

(Re)imagining Taiwan: Taiwanese Cultural  
Nationalism in Film and Literature, 1970-1990s

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(RE)IMAGINING TAIWAN: TAIWANESE CULTURAL  
NATIONALISM IN FILM AND LITERATURE, 1971-1990s

History is rife with questions of identity—Taiwan is no exception. Since 1600, the island has been, among other things, a Dutch colonial outpost, a refuge for Ming loyalists, a provincial frontier of the Qing Dynasty, a Japanese colony, and, since the end of World War II, the home of the Republic of China (ROC). More than sixty years of government as the Republic of China, however, has not put an end to the question of cultural—or even national—identity in Taiwan. Indeed, since the “retrocession” of Taiwan to the ROC, the island’s identity has been an oft-contested issue. Under Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) sought not only to instill a sense of “Chinese” identity among the citizens of Taiwan—who had, after all “looked, acted, and sounded Japanese” when KMT officials arrived on the island<sup>1</sup>—but also aimed to foster a sense of identity that stood in opposition to the communist People’s Republic of China (PRC) that had ousted Chiang Kai-shek from the mainland.

The concept of a “Taiwan identity” has undergone dramatic changes since the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT. In 2003, Lee Teng-hui, who served as the ROC’s first Taiwan-born president from 1988 to 2000, remarked, “Creating a Taiwan-centred [*sic*] environment and realizing the ideals of a normal country are the goals towards which Taiwan should strive.” He further argued, “Taiwan’s actual status ought to be deemed a land belonging to no country, whose international status has yet to be defined—not as a part of the Republic of China’s already-existing territory...the ‘Republic of China’ is just an official name, not a nation.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew D. Morris, “Taiwan’s History,” in *The Minor Arts of Daily Life: Popular Culture in Taiwan*, ed. David K. Jordan, Andrew D Morris, and Mark L. Moskowitz, 3-31 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Lee Teng Hui, “‘Rectifying’ Taiwan’s Name,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 16, 2003. Retrieved online via <http://www.taiwandc.org/feer-2003-01.htm> (accessed March 1, 2010).

Lee's comments typify what scholars often call a "Taiwan consciousness"—that is, a sense of "self" rooted in identification with the island of Taiwan rather than any other geopolitical entity. In this essay, I mark the 1970s as a pivotal turning point in the emergence of a Taiwan consciousness and the discussion of Taiwanese identity. I begin in the 1970s because it was a period in which Taiwan's political climate began to change significantly. On October 25, 1971, for example, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 2758, which recognized the PRC as "the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations" and effectively undermined one of the KMT's major claims to authority in Taiwan.<sup>3</sup> The KMT legitimacy crisis was furthered throughout the decade as the ROC progressively lost recognition as the official government of China from most of the international community, including the United States in 1979. The 1970s was consequently a period in which the KMT had to aggressively counter the challenges of domestic movements, such as the *dangwai* movement, and reformulate its hegemony in Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the dramatic economic growth that emerged in this period—which, in many ways became a form of "performative legitimacy" for the KMT—literally reshaped Taiwan's landscape and social environment, thereby giving rise to new questions concerning what it meant to be Taiwanese.

I am not unique in seeing the 1970s as the beginning of a transformative period in Taiwan's history. However, much of the existing literature tends to analyze the emergence of a Taiwan-centric identity from a politically oriented perspective. Such works typically posit a narrative of the "Taiwanization" of Taiwan contending that the 1970s legitimacy crisis required the KMT to enact a series of political reforms that consequently increased local participation in

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, *Resolution 2758: Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations*, 26<sup>th</sup> Session (New York, October 25, 1971), <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/26/ares26.htm> (accessed March 1, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *Dangwai* is a term meaning "outside the party." Following Chiang Kai-shek's declaration of martial law in 1948, the KMT was the only legal political party in Taiwan.

government affairs and culminated in the lifting of martial law in 1987, the inauguration of Lee Teng-hui as Taiwan's first "native-born" president, the legalization of non-KMT political parties, and the holding of openly democratic elections. Each of these political acts, such scholars argue, encouraged greater discussion and reevaluation of Taiwanese identity.

While the transformation of political structures and the discourses of "high politics" are useful in understanding the emergence of a Taiwan consciousness, they do not tell the whole story of Taiwan's identity discourse. In his landmark work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson argued that "nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of the word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts [*sic*] of a particular kind."<sup>5</sup> According to Anderson, these artifacts emerged from a "crossing" of distinct historical forces. Once created, however, they were able to merge with a "wide variety of political and ideological constellations."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, I intend to draw attention to the role of cultural factors and, where appropriate, to incorporate Anderson's theory by showing how these cultural artifacts became entrenched with Taiwanese nationalism and existing historical forces.

In this paper, I take post-1970 literature and cinema from Taiwan to be significant cultural artifacts. As acts of conscientious cultural production, both film and literature have been at the forefront of identity discourse in Taiwan and have continually engaged in the (re)imagining of "Taiwan." In fact, I will argue that these fields were mediums through which individuals challenged the KMT's Sinocentric conception of cultural and national identity by localizing the narrative of Taiwanese history and everyday life.

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Much has been written on the role of Taiwanese literature in history. Angelina Yee, for example, has traced the “constructions and manipulations” of Taiwanese identity by examining the ways in which literature in twentieth-century Taiwan “negotiate[d] between imagined homelands and competing cultural authorities.”<sup>7</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang has also written extensively on Taiwanese literature. In “Literature in Post-1949 Taiwan, 1950 to 1980s,” she contends that “the literary accomplishments of writers from the earlier post-1949 decades laid the groundwork for Taiwan’s vital and pluralistic cultural developments in the 1990s” and that “literary currents in post-1949 Taiwan have closely mirrored the country’s larger sociopolitical transitions.”<sup>8</sup> In this respect, the production of literature in Taiwan is integral to the understanding of Taiwanese identity. Concerning the period addressed in this paper, however, there is too often a tendency to view the literature of the 1970s and 1980s with respect to the nativist-modernist dichotomy. This paper will focus less on the ways in which nativist literature was a reaction to the modernist approach, and will instead give more precedence to the ways in which nativism challenged state ideology and presented an alternative, though occasionally idyllic, version of Taiwanese identity.

Cinema, too, has been a common topic of discussion. Douglas Kellner, for instance, has argued that Taiwan’s “New Cinema” movement attempted to develop a national cinema “to define Taiwanese history and identity and to deal with current social problems previously ignored or suppressed in the national cinema and in Taiwanese culture at large.”<sup>9</sup> In “Festivals, Criticism, and International Reputation of Taiwan New Cinema,” moreover, Chia-chi Wu

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<sup>7</sup> Angelina C. Yee, “Constructing a Native Consciousness: Taiwan Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” *The China Quarterly* 165 (2001): 84.

<sup>8</sup> Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, “Literature in Post-1949 Taiwan, 1950 to 1980s,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray Rubinstein, expanded ed., 403-418 (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 404.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Kellner, “New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 42 (December 1998): 101-115. <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC42folder/80sTaiwanCinema.html> (accessed January 13, 2010).

claimed that Taiwan New Cinema was able to assume a role as a cultural expression of “would-be national legitimacy” through international film festivals.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, analysis of much of Taiwanese cinema has tended to look at films in and of themselves as pieces of art rather than as texts that illustrate the evolution of Taiwan’s identity discourse. Therefore, I will endeavor to explain the ways in which film used images, narrative, and even language to construct an alternative vision of Taiwanese identity both by revisiting Taiwan’s past and by critiquing contemporary society.

Perhaps no work has been more influential in my approach to Taiwan’s cultural history than June Yip’s *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary*. According to Yip, political democratization and the “indigenization” of Taiwan were a consequence not of a “cataclysmic shift in Taiwanese life,” but of the “culmination of a decades-long process of social and cultural decolonization—a process in which the island’s popular cultural forms have been deeply implicated.”<sup>11</sup> Yip’s work, like my own, sees the *xiangtu*, or nativist, literature of Huang Chun-Ming and the cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien as vital to the articulation of a Taiwanese cultural identity.

The central purpose of this paper, therefore, is to trace the evolution of a “Taiwan consciousness” since 1970. In doing so, I will make a number of arguments. First, the emergence of a Taiwan-centered identity discourse in the 1990s was, many ways, a consequence of discourses in the field of culture. Second, both literature and cinema were central mediums through which KMT policy and ideology were challenged and the Taiwan experience was both localized and (re)imagined. Finally, I will argue that, in many ways, the political changes in the

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<sup>10</sup> Chia-chi Wu, “Festivals, Criticism, and International Reputation of Taiwan New Cinema,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-shuo Robert Chen, 75-93 (New York: Routledge, 2007), 80.

<sup>11</sup> June Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 8.

post-1970 period epitomized Benedict Anderson's argument that nationality resulted from the merging of cultural artifacts with "political and ideological constellations."

### **THE "RETROCESSION" OF TAIWAN: THE KMT NARRATIVE TO 1971**

It is impossible to understand the developments in Taiwan since 1970 without first understanding the context in which the discussion of identity occurred. Occasionally underscored by the island's unique historical development—what John E. Wills, Jr. has labeled a history of "remarkable discontinuities"<sup>12</sup>—the cultural nationalism that emerged from the 1970s onward was primarily a challenge to the KMT's Sinocentric narrative. For, from 1949, when the KMT was forced into virtual exile on Taiwan, to 1970, the primary goal of the KMT was to "re-Sinicize" Taiwan and establish Chinese cultural hegemony.

When Chinese authorities assumed control over Taiwan in 1945—an act that would notably be called the "retrocession" of Taiwan—they inherited an island that had been recently subjected to fifty years of Japanese colonialism. Although many inhabitants of Taiwan originally rejoiced over unification with "the motherland," initial contacts between KMT officials and the Taiwanese proved disillusioning for the island's inhabitants. According to Denny Roy, locals found ROC soldiers to be "generally ill-disciplined, poorly educated, and unkempt."<sup>13</sup> To make matters worse, Nationalist officials seized control over most of the island's resources, forced thousands of Taiwanese out of jobs to make room for Mainlanders, and looted much of the island for their own benefit or to transport resources to support the civil war against Mao Zedong and the Communists. On February 28, 1947—a date simply referred to as 2/28 among Taiwanese—

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<sup>12</sup> John E. Wills, Jr., "The Seventeenth-Century Transformations: Taiwan Under the Dutch and the Cheng Regime," in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray Rubinstein, expanded ed., 84-106 (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 85.

<sup>13</sup> Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 59

tension between the Taiwanese and Mainlander populations exploded. When KMT officials arrested and beat a Taiwanese woman for selling cigarettes without a license, a group of Taiwanese launched an anti-KMT rebellion. The rebellion was violently suppressed and culminated in a declaration of martial law.

When Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government were forced to flee from mainland China in 1949, his government quickly acted to legitimize KMT authority by positioning Taiwan an inalienable part of Chinese history. Confronted by tension within Taiwan, and no longer able to claim Taiwan as a part of China in virtue of being a part of the mainland political system (as the KMT no longer had physical control over the mainland), the KMT “attempted to construct spatial and temporal continuity between the island and the continent, consecrating Taiwan as the rightful heir to China’s imperial tradition.”<sup>14</sup> The central feature of this policy was to transplant the cultural discourse and symbolism of mainland China into Taiwan. Civic education, for instance, revolved around knowledge of China’s geography, monuments, historical heroes, achievements, and cultural values, and conveniently overlooked much of Taiwan’s “history of discontinuities,” the civil war with the Communists, the series of conflicts between mainlanders and Taiwanese upon the arrival of the KMT, and the fact that the KMT lacked formal control over continental China. In other words, the Nationalists sought to omit any historical experience that would imply Taiwan’s difference from China.<sup>15</sup>

However, the KMT’s attempt to incorporate Taiwan into the fold of Chinese identity was, in some ways, problematic. As Allen Chun has pointed out, the KMT government was attempting to “*nationalize* Chinese culture” by propagating it as an allegory of the nation-state

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<sup>14</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

where the culture of a Chinese nation-state had only begun to recently develop.<sup>16</sup> Of course, nationalism was still developing in many parts of the world, but the difficulty faced by the KMT was to transplant that sense of identity to Taiwan, a task made even more complicated by the fact that Japan's *dōka* and *kōminka* policies had already begun to instill Taiwanese with a sense of identification with Japan. Thus, the KMT not only had to struggle with defining its own "imagined community" of Chinese national identity, but also with "renationalizing" Taiwan and supplanting the Japanese national identity that had begun to take root.

The KMT solution was not only to transplant existing mainland culture to Taiwan, but also to establish the KMT as the guardian of a "traditional" Chinese cultural history of which Taiwan was purported to be an "inalienable" component. The Sinocentric narrative embodies what Melissa J. Brown has called a "narrative of unfolding"—a constructed ideology that attempts to shape a group's understanding of their past for political purposes.<sup>17</sup> The first twenty-five years of KMT rule on Taiwan, 1945-1970, thus came to be characterized by the imposition of both a Gramscian system of hegemonic control and the exercise of Foucauldian discipline.

On one hand, the KMT quite visibly embarked on a Gramscian approach by infusing civil society with knowledge of Chinese cultural traditions. While Chiang Kai-shek's policies do not neatly follow Gramsci's model of hegemony with respect to the rhetoric of class struggle, Chiang's government was, in effect, acting to subvert the existing sociocultural hegemony by establishing new institutions and social systems that would "restore" Chinese hegemony in Taiwan. For instance, the government's educational policies, coupled with the preponderance of the narrative that Taiwan was an inalienable component of the greater Chinese nation—of which

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<sup>16</sup> Allen Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing: Cultural Imagination and State Formation in Postwar Taiwan," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 31 (January 1994): 54. Italics original.

<sup>17</sup> Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.

the KMT was the purportedly legitimate government—allowed the KMT to gradually establish political structures that privileged Mainlander authority over Taiwan’s future and reduced the influence of local Taiwanese. One common example was the KMT assertion that Taiwan ought to be represented only in proportion to its population with respect to the entire Chinese nation (i.e., Taiwan and continental China). Moreover, by maintaining certain “icons of nationhood”—such as the ROC flag, the ROC national anthem, and numerous “national treasures” from the mainland—the ROC created a symbolic framework in which identity-related discourse would be inherently connected to a Chinese framework that Taiwan had been apart from for the past fifty years. As Chun puts it, “In the service of national unity, these various icons and narratives of Chineseness provided the basis for a cultural hegemony that had not existed in the past.”<sup>18</sup>

In the aftermath of the 2/28 Incident, Chiang Kai-shek’s government began to vigorously “root out” Communist conspirators and dissidents. In the early postwar period, what has since been labeled the “white terror,” the government arrested, imprisoned, and executed tens of thousands of people, in many cases on the basis of insufficient or circumstantial evidence. It was an environment in which Taiwanese “dared not criticize the government, make comments on current politics, or voice grievances to strangers.”<sup>19</sup> The system was made more effective in that it was not confined to Taiwanese. Mainlanders, who often criticized the KMT’s administration over Taiwan and its loss of continental China, were also subject to the persecution of the “white terror.” Even government and party officials, irrespective of their position, could be persecuted

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<sup>18</sup> Chun, “From Nationalism to Nationalizing,” 57.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Chen-main Wang, “A Bastion Created, A Regime Reformed, An Economy Reengineered, 1949-1970,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, 320-338 (see note 8), 330.

or purged as Chiang Kai-shek attempted to impose uniformity and coherence upon the island's population.<sup>20</sup>

In this regard, the KMT security apparatus functioned in a manner similar to what Foucault has termed panopticism. The principle of panopticism, Foucault argued, is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary.”<sup>21</sup> Although deriving specifically from an examination of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison, Foucault's model is equally applicable to postwar Taiwan. Despite the fact that the KMT did not visibly punish each and every individual that somehow criticized or resisted their authority, the idea that any individual was a *potential* victim of KMT suppression had the effect of subduing much of the population into an at least passive compliance with government authority. Thus, while the policies of the “white terror” began in response to a specific threat to the government, they evolved into a power structure that coaxed individuals—Mainlanders and Taiwanese alike—into self-censorship.

The KMT also “disciplined” local Taiwanese in many ways. Most notably, the government enacted a strict language policy that designated Mandarin Chinese as the national language. The speaking of Japanese, which had, of course, been the language imposed upon Taiwan during the colonial era, was prohibited entirely. The local Taiwanese dialect, while still permitted in the home and marketplace, was often denigrated in government campaigns as crude and impure. Moreover, the KMT strictly imposed the use of Mandarin Chinese as the sole

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Chiang's policies were also designed to maintain support from the United States by visibly opposing the spread of Communism.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 201.



**Fig. 1:** A 1957 stamp depicting Taiwan as part of mainland China bears the inscription 光復大陸, meaning “recovery of the mainland.” (From “Definitive 083: Map of China Stamps (1957),” Chunghwa Post, [http://www.post.gov.tw/post/internet/w\\_stamphouse/stamphouse\\_index\\_eng.htm](http://www.post.gov.tw/post/internet/w_stamphouse/stamphouse_index_eng.htm) [accessed April 10, 2010].)

language for government, business, education, literature, and other public discourses. In fact, children were punished for even speaking Taiwanese in school.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, higher education was contingent upon individuals passing college entrance tests requiring substantial knowledge of mainland Chinese history and literature and Sun Yat-sen’s “Three Principles of the People.”<sup>23</sup> Such policies, accompanied by the ever-present rhetoric that Taiwan was to serve as the base for the KMT’s “recovering of the mainland”—a slogan ubiquitous enough to appear on ROC postage (Fig. 1)—served to position everyday life within a system of Chinese national identity.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, although not every Taiwanese individual complied with the demands by the KMT—a fact evidenced by the numbers purged under the white terror—the overwhelming majority were being forced to operate within a system that aimed to promote “Chinese” self-identification. On one hand, the symbols of mainland China conjoined with the KMT’s “reeducation” of the Taiwanese in order to convince the island’s population that it was an inalienable part of a Chinese national identity. At the same time, the KMT disciplined Taiwanese

<sup>22</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Roy, 96.

<sup>24</sup> For a full discussion of the role of postage stamps in Taiwan’s identity politics see Phil Deans, “Isolation, Identity and Taiwanese Stamps as Vehicles for Regime Change,” *East Asia* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 8-30.

by asserting its authority through the threat of violence and persecution and by imposing a new national language that was, on many levels, utterly foreign to the island's population. These policies were all designed to develop a China-centered identity narrative that would legitimize KMT authority over Taiwan.

### **THE 1970s: CRISIS AND CONTENTION IN TAIWAN**

As stated in the introduction to this essay, the 1970s marked a turning point in Taiwan's history—one that would be critical for the development of a "Taiwan consciousness." On a political level, the 1970s was a decade in which the KMT government was confronted with a profound crisis of legitimacy. Diplomatic setbacks and domestic political movements challenged the existing authority of the KMT and required the government to tweak its hegemonic structure.

Among the most visible elements of the KMT legitimacy crisis was the passage of UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 in 1971. The resolution not only recognized the PRC as the only representative of China to the UN, but effectively expelled Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT from the UN and its partner organizations. Yet, as monumental as this may seem today, it provoked little response within Taiwan by either the government or the general population.<sup>25</sup> There are, no doubt, multiple readings on why this was the case, but it would seem as if Yale political science professor David Rowe was right in May 1972 when he noted that "the dignity and assurance of the ROC survives unharmed."<sup>26</sup> The discussion of awarding the ROC's seat in the UN to the PRC had been debated long before the passage Resolution 2758 and thus may not

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Harrison, *Legitimacy, Meaning and Knowledge in the Making of Taiwanese Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 132.

<sup>26</sup> David Rowe, "Republic of China: Post-United Nations," *Issues & Studies* 8, no. 8 (May 1972): 21.

have come as a major surprise to the government officials. More importantly, the ROC still maintained political recognition and military support from its closest ally: the United States.

Nonetheless, diplomatic setbacks triggered at least some initial response within Taiwan. Sheldon Appleton, who also wrote on events in Taiwan in early 1972, remarked that “students at National Taiwan University, local politicians and newspapers were permitted to say in the fall what they would not have dared say in the spring: that reforms should be made.”<sup>27</sup> It was also during this period that a few individuals formed what would later be known as the *dangwai* movement—a subtle challenge to Taiwan’s one-party system that made open demands for political change. While some degree of political reform was undertaken in the aftermath of the UN incident, calls for reform began to subside by 1973, in part due to the KMT’s cooptation of those calling for reform and the arrest of *dangwai* affiliates and KMT critics.<sup>28</sup>

As the decade progressed, however, the United States gradually “normalized” relations with the PRC. In 1972, just months after the ROC had been stripped of its UN membership, Nixon made a formal visit to mainland China, the first by any U.S. President. Although the U.S. initially made qualified commitments to the PRC—acknowledging the “one-China policy” vis-à-vis the Shanghai Communiqué, for example, yet simultaneously maintaining military support for the ROC-controlled Taiwan—the end of the decade would witness the United States’ formal recognition of the PRC as the government of China.

Whereas the expulsion of the ROC from the UN proved to be a somewhat minor strain on KMT authority, the United States’ announcement that it would terminate formal diplomatic relations with the ROC and recognize the PRC as the government of China on January 1, 1979

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<sup>27</sup> Sheldon L. Appleton, “Taiwan: The Year it Finally Happened,” *Asian Survey* 12, no. 1 (Jan. 1972): 35.

<sup>28</sup> A-chin Hsiau, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 68; Murray Rubinstein, “Political Taiwanization and Pragmatic Diplomacy: The Eras of Chiang Ching-kuo and Lee Teng-hui, 1971-1994,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, 436-495 (see note 8), 438.

was a significant fracture. Unlike the mild response following Resolution 2758, the government responded quite visibly to the U.S. recognition of China. Chiang Ching-kuo, who had replaced his deceased father as president, called the act “tantamount to dashing the hopes of the hundreds of millions of people enslaved on the Chinese mainland for an early restoration of freedom.”<sup>29</sup>

The government further asserted its claim as the legitimate representative of China through government-sponsored media such as *Sinorama*, a bilingual monthly magazine distributed across the globe. An article appearing in a January 1979 issue of *Sinorama*, for example, departed from the magazine’s typically “neutral” tone (though it was always pro-KMT and Sinocentric) and lambasted the United States’ recognition of the PRC as a “shameful betrayal of a sworn U.S. ally and faithful friend.”<sup>30</sup> Moving beyond issue of political status, the article also asserted the ROC’s cultural identity as Chinese. Commenting on one of the anti-U.S. protests that emerged in the aftermath of the U.S. policy announcement, the article drew attention to the bold actions of a protester: “A young man even broke through the police lines, climbed into the tightly-guarded embassy, hoisted the national flag of the [ROC], and sat down in silent protest. When asked his name, he proudly replied: ‘Chinese.’”<sup>31</sup> The article also attempted to portray Taiwan as unified in both its opposition to the U.S. announcement and its support of the ROC, noting that one protester’s sign “declared opposition to those advocating Taiwan’s independence and urged all the people to dedicate themselves to the cause of maintaining the dignity of the Republic of China...to bring the Three Principles of the People back to the China mainland.”<sup>32</sup> Murray Rubinstein’s contention that these protests were “carefully staged,”

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<sup>29</sup> Roy, 139.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Kuan, “Heaven Helps Those Who Help Themselves,” *Sinorama*, January 1979, 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

however, is, perhaps, too extreme.<sup>33</sup> After all, it is perfectly understandable, indeed plausible, that many of the island's inhabitants—Mainlander and Taiwanese alike—would be upset about a loss of support from the United States. Nonetheless, the events that unfolded in 1979 indicate that the population was not as unified as the KMT purported.

Throughout 1979, the publishers of *Meilidao* (also known as *Formosa* magazine), who were also part of the *dangwai* inner circle, published articles calling for human rights, democratic reforms, and the lifting of martial law. They also planned a series of protests in support of this agenda. In December 1979, protest organized by *Meilidao* in Kaohsiung resulted in a violent clash between activists, government authorities, and KMT-hired instigators. Although the protesters contributed to the escalation of violence, the government, as Rubinstein has argued, “had to struggle for diplomatic survival and would not allow the activists to give the impression that the Nationalist government was unstable.”<sup>34</sup>

Once again, the Government Information Office (GIO) responded forcefully vis-à-vis *Sinorama*. According to *Sinorama*, the riot erupted “when a few hundred yelling youths beat up unarmed police with heavy clubs and steel bars...under the instigation of *Formosa* magazine.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, *Sinorama* condemned the magazine because it “distorted facts, questioned the legality, and ignored the government's achievements in economic development during the last 30 years.”<sup>36</sup> The article continued with its accusatory tone by dismissing the protesters as lawless terrorists conspiring to disrupt social order and mislead the general public.

What is interesting is that, while the general public *did* seem to believe that the protests threatened public order and required police intervention, most of the Taiwan public sympathized

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<sup>33</sup> Rubinstein, “Political Taiwanization and Pragmatic Diplomacy,” 441

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>35</sup> Lisa Kuan, “Kaohsiung Riot—An Abuse of Democracy,” *Sinorama*, January 1980, 55.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

with the underlying motivations of the rally.<sup>37</sup> Although many of the protest organizers were arrested, the state's "show trial" actually increased public support for democratic reforms rather than to discredit the opposition movement. In fact, many of the individuals who had been connected to the Kaohsiung protests won political offices in the 1980 elections.<sup>38</sup>

In short, the 1970s were a period of transition in Taiwan's history. Political changes and diplomatic setbacks had challenged the KMT's legitimacy and required the KMT to restructure its authority, giving greater leeway for oppositional voices in the process. In some ways, in fact, democratization itself became a means of reconstructing state hegemony, both as a means of co-opting oppositional movements and for positioning the ROC in opposition to the PRC.

The point of this discussion has not been to argue that these events *caused* the emergence of a "Taiwan consciousness" in the field of culture. Many of the themes that will be discussed over the remainder of this essay predated the 1970s and cannot be described as either a direct result of a particular historical event or as politically isolated cultural phenomenon. Rather, the purpose of the prior discussion is to indicate that the sociopolitical environment was evolving to a point where particular cultural voices were more likely to be heard among the general populace. Therefore, the focus of this paper now turn to cultural movements—primarily in the fields of literature and film—to trace the development of Taiwanese cultural nationalism. In doing so, I shall demonstrate the ways in culture responded to particular sociopolitical contexts and how fields like film literature were themselves mediums for the critique of KMT hegemony and critical agents in the development of a Taiwan-centric identity.

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<sup>37</sup> Roy, 169.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

## THE NATIVIST “EMERGENCE”: LITERATURE IN THE 1970s

In the midst of the sociopolitical upheavals of the 1970s, Taiwanese literature became increasingly dominated by a movement known as nativism. However, nativist literature—or *xiangtu* literature as it is often called—was not an entirely new development in the 1970s.<sup>39</sup> According to Sung-shen Yvonne Chang, nativism as literary genre—in which the central features consist of the use of Taiwanese dialect, the emphasis on the economic struggles of small-town residents and country folk, and the resistance to imperialism—can be traced to the Japanese colonial period.<sup>40</sup> While similar to this earlier period, the nativist movement that emerged in the 1970s responded to a different set of political circumstances and maintained a different political agenda. As such, Chang has hailed the nativism of the 1970s as the “the first oppositional cultural formation in contemporary Taiwan.”<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note, however, that nativism initially emerged not as a direct challenge to the ideology of the state, but in response to the modernist literary movement that had come to occupy a prominent position during the 1950s and 1960s. Influenced, in part, by the anti-Western sentiment that arose in Taiwan following the political setbacks of the early 1970s, the nativists attacked the modernists for their mimicry of Western models, charging that their “blind admiration” allowed for the advance of Western cultural imperialism.<sup>42</sup> Yet, one should avoid the conclusion that nativism was diametrically opposed to all things Western. Rather, the nativist response demanded a critical assessment of Western civilization, a reexamination of, and renewed commitment to, native cultural traditions, and greater cultural and economic

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<sup>39</sup> *Xiangtu* is often translated as “native soil” or “village-earth.”

<sup>40</sup> Chang, “Literature in Post-1949 Taiwan,” 412.

<sup>41</sup> Sung-shen Yvonne Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan: Martial Law to Market Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>42</sup> Chang, “Literature in Post-1949 Taiwan,” 412; Chang, *Literary Culture in Taiwan*, 9; Yee, 83.

autonomy.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, by promoting a literary genre that focused on the “everyday realities” of people in Taiwan—especially the transformations resulting from modernization and urbanization—the nativists simultaneously challenged many of the ideologies that underpinned the KMT political model and presented a narrative of Taiwanese identity that often contrasted with the image the KMT propagated. In this regard, nativist literature became a key medium through which a Taiwanese cultural nationalism, or a “Taiwan consciousness,” was imagined and articulated.

Among the *xiangtu* authors, Huang Chun-ming affords one of the best bodies of work for analysis. Hailed by many as the “master” of the *xiangtu* literary movement, Huang stood outside the “polemical fray” of the literary debates.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Huang was notably absent from the group concerned with the theoretical articulations of *xiangtu* and refrained from the more politically oriented activities of other nativist authors. That is not to say that Huang was politically neutral, rather that he promoted his literature as the product of personal experience. In the preface to the compilation *The Taste of Apples*, for example, Huang comments on the range of experiences that influenced his writing, including the white terror that “enshrouded Taiwan” under martial law and the “conflicts between old and new” that emerged when “the modern world began making inroads into the out-of-the-way town of Langyang, where [he] was born.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, Huang’s work is important for its autobiographical nature, its interaction with contemporary developments, as well as its claimed position as a voice of everyday Taiwanese people. Moreover, Huang’s work is important to analyze due to the iconic status it assumed within Taiwan and the fact that it served as the inspiration for some of the earliest films in Taiwan’s New Cinema movement, whose

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<sup>43</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Huang Chun-ming, preface to *The Taste of Apples*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), xv.

contribution to Taiwanese cultural nationalism and “Taiwan consciousness” will be discussed later.

### **Huang Chung-ming and Taiwanese Identity**

One of the central features of Huang Chun-ming’s stories is the prevalence of contrasts. Among the most visible, perhaps, is the contrast between an idyllic rural community and the transformations of modernization and urbanization—a theme that was, in many ways, a critique of the modernists and their seemingly pro-Western mentality. However, the contrast presented in Huang’s short stories, particularly those that present modernization, Westernization, and urbanization as forces of conflict in Taiwanese society, implicitly undermined KMT authority.

In “The Drowning of an Old Cat,” for example, Huang challenges the hegemony of the KMT identity discourse through a critique of the abstract concept of modernization—in this case, through the construction of a swimming pool in a country village. From the outset, Huang lays out a contrast between urban and rural identity, commenting that the town youth “habitually put on airs of self-importance to show that they were urbanites” whenever they came across people from the countryside.<sup>46</sup> Huang furthers this sense of disparity between the urban and rural identity through an imagined spatial difference: “Though no more than two and a half kilometers separated them...the townspeople sensed that Clear Spring village was a great distance away.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Huang’s story is visibly infused with conceptions of identity.

This is quite evident in the basis for the central conflict in the story. Although minor from a modern-day Western perspective, the construction of a pool in Clear Spring village worries the story’s focal character, Uncle Ah-sheng. For Ah-sheng, the pool not only promises to alter the

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<sup>46</sup> Huang Chun-ming, “The Drowning of an Old Cat,” in *The Taste of Apples*, 11-32 (see note 46), 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

village's geography and bring numerous townsfolk into the village, but also poses the possibility of drying up Clear Spring's sacred well.

Ah-sheng's decision to oppose the action at one of the town meetings becomes a venue in which Huang subtly implies a distinct Taiwanese identity. One way this is accomplished is through the use of different languages. At the town meeting, Huang notes that "the village chief opened the meeting with a speech in Mandarin that left our old-timers feeling disgruntled, since they didn't understand a word he said." He also remarks that other speeches at the meeting—also in Mandarin—were "little more than an unbearable series of grunts and gestures" to Ah-sheng.<sup>48</sup> Huang's depiction establishes Ah-sheng—and the community he supposedly represents—as something *other* than part of the mainstream Mandarin culture. Indeed, Mandarin is presented as an essentially foreign language to the older Taiwanese villagers and draws attention to the fact that the Taiwanese dialect was the mostly widely spoken language in most of Taiwan's rural communities during the period.<sup>49</sup> "The Drowning of an Old Cat" thus alludes to the limits of the KMT's Sinicization policy that had imposed Mandarin as the official language of the new "Chinese" state. By positioning Ah-sheng and many of the villagers as existing "outside" the symbolic language of Chinese national and cultural identity, Huang implies the existence of a persistent indigenous Taiwanese identity. It is notable that when asked why he so aggressively opposes the construction of a swimming pool, Ah-sheng demarcates himself from the Mandarin-speaking officials and townspeople in characteristic *xiangtu* fashion, responding, "Because I love this piece of land and everything on it."<sup>50</sup>

In "The Taste of Apples," Huang's critique is more clearly directed toward the modernists. However, he also subtly, yet effectively, targets both the KMT and the United States

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>49</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 136.

<sup>50</sup> Huang, "The Drowning of an Old Cat," 24.

as subverting Taiwan's cultural identity by detailing the story of a Taiwanese man who is hit by the limousine of an American military officer. The majority of the story concerns the effects that the accident has had on the family, both as they fear for Jiang Ah-fa's health and as they struggle to interact with foreigners and the elements of modernization they encounter on their way to the hospital. However, when Ah-fa finally awakes from his anesthesia and meets the American military officer and a Chinese policeman, he is—much like Uncle Ah-sheng in “The Drowning of an Old Cat”—confronted by “unintelligible mutterings.”<sup>51</sup> By applying this description of language to both the American military officer and the Chinese policemen, Huang establishes their difference from Ah-fa's implicit “Taiwanese” identity.

Huang's critique becomes more explicit, and almost cynical, toward the end of the story. After learning that their family will be handsomely compensated by the American officer for Ah-fa's injuries, Ah-fa and his family begin to enjoy the numerous goods the American officer has left for them, including soft drinks, sandwiches, milk, canned fruit, and apples. The seemingly trivial soda cans become treasures and Ah-gui warns her children that she will “flay the skin off the bones of anyone who loses [these pretty soda cans]!”<sup>52</sup> In the midst of their minor luxury, the family begins to think of the car accident as a fortunate encounter that has elevated their standard of living. Yet, when they finally bite into the apples left for them by the American officer, “they felt that the apples weren't quite as sweet as they had imagined...when chewed they were frothy and not quite real.” It is only after remembering that one apple costs as much as four catties of rice that “the flavor [is] enhanced.”<sup>53</sup> Metaphorically, then, Huang's closing critiques the superficial admiration of American cultural models and, by extension, the KMT's advocacy of those models. Huang thus implicitly warns that the wholesale adoption and admiration of

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<sup>51</sup> Huang Chun-ming, “The Taste of Apples,” in *The Taste of Apples*, 135-156 (see note 46), 153.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 156.

Western luxuries threaten to diminish Taiwanese cultural identity in the same way it had co-opted the concerns of Ah-fa's family.

In a similar manner, many of Huang's other stories also draw upon contrasts and oppositions to imply the existence of an important, and culturally distinct, indigenous identity that is somehow threatened by foreign influences. In "Sayonara/Zaijian," for instance, a young Taiwanese man is made to act as a "pimp" for a group of Japanese businessmen who "come to do business in Taiwan, with their haughty, disdainful attitude, [and] strut around as if Taiwan were their economic colony."<sup>54</sup> While escorting the Japanese men, the focal character, Huang, meets a student who wishes to speak with the Japanese businessmen about studying Chinese literature in Japan. In his conversation with the student, Huang laments that the words of foreigners are treated like "a message from the gods" while those of Taiwanese are "a fart in the wind."<sup>55</sup>

In "The Two Sign Painters," modernization is once again the threatening force as two young men take up jobs as sign painters in the city, later described as stepping "off the train and onto a ship of thieves."<sup>56</sup> The contrast in the story is not as explicit as in "The Drowning of an Old Cat," but Monkey and Ah-li's frustration with the urban environment seems to indicate the existence of an idyllic rural environment. Indeed, as they lament their lack of a sense of significance in the city, feeling as though they are "engaged in a meaningless struggle in a vast, illusory fantasy world,"<sup>57</sup> they pass the time and relax themselves by humming folk songs from eastern Taiwan. Ultimately, however, a seemingly minor incident—a paint bucket falling off the top of a large wall while they vent their anger—releases the chaos of the city and a swarm of reporters as passing cars and pedestrians believe one of them is going to jump. Overwhelmed by

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<sup>54</sup> Huang Chun-ming, "Sayonara/Zaijian" in *The Taste of Apples*, 209-251 (see note 46), 223.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>56</sup> Huang Chun-ming, "The Two Sign Painters," in *The Taste of Apples*, 183-208 (see note 46), 195.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

the combined pressure of the reporters and his own internal struggles emerging from the demands of providing for his countryside family, Monkey tries to escape the throng of reporters and slips, falling to his own death. Much like Uncle Ah-sheng in “The Drowning of an Old Cat,” monkey is literally destroyed by urbanization and the “outside world.”

Although I have devoted particular attention to the stories of Huang Chun-ming, the themes are relatively consistent throughout *xiangtu* literature. As A-chin Hsiao has observed, “A typical work depicted the hardships that the country folks or small-town dwellers faced in economic difficulty...Nearly all protagonists were of humble of humble origins” and existed in a world where Taiwan had become an economic colony of Japanese and American investment.<sup>58</sup> Yet, as consistent as themes were, it is important to note the subtlety of the nativist literary movement. Their writings were not always confrontational or explicitly oppositional. Rather, they often utilized narrowly framed critiques that alluded to the existence of a distinct, albeit idealized, Taiwanese identity. For, although nativist literature did not describe its subjects in terms of national identity, it was, nonetheless, “a bounded and structured discourse producing a narrative of the meaning of Taiwan.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, even as some nativists professed allegiance to a Chinese consciousness, many of the nativist authors exhibited a regional consciousness that asserted Taiwan’s distinctiveness from “the Chinese center.”<sup>60</sup> It was these qualities that began to attract the attention of the KMT, which criticized the movement as subversive, leftist (i.e., Communist), and separatist in the late 1970s.<sup>61</sup> Yet, the movement escaped any official repression—a rather surprising development given the politically sensitive environment that had unfolded throughout the 1970s.

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<sup>58</sup> Hsiao, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 70.

<sup>59</sup> Harrison, 146.

<sup>60</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 41. Also see: Hsiao, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 70-74 for a detailed description of *xiangtu* provincialism.

<sup>61</sup> Hsiao, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 71.

Many scholars mark this period as a point of fracture in the nativist movement in which a “localist” cultural movement emerged out of nativism and carried on into the 1980s in conjunction with the *dangwai* political movement. In short, the difference concerned the divergence between those who had opposed KMT hegemony in order to create a more authentic “Chinese consciousness”—as often advocated by Ch’en Ying-chen—and those more explicitly committed to a Taiwan consciousness. Thus, while it was previously mentioned that even the “pro-China” stance delineated Taiwan’s regional particularity, the element of nativism that would become most dominant in the 1980s as “localism” was one that more directly concerned itself with the “reality of Taiwan’s objective existence.”<sup>62</sup> It is this quality that became highly evident in Taiwan’s New Cinema movement.

### **IMAGINING TAIWAN THROUGH CINEMA, 1980s-1990s**

Although Taiwan experienced tremendous economic growth in the 1960s and the 1970s, the Taiwanese film industry faced severe economic difficulties at the beginning of the 1980s. In some ways, economic growth contributed to the industry’s struggles, for it gave rise to new cultural tastes that made many Taiwanese less interested in martial arts and melodrama films.<sup>63</sup> Taiwanese cinema had also lagged beyond the proliferation of *xiangtu* style cultural expression that had been prevalent in many other cultural industries during the 1970s and early 1980s. In part, this stemmed from the level of government involvement in Taiwanese cinema, which limited the types of discourse available to the medium. As Yip observes, “Films of the 1970s stagnated at two extremes: anticommunist and anti-Japanese propaganda films on the one hand and, on the other, films of pure escapism that avoided politics and contemporary sociocultural

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<sup>62</sup> Ch’en Shu-hung, quoted in Hsiao, *Contemporary Taiwanese Cultural Nationalism*, 92.

<sup>63</sup> Ru-Shou Robert Chen, “Taiwan Cinema,” in *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, ed. Yingjin Zhang, 47-62 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 55.

problems altogether.”<sup>64</sup> These categories, of course, reflected the political climate of the 1970s, wherein KMT hegemony had become increasingly vulnerable. However, as films from Hong Kong increasingly dominated the cinema market in Taiwan, the GIO began to loosen controls over the industry and encourage young directors to make films of a more artistic nature that would elevate the medium to a higher cultural standing.<sup>65</sup>

Surprisingly, despite the fact that Taiwanese cinema was overseen by and, in some cases, dependant upon the GIO and the government-run Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), Taiwan’s New Cinema movement began to incorporate the same discourse of cultural nationalism that had emerged in the literature of the 1970s. Among the earliest films of the New Cinema movement was the 1983 anthology film *The Sandwich Man*, which consisted of three cinematic versions of stories by Huang Chun-ming. Much like the original stories—“His Son’s Big Doll,” “Xiaoqi’s Cap,” and “The Taste of Apples”—the short films were critical of the newly developing economic conditions and the difficult environment in which many Taiwanese were forced to live.<sup>66</sup>

From these early films emerged two young directors that would shape the future of Taiwan New Cinema: Edward Yang (Yang Dechang) and Hou Hsiao-hsien. Discussing his role in the watershed film *In Our Time*, Yang articulated the film’s significance as being “perhaps the first attempt in cinema to recover the Taiwan past...[to question] our origins, our politics, our relation to mainland China, and so on.”<sup>67</sup> The fact that Yang and Hou were born in mainland China does not exclude them from rhetoric of Taiwanese cultural nationalism, for they were each

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<sup>64</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 53. Ru-Shou Robert Chen, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 54.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Yang, quoted in Ru-Shou Robert Chen, 57.

part of a generation for which the only home they had ever known was Taiwan.<sup>68</sup> It was this element that allowed New Cinema to incorporate both mainland Chinese and native families. Both Yang and Hou, therefore, would become leaders of a movement that, incorporating individuals from both mainland Chinese and native families, “held up a mirror to society” in order to question its origins and fundamental structure.

Yet, each became well known for their particular style of inquiry. Edward Yang, in a manner more immediately relatable to the *xiangtu* literature of the 1970s, became best known for his portrayal of the urban environment and the consequences of urban development for Taiwanese society. Hou Hsiao-hsien, on the other hand, initially paralleled Huang Chun-ming in drawing on personal experience to present the everyday reality of Taiwanese life, but became best known for his post-martial law films that directly addressed previously taboo areas of Taiwan’s national history. Regardless of their differences, both Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien were influential in articulating a “Taiwan consciousness.” Much like the *xiangtu* authors, their articulations were not always explicit, but by responding to contemporary conditions and presenting narratives of “everyday reality,” they propagated images that asserted the existence of a particular Taiwanese experience.

### **Edward Yang and the Urban Environment**

Much like the nativists of the 1970s, Edward Yang’s films responded to the socioeconomic changes that were redefining the Taiwanese way of life. Although Yang—and the *xiangtu* authors—presented critical perspectives on this development, it is important to recognize that Taiwan’s economic growth was beneficial for a large percentage of society. In fact, on some level, it was the increasing standard of living and development of the national economy that the

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<sup>68</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 60.

KMT relied on as a form of “performative legitimacy.” As James C. Scott pointed out in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, the success of hegemonic power depends, in large part, on the acts of the subordinated group. Scott argues, “Any ideology which makes a claim to hegemony must, in effect, make promises to subordinate groups by way of explaining *why* a particular social order is also in their best interests.”<sup>69</sup> As mentioned earlier, one of the responses of KMT officials to the Kaohsiung riot—vis-à-vis *Sinorama*—had been to emphasize the economic achievements of the KMT. In fact, per-capita income had increased exponentially from \$186 in 1952, to \$890 in 1975, to \$2,992 in 1985. The average number of calories consumed per day also increased by 38 percent between 1952 and 1985.<sup>70</sup> Combined with the large-scale structural improvements initiated by Chiang Ching-kuo, Taiwan gained an international reputation as a burgeoning industrial economy, characterized by narrative catch phrases that positioned it as “the Little Dragon” or as one of the “Asian Tigers.” Although this period of development would later be used to distinguish Taiwan from mainland China, it was also propagated by the KMT to legitimize its claim as an effective government.

In addition to building upon Huang Chun-ming’s line of criticism that Western-style modernization was a form of cultural imperialism, Yang challenged the discourse of economic development by exposing its consequences for *quality* of life, particularly among marginalized groups of society. Most academic studies concerning Yang’s portrayal of the urban environment, however, have focused on his 1986 film, *The Terrorizers*. Frederic Jameson’s “Remapping Taipei,” for example, has positioned the film within the context of post-modernism and thoroughly examined its aesthetic presentation of the urban environment as a “superimposed set

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<sup>69</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 77. Italics original.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas B. Gold, “Taiwan Society at the *Fin de Siècle*,” *The China Quarterly* 148 (December 1996): 1091-1114. All dollar amounts are in USD.

of boxed dwelling spaces in which the characters are all confined in one way or another.”<sup>71</sup> Though it has not been ignored, less attention has been given to Yang’s 1985 film, *Taipei Story*. Like *The Terrorizers*, *Taipei Story* possesses many of the spatial relationships Jameson discussed in “Remapping Taipei.” However, *Taipei Story* can also be read in terms of identity narrative as it draws upon many *xiangtu* themes, including generational disparity, the alienating effect of modernization, the economic imperialism of the West, and nostalgia for the past.

*Taipei Story* takes place in a period more or less contemporary with its date of release. From the beginning, *Taipei Story* establishes itself as adopting a thoroughly “realist” perspective. It opens in a quiet, empty apartment as a couple, Lon and Chin, explores their future residence. The lack of quick cuts or cinematic score typical of Hollywood film creates a mellow, drawn-out scene that gives the viewer the sense that, although these characters are fictional, their lives—and their story—resemble reality in Taiwan.

Early on, Yang indicates that *Taipei Story* will not echo the government’s glorification of Taiwan’s industrialization and the construction of a “modern” city. While having a conversation in a high-rise office, Chin’s colleague, an architect, remarks, “Look at these buildings. It’s getting harder and harder for me to distinguish which ones I designed. They all look the same, as if it doesn’t make much difference whether I exist or not.”<sup>72</sup> This sentiment marks a profound contrast with the narrative being constructed by Taiwan’s government. A 1978 article in *Sinorama*, for example, attempted to depict the urbanization of Taiwan in a more positive light, noting, “The height, size, and density of the housing, as well as the width of the streets is all

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<sup>71</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Remapping Taipei,” in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, 114-157 (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 154.

<sup>72</sup> Edward Yang, dir., *Qing mei zhu ma* [Taipei Story] (Taiwan: 1985), film.

standardized. The overall appearance of the community is therefore neat and orderly, *but not sterile*, since the houses are subtly spaced amid the gardens and grassy areas.”<sup>73</sup>

*Taipei Story* also touches upon the effects that modernization has had upon intergenerational relationships. Lon’s former baseball coach, for instance, expresses a feeling that he needs to retire, commenting, “You young people, I find it gets harder to understand what you’re thinking about.”<sup>74</sup> Much as Uncle Ah-sheng in “The Drowning of an Old Cat” is frustrated with and distanced from the younger, more hedonistic members of his surrounding community, Lon’s baseball coach feels alienated from youth culture. Yet, Yang shows that even *within* youth culture, the urban environment creates a sense of isolation. After a falling out with Lon, Chin joins a new social group and enters the Taipei nightlife. Surrounded by bright lights, American music, and the spectacle of the modern city, Chin stares blankly into space as though she were just a shell of existence. What Yang exposes, therefore, is the sense of detachment experienced by Taipei residents and the difficulty they have in connecting with one another.

*Taipei Story* also incorporates a criticism of Westernization. Through much of the film, Lon, who is often absorbed his own feeling of nostalgia over his days as a baseball player, is drawn to the idea of immigrating to America. He plans to enter the food importing business with his brother, who, he notes, lives in a formerly all-white neighborhood in San Marino along with many other Taiwanese who bought houses with cash. Yet, his own internal struggles and financial difficulties—themselves an outgrowth of the new urban environment—leave Lon feeling as though America is little more than a dream, “a kind of illusion that you can start everything over again.”<sup>75</sup> Chin, too, is a victim of the Western economic model. Already employed in a Western-style corporation, her company is shut down and bought out by a

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<sup>73</sup> “A New Community.” *Sinorama* 3, April 1978, 61. Emphasis added.

<sup>74</sup> Yang, *Taipei Story*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

multinational corporation for a seemingly minor error in building schematics. When her former boss starts a new company and offers her work, her boss brags, “Isn’t it great here? Now we can bring the big American companies right to our doorstep?”<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, like any film, it is important to interpret not only the dialogue, but also the way in which the director has chosen to portray his subjects. The sense of alienation is furthered by Yang’s chosen locations and camera perspectives, which often separate the viewer from the subject. Yang’s characters are often depicted as being “caged” in the urban environment. Scenes abound in which characters are situated in front of windows overlooking a mass of urban sprawl, rooms are wide open and empty, and the city appears as something in which the individual exists without an intimate connection to their surroundings.

Thus, what is significant about Yang’s work is how *Taipei Story* portrays city life in contrast to the narrative constructed by the government. Whereas government publications boasted of urban renewal and rising economic status, *Taipei Story* portrays the darker consequences of rapid development and highlights the struggle to reconcile individuality in a society increasingly commodified and standardized by consumer culture. To this extent, Yang’s films localize the narrative of Taiwan by focusing on the experience of individuals that may have otherwise been marginalized in public discourse. As such, works like Yang’s are invaluable in understanding the tension that existed as discussions of “Taiwanese identity” began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, one might view *Taipei Story* as part of Taiwan’s democratization movement, for by giving audiences insight into the peripheral world of Taiwanese society, Yang acts to construct a modern history that moves beyond the island’s elite and incorporates a broader base of individuals. And while Yang’s story does not adopt the explicitly nationalistic approach of identifying a “mythological origin” or a unifying characteristic of the Taiwanese people,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

*Taipei Story* is nevertheless an identity narrative in that it tries to project the actual experiences of Taiwan's inhabitants as they are confronted by dramatic forces of historical change.<sup>77</sup>

### **Hou Hsiao-hsien and the Narrative of Taiwanese History**

Like Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien often addressed the “realism” of Taiwanese life. Films such as *The Sandwich Man* (1983), *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984), and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985) were all reminiscent of the *xiangtu* spirit of the 1970s in that the focus on everyday life created characters whose lives reflected Taiwan's historical development.<sup>78</sup> While these films are all important to the narrative of a “Taiwan Consciousness”—especially *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, in which Hou profiles his own childhood experience as a means of detailing the lives of mainland immigrants and the growing identification with Taiwan felt by their children—Hou is, perhaps, best known for his Taiwan trilogy: *A City of Sadness* (1989), *The Puppet Master* (1993), and *Good Men, Good Woman* (1995).

Of course, the trilogy films were released in a dramatically different cultural and sociopolitical environment than the early 1980s and are therefore important in showing how the concept of a “Taiwan consciousness” evolved alongside other historical developments. In part a continuation of the sentiments that had erupted during the 1979 Kaohsiung incident and in part a consequence of a growing middle class, the first part of the 1980s was a period of activism. While the KMT did not relinquish its use of oppression to silence opposition, Chiang Ching-kuo did begin to open up the governmental system and steer the KMT toward “Taiwanization.”<sup>79</sup> The most dramatic changes to Taiwan's political system, however, began around 1986. In a state of

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<sup>77</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 60.

<sup>78</sup> Kellner, “New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s.”

<sup>79</sup> Rubinstein, “Political Taiwanization and Pragmatic Diplomacy,” 445.

declining health, Chiang Ching-kuo initiated three major reforms that would allow for the expansion of Taiwan's identity discourse. First, he allowed for the existence of opposition parties. Many members of the *dangwai* thus institutionalized their movement as a legally recognized political group in September 1986 as the Democratic Progressive Party. Additionally, in October of 1986, Chiang announced that martial law would be lifted in July 1987. Lastly, Chiang permitted the island's residents to visit mainland China—a move that led many Taiwanese to realize the utter disparity between Taiwan and China.<sup>80</sup> Chiang Ching-kuo's death in 1988 would also be significant, as it resulted in Taiwan having its first native-born president: Lee Teng-hui. President Lee would carry on many of the reforms initiated by Chiang and would lead Taiwan toward greater democratization in the 1990s.

In the midst of this political change and the increasingly liberalized cultural environment of post-martial law Taiwan, Hou Hsiao-hsien released *A City of Sadness*. Released only two years after the lifting of martial law, *A City of Sadness* daringly, yet somewhat appropriately, focused on the events surrounding the KMT arrival in the 1940s, including the previously taboo 2/28 incident, which had been virtually excluded from public discourse until the incident was publicly commemorated in 1988 by Lee Teng-hui.<sup>81</sup>

Hou's personal justification for *A City of Sadness* delineates its multi-layered significance for Taiwanese identity: "I hope that a renewed understanding of 'Two-two-eight' will help everyone to finally cast away its dark shadow and to go on living with energy and vitality. What I most desire is for audiences who see my film to leave the theater not only with tears in their eyes, but with a sense of pride, of empowerment, and with the determination to move toward the

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<sup>80</sup> J. Bruce Jacobs, "'Taiwanization' in Taiwan's Politics," in *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua*, ed. John Makeham and A-Chin Hsiau, 17-54 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 33.

<sup>81</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 90.

future.”<sup>82</sup> On one hand, Hou’s film served as a critique of the KMT transition and an exposé of the injustices the new Chinese government exacted. The film explicitly opens, for example, by stating: “In 1945, after fifty-one years of Japanese rule, the island of Taiwan was returned to China. The islanders’ joy was short-lived.”<sup>83</sup> In addition to this, however, *A City of Sadness* also served as a “subaltern” history of Taiwan that sought to make sense of a previously excluded element of history. Thus, while framed by political circumstances, politics is merely a side-story to Hou’s investigation of the lives of common people. In the opening scene, for instance, while the radio discusses the dropping of the atomic bomb and Japanese surrender, the announcement serves as a backdrop to the birth of a child. Politics thus assume a peripheral position in *A City of Sadness*, such that the government and its interactions with the Taiwanese people are rarely the focus of a scene.<sup>84</sup>

By making politics the frame rather than the focus, *A City of Sadness* effectively conveys a Taiwan-centric narrative that implicitly details the island’s difference from China. What is exposed is not the grand sequence of political events, but the ways in which these events affected and transformed the lives of Taiwan’s residents. The Taiwanese are initially optimistic about their reunification with China. Yet, Hou implicitly challenges the concept of “reunification” by showing that even though the Taiwanese were anxious to welcome the ROC officials to the island, they had no clue about how to orient the ROC flag. Shortly after the arrival of mainlanders, the Taiwanese become disillusioned and frustrated. As one character laments to his Taiwanese peers, “This isn’t a government, it’s a private company with boss Chen Yi lining his

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<sup>82</sup> Hou Hsiao Hsien, quoted in June Yip, “Construction a Nation: Taiwanese History and the Films of Hou Hsiao-hsien,” in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, ed. Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu, 139-168 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 152.

<sup>83</sup> Hou Hsiao-Hsien, dir., *Bei qing cheng shi* [A City of Sadness], DVD (Taiwan: 3H Films, 1989).

<sup>84</sup> Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*, 98.

own pocket, not yours.”<sup>85</sup> Hou also draws attention to the fact that the island had once been surrendered to Japan. As Taiwanese criticize the mainlander’s suppression of their rights and the oft-repeated mainlander justification that the island had been tainted by Japanese colonialism, one exclaims: “Damn it, were we so low as to want to become slaves? The Qing Dynasty sold us out. Who asked us if we agreed to being ceded to Japan?”<sup>86</sup>

Although *A City of Sadness* is most often discussed for its “portrayal” of 2/28, the event itself is rather obscure in the film. Rather than witness the event, the viewer is informed of its occurrence through a radio broadcast in which governor Chen Yi declares martial law. Here, too, Hou undermines the KMT narrative. After Chen Yi’s announcement that “no harm will come to law-abiding citizens,” a series of seemingly innocent characters are beaten, arrested, or executed—many intellectuals are forced to hide in the mountains. Hou’s emphasis on this mainlander-Taiwanese tension subverts the official narrative of the KMT transition and the concept of reunification. In addition, Hou reinforces the idea of Taiwanese “uniqueness.” Wen-Ching, whose own muteness could be read as symbolic of the KMT suppression of Taiwanese, for example, finds himself nearly beaten by a group of Taiwanese who mistake his inability to comprehend Japanese as a sign of being a mainlander. Hou thus indicates that—regardless of the KMT’s periodic attempts to exclude the Japanese period from Taiwan’s “legitimate” history—Japanese colonialism had left an indelible marker of identity that made the island’s inhabitants different from mainlanders.

Hou adopts a similar approach in his later film, *Good Men, Good Women*. The film’s structure is noticeably different from *A City of Sadness*, for rather than focus on one single historical period, Hou attempts to link the history of the “white terror” to the present. The film

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<sup>85</sup> Hou, *A City of Sadness*.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

focuses on the story of a modern-day actress playing the role of Chiang Bi-Yu, a woman who left Taiwan during World War II to assist China in resisting the Japanese. It is the “flashbacks” of the film—that is, those moments that are to represent the actual life of Chiang Bi-yu—that provide the most important elements for Taiwan’s history. As Chiang, her husband, and their peers meet up with Chinese forces and offer their assistance, they are charged with being spies. Once again utilizing language as a marker of identity, Hou emphasizes their inability to comprehend their Chinese interrogators without the use of a translator. After the war, Chiang and her husband return to mainland China. However, in the midst of the “white terror,” her husband is arrested for his role in a left-leaning publication, *The Enlightenment*, and is eventually executed as a communist conspirator. Hou, therefore, undermines the concept of the Chinese “embrace” of Taiwan by portraying the Chinese as distrusting and paranoid. By extension, he subverts the Sinocentric narrative, for if Taiwan were truly Chinese, why were they treated as spies?

The central significance of *A City of Sadness* and *Good Men, Good Women*, then, is in their portrayal of history. According to Yip, “One of the chief objectives of the 1980s Taiwanese New Cinema was to challenge the narrow view of Taiwan’s modern history...by describing the great diversity of experiences in contemporary Taiwanese life.”<sup>87</sup> Both *A City of Sadness* and *Good Men, Good Women* accomplished this in ways that explicitly critiqued the KMT narrative of history—wherein Taiwan was an inalienable part of China—and the KMT’s projection of itself as a beneficent government. Focusing on the events that comprise the birth of a so-called “modern” Taiwan, Hou gives a voice to marginalized histories that demarcate a unique Taiwanese historical experience. In that sense, they give voice to the idea of a unique Taiwanese culture—one that acknowledges the legacy of pre-Chinese history—and, perhaps, a national identity. In other words, a “Taiwan consciousness.”

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<sup>87</sup> Yip, “Constructing a Nation,” 140.

*A City of Sadness* is particularly important with respect to the trend of “historicizing” Taiwan. For, although there had been developments from the late 1970s onward that had explored folk traditions, it was only after the end of martial law that a specifically Taiwan-centered history was openly presented. Yet, even around the time of *A City of Sadness*, the government was still relatively pro-Chinese in their approach. A 1991 English-language guide to historical sites articulated the lingering Sinocentrism, “The Republic of China’s island of Taiwan has been blessed with a string of historical coincidences, which have made it the sanctuary of Chinese culture.”<sup>88</sup> To be fair, the publication does make reference to the non-Chinese origins of many historical sites, but the scope of much of the guide is geared toward the celebration of Chinese culture and the more Sinocentric interpretation of the island’s heritage. Thus, the guidebook might be seen as a transitional text that indicates the shifting ideological orientation of the government but nonetheless confirms the continuing emphasis on China.

*A City of Sadness*, therefore, can be seen as a forerunner of the developing trend toward the reevaluation of the island’s history. In 1992, three years after *A City of Sadness*, the *Free China Review* stated, “Popular sentiment is now pushing the government and academia to strike a different balance in the way they approach Chinese history and culture, one that will give more attention to their island home.”<sup>89</sup> This is not to say that Hou’s films *caused* this trend, rather that films like *A City of Sadness*—as well as many of his earlier films in the 1980s—epitomized the growth of projecting Taiwan’s history in and of itself rather than in terms of a provincial identity or as a subcategory of Chinese studies. In this regard, the cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien was integral to the development of Taiwanese cultural nationalism.

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<sup>88</sup> Tourism Bureau, Republic of China (Taiwan), preface to *Tour of Historical Sites of Taiwan* (Taipei: Tourism Bureau, 1991).

<sup>89</sup> “History Unfettered,” editorial, *Free China Review*, March 1992; Also, see Emma Wu, “Local Scholars Take a Closer Look at Home,” *Free China Review*, March 1992 for a discussion of changing trends in historical study in 1990s Taiwan.

## CONCLUSION

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson stressed the importance of print-capitalism and the creation of a unified linguistic identity to the development of “the subjective idea of the nation.”<sup>90</sup> Taiwan’s model of community making has followed a slightly different trajectory. Authors and filmmakers did, in fact, utilize the existence of a “Taiwanese” dialect to imply the island’s uniqueness and drew upon the use of Japanese to highlight the island’s non-Chinese history, but they almost always made use of Mandarin Chinese as well, and thus never established the “fixity of language” that Anderson viewed as central to the development of nationalism. Instead, the development of a “Taiwan consciousness” has been the result of the construction of particular narratives. From the 1970s onward, authors and filmmakers increasingly promoted their works as a reflection of the “everyday reality” of Taiwan—particularly for those marginalized by the KMT and the mainlander population. In doing so they undermined the Sinocentric narrative promoted by the KMT since Taiwan’s “retrocession” to China in 1945.

Such developments were not confined to film and literature. There were, to be sure, elements of *xiangtu* and a growing emphasis on “folk culture” in multiple realms of cultural production. Film and literature, however, were among the most visible mediums through which a Taiwan-centric narrative was composed. The consequence of these developments was the proliferation of a cultural nationalism through which many of the island’s inhabitants began to assert a sense of identity rooted in Taiwan’s own historical development and cultural tradition rather than as a mere part, or subculture, of the mainland Chinese tradition.

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<sup>90</sup> Anderson, 44.

The 1990s was a decade during which this “Taiwan consciousness” began to manifest and proliferate quite rapidly. With the end of martial law, a Taiwan-born President, the emergence of a legal opposition, and increasing political liberalization, Taiwanese identity discourse came to occupy a central position in the 1990s sociopolitical environment. However, a finite definition a “Taiwan” identity was still heavily debated throughout the 1990s and has yet to be solidified today. In 1997, for instance, fierce debates emerged over the production of *Renshi Taiwan* (Understanding Taiwan) textbooks that sought to institutionalize a Taiwan-centric perspective in education.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, Taiwanese identity became increasingly complex and pluralistic, or “hybridized,” from the 1990s onward, particularly as Taiwan has sought to improve its position in the international community and rejoin organizations like the United Nations.

Even within the island, the concept of what it means to be “Taiwanese” has been progressively broadened. If one visits the official Taiwan tourism website, for example, there is an increased emphasis on the diversity of Taiwan’s identity when compared to the aforementioned 1991 tourist pamphlet. “The blending of Hakka, Taiwanese, indigenous people, and mainland Chinese cultures,” the website states, “has produced a rich plethora of cultural and social color. Whether it is religion, architecture, language, living habits, or food, it’s just one big exciting melting pot!”<sup>92</sup> Likewise, sections on the website devoted to culture and heritage emphasize the multi-layered heritage of the island.

There has also been increasing interest with respect to Taiwan’s indigenous communities. Publications throughout the 1990s, for instance, began to highlight the island’s indigenous

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<sup>91</sup> Harrison, 195-197. For a detailed discussion of the debates, see Fu-chang Wang, “Why Bother about School Textbooks?: An Analysis of the Origin of the Disputes over *Renshi Taiwan* Textbooks in 1997,” in *Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan*, 55-102 (see note 80).

<sup>92</sup> Tourism Bureau, Republic of China (Taiwan), Official Taiwan Tourism Webpage, <http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/> (accessed May 30, 2010).

heritage, as many feared that modernization was prompting a degree of “cultural suicide.”<sup>93</sup> In short, Taiwan has embraced his history of “discontinuities” and the diversity of its historical experience as a fundamental component of its identity. This multi-layered “identity of diversity,” is effectively conveyed in Chen Kuo-fu’s 1998 film, *The Personals*, which, in following the main character on a series of blind dates, draws attention to complexity of individual experience in contemporary Taiwan.

This evolving sense of cultural and national identity, moreover, has, in accordance with Anderson’s thesis, been the result of a crossing of cultural artifacts and distinct historical forces. While it would be a gross oversimplification to say that Taiwan’s contemporary identity discourse originated in the 1970s, the 1970s do, nonetheless, mark a critical turning point in Taiwan as the decade’s events served as an impetus for a greater discussion of Taiwan’s identity. There was, on one hand, a number of political events that challenged the narrative propagated by the KMT. The ROC’s removal from the United Nations and the United States official recognition of the PRC, for example, threatened to undermine KMT hegemony and resulted in calls for reform that culminated in occasionally violent conflict with an unofficial government opposition group. Additionally, Taiwan’s dramatic economic development steadily transformed the lives of the island’s residents—both physically and culturally—and prompted fierce debates regarding the appropriate models for development.

Literature was infused with the conflicts and contests of the period, as a group of writers began to criticize Western economic and cultural imperialism, calling, instead, for a renewed commitment to the island’s own cultural tradition and the development of economic autonomy. In doing so, these *xiangtu* writers began to critique the shortcomings of Taiwanese society

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<sup>93</sup> “The Power of One,” editorial, *Free China Review*, June 1992. The June 1992 issue of *Free China Review* was devoted entirely to indigenous peoples.

through their focus on the “everyday realities” of Taiwan. Their narrowly framed critiques, however, implicitly undermined the KMT’s Sinocentric narrative by alluding to the existence of a distinct, albeit often idealized, Taiwanese identity.

The works of the 1970s *xiangtu* writers would profoundly impact the localism of the 1980s and many of the key filmmakers in Taiwan’s New Cinema movement. Drawing on similar themes of linguistic identity, economic hardship, the urban-rural divide, local tradition, historical experience, and “realism,” these filmmakers further contributed to a “Taiwan consciousness” by constructing a particular narrative of the Taiwan experience that envisioned the basis of the island’s identity as extending far beyond its connection to mainland China.

Although Taiwan’s identity discourse became increasingly complex from the 1990s onward—presenting a multi-layered vision of Taiwan that is not easy to conceptualize—the ideological underpinnings of that identity discourse were strongly connected to those articulated in the literature and film of the 1970s and 1980s, for it still sought a basis for identity in the island’s own unique historical trajectory and the “reality” of its local experience. Therefore, while distinctions can be drawn from decade to decade, these discourses had the consequence of contributing to a new “imagined community.”

Thus, Taiwan presents an interesting example of Anderson’s theory of nationalism. When the KMT arrived on Taiwan in the 1940s, they brought with them the idea that Taiwan existed as an inalienable part of the mainland Chinese tradition. Exiled from mainland China, the KMT sought to transplant Chinese culture to Taiwan and transform the island into a center of Chinese national identity. This was, in itself, a creation of an “imagined community.” Since 1970, however, political and cultural developments—of which film and literature were central components—effectively (re)imagined Taiwan and undermined in the hegemonic position of the

KMT by constructing a Taiwan-centric narrative. Of course, this process was not entirely unique to the post-1970 period—one might even argue that the island’s history of discontinuities was, itself, a periodic reconstruction of Taiwan as an “imagined community.” Where post-1970 Taiwan may be unique, however, is in the assertion of the island’s identity based upon the island as a self-contained geopolitical entity. Regardless, post-1970 Taiwan demonstrates the fluidity of the “imagined community” model, for it shows that nationalism is not a once and for all event. Rather, new historical forces can produce new “cultural artifacts” that merge with various “political and ideological constellations” and (re)imagine a sense of identity.

Taiwan began a process of (re)imagining in the 1970s that was driven, in part, by cultural developments in film and literature. In subsequent decades, that (re)imagining underwent slight tweaks and modifications as the social, political, and economic environment evolved, becoming increasingly complex by the 1990s. Whether or not the construction of a new “imagined community” based upon a “Taiwan consciousness”—or Taiwan-centric narrative— has been completed, remains to be seen.

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