinema, who pushes Hou, Yang, and Tsai's long takes and long shots to an extreme. Taiwan New Cinema thus continues to convey its significance to contemporary young filmmakers and artists in Asia, creating a unique film culture that is significantly different from the Euro-American film industry. More and more young Asian filmmakers' slow styles have received acknowledgment by international film festivals. For example, Thien An Pham's *Inside the Yellow Cocoon Shell* (2023) won the Caméra d'Or at Cannes Film Festival, while Hu Bo's *An Elephant Sitting Still* (2018) won several awards at the Berlin Film Festival. The slowness initially embraced by Taiwan New Cinema filmmakers, later extending its influence across Asia, thus serves not only as a symbol of rebellion towards the mainstream but also as a distinctive hallmark of Asian arthouse cinema. Through a shared artistic expression, the memories of sociopolitical transformations reminisce across diverse cultures.

[233] Ma, Jean. *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema*, Vol. 1. Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 149.

# Appendix

[234]

**Figure 1**: The representative figures of the Taiwan New Wave. From left to right: Wu Nien-Jen, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Edward Yang, Chen Kuo-Fu, and Jan Hung-Tze.

**Figure 2 (Left)**: A disco in Taipei's East District. Shot on 1992/8/8, by Hsu Shih-Ching, 時光報, published on 2022/07/20.

**Figure 3 (Right)**: The protagonist, Hsiao-Kang, roller-skating in Tsai Ming-Liang's 1992 film, *Rebels of the Neon God*.

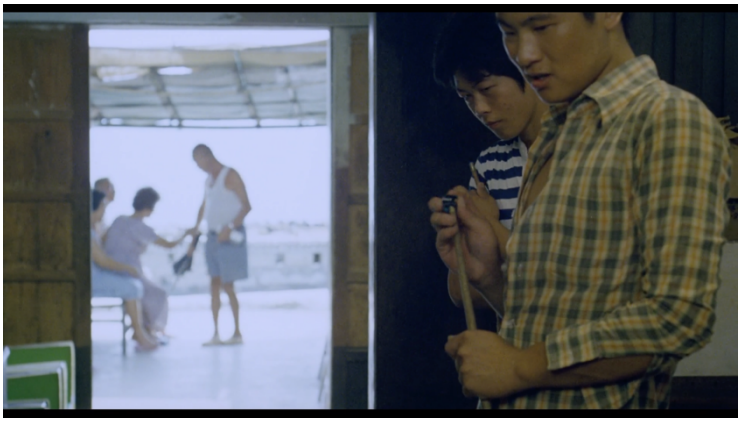

**Figure 4 (Left) and Figure 5 (Right):** The opening sequence of *Boys from Fengkuei* that juxtaposes the pool hall and the wandering boys.

[234] Figure 1: Hudson, David. "Taiwanese New Waves in New York." *The Criterion Collection*, November 10, 2022. https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/7989-taiwanese-new-waves-in-new-york.


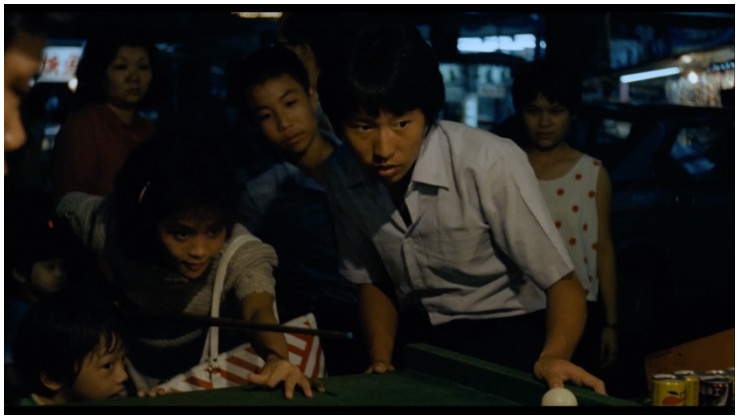

**Figure 6 (Left) and Figure 7 (Right):** Ah-Ching and Hsiao-Hsing happily playing pool in the night market in *Boys from Fengkuei*.

**Figure 8:** The boys got scammed to watch the "high-resolution film on a big screen", which turns out to be the scenery of Taipei.

**Figure 9 (Left) and Figure 10 (Right):** Hsiao-yang and friends at the club dancing in *Daughter of the Nile*

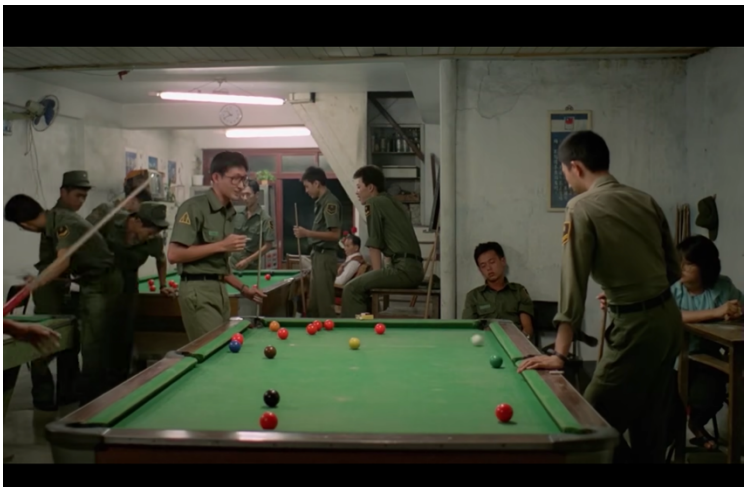

**Figure 14:** In *Dust in the Wind*, the soldiers playing pool in the military barracks when Wan is in service. Wan is sitting in the mid-ground with his eyes closed.

**Figure 15:** In *Goodbye South, Goodbye***,** Xiao Kao answers his phone with the pool hall in the background. A glass door separates the audience and Xiao Kao.

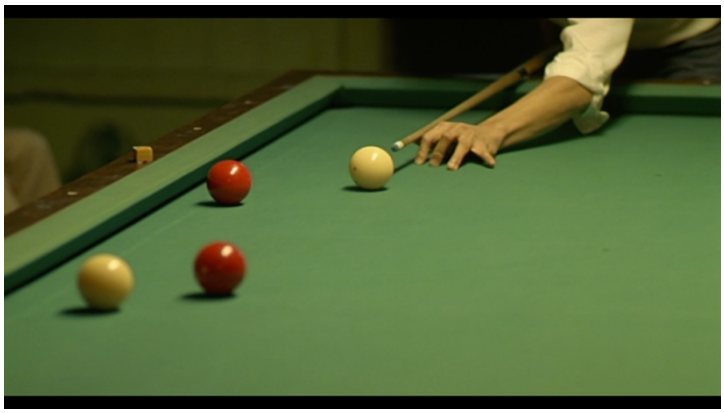

**Figure 16:** A close-up on the billiard balls that equates the importance of billiards with the protagonists in *Three Times*.

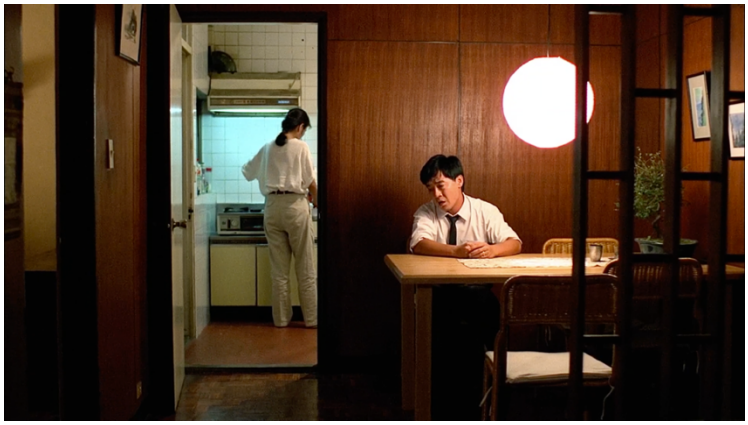

**Figure 17:** A long shot in *The Terrorizers* of Li Lizhong in the dining room and Zhou Yufen in the kitchen, visually separates the couple.

**Figure 18:** The well-lit Zhou Yufen contrasts with the dark room, which allows the audience to identify with her emotional turmoil.

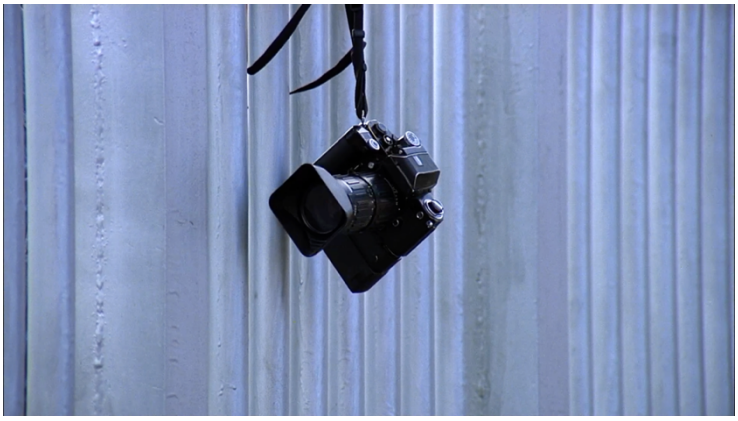

**Figure 19:** A close up of Xiao Qiang's camera, intensifying his objectification of people.


**Figure 20 (Left) and Figure 21 (Right):** The big smile of the anchor on TV and the bright light shining on her contrast with Molly and Qiqi's worrisome faces sitting in the dark in *A Confucian Confusion.*

**Figure 22:** Molly uses her cigarette to light Qiqi's cigarette, intensifying the intimacy between them.

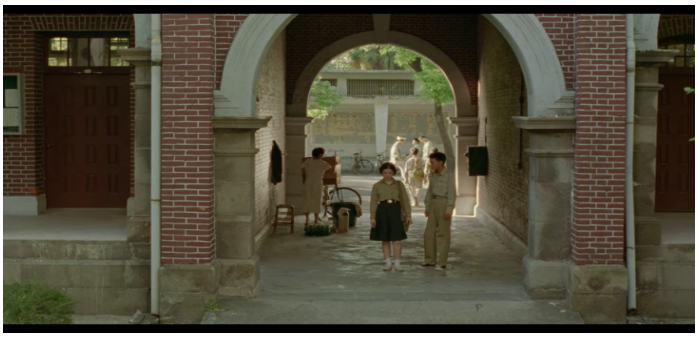

**Figure 23 (Left):** The Victorian passageway that connects the school and the outside world in *A Brighter Summer Day.*
**Figure 24 (Right):** The deep and dark spaces portrayed in the passageway.

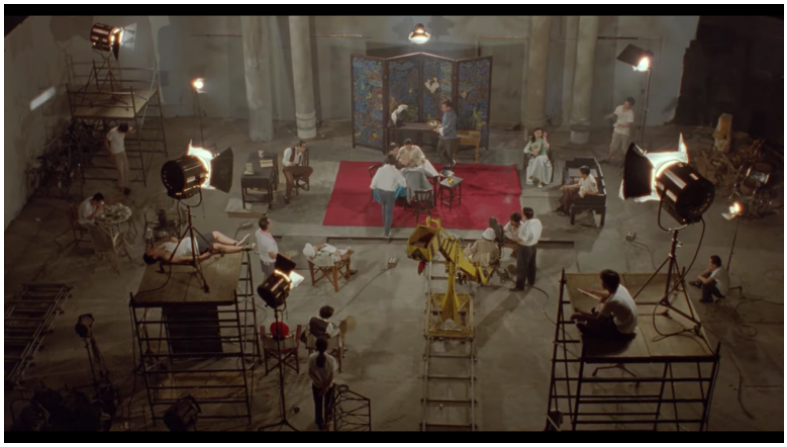

**Figure 25:** The bird-eye view of the film studio, which intensifies the hierarchical nature of the film studio.

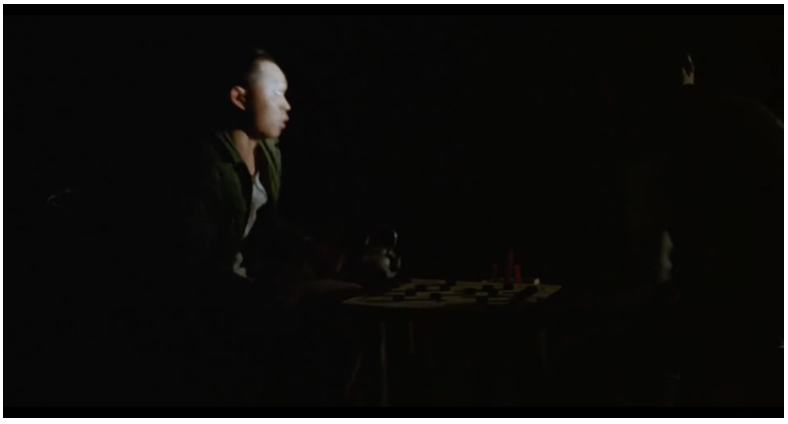

**Figure 26:** The flashlight shine on Shandong's scary face, and the fight bursts out.

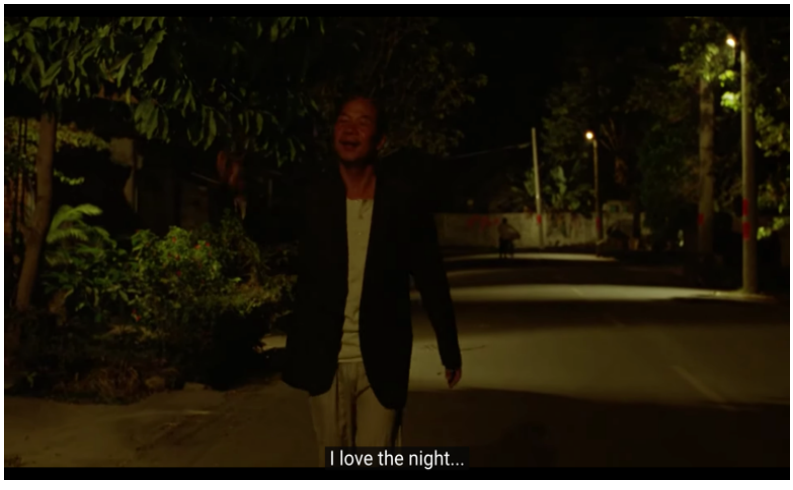


**Figure 27:** The neighbor smiles and shouts, "I love the night!" at night after he got drunk.

**Figure 28:** A close-up on the key that Hsiao-Kang later takes in *Vive l'amour*.

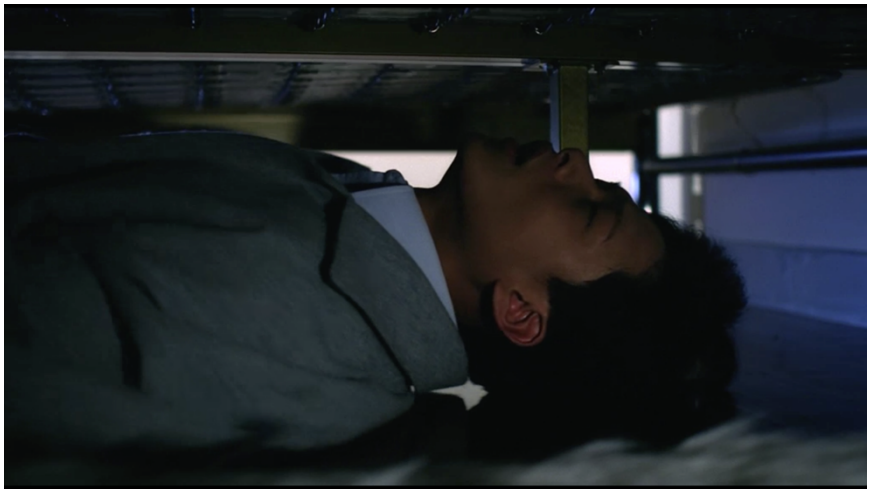

**Figure 29:** Hsiao-Kang hides under the bed to masturbate while Ah-Jung and Mei-Mei are having sex.

**Figure 30:** The portrayal of Hsiao-Kang's room, which produces a sense of constraint and claustrophobia, in *What Time Is It There?*.

**Figure 31:** Shiang-Chyi keeps herself under a quilt, refusing to make conversation or eye contact with the woman, suggesting a sense of humiliation at being "discovered."

**Figure 32:** The man in the cinema places the clock in front of his exposed crotch, and during a moment of silence, Hsiao-Kang and the man glance at each other.

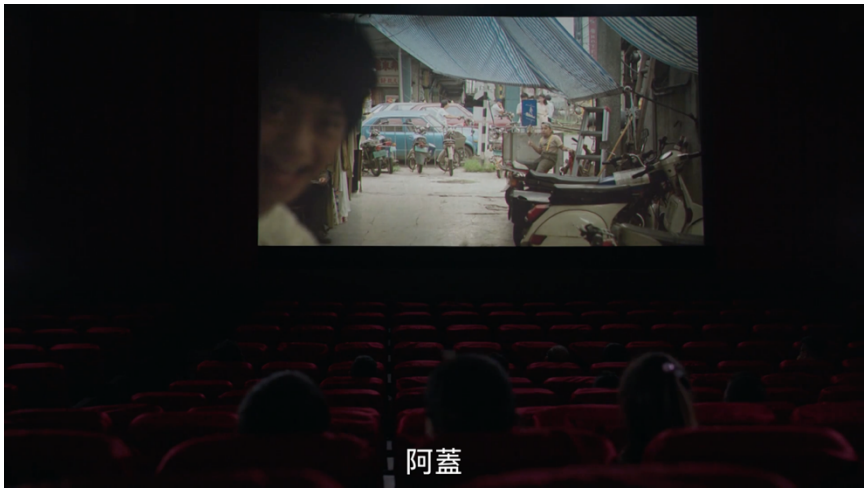


**Figure 33:** The Protagonist of *The Magician on the Skywalk* magically enters the world of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Dust in the Wind*.

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