

Ann Hui's Films under the Influence of Hou Hsiao-hsien

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INTRODUCTION

Hou-on-Hui Influence

The influence of directors on other directors has shaped film history in important ways. One of the most representative examples is Hollywood’s influence on French New Wave directors. For example, having learned from Hollywood films of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, cinephiles like François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Jacques Rivette were unsatisfied with simply putting their film knowledge into reviews. They sought to become auteurs like the filmmakers they admired, including Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock—the result was the important French New Wave movement. Likewise, any discussion of Woody Allen’s achievements is incomplete without mention of Federico Fellini’s influence on Allen—for instance, Allen’s *Stardust Memories* (1980) is widely recognized as “a remake” of Fellini’s *8 1/2*, while the newlyweds’ honeymoon in Rome in Allen’s *To Rome with Love* (2012) parallels elements in Fellini’s *The White Sheik* (1952; “Woody Allen and Roberto Benigni on Fellini”). This thesis examines the director-on-director influence between two internationally acclaimed film directors—Hong Kong’s Ann Hui¹ (许鞍华, in Chinese) and Taiwan’s Hou Hsiao-hsien² (侯孝贤). I examine Hou’s influence on Hui by comparing their films, and I assert that Hui borrows from Hou’s cinematic style—a style I call *neorealism in a Chinese mode*, which Hou developed as part of the Taiwanese New Wave movement in the 1980s. More specifically, I argue that identity negotiation in Hou’s films inspired Hui to explore Hong Kong’s cultural identity in her own films.

¹ Full name, Ann Hui On-wah

² Hou is his last name, in accordance with the Taiwanese style for writing names in English.

The strong ties between their films can be explained, in part, by the two directors' similar critical life experiences: Both were born in mainland China and immigrated elsewhere with family after the Second World War—Hui's family moved from Manchuria to Macau and then, later, to Hong Kong, while Hou's family settled in Taiwan. As well, each of their families felt an emotional bond to their respective homelands, which is aptly represented in both Hou's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985) and Hui's *Song of the Exile* (1990). Moreover, when Hui's Japanese mother's family forbade her from returning to Japan after she married a Chinese man, she was forced to live a diasporic life—Hui would later base *Song of the Exile* both on her mother and on her paternal Chinese family's diasporic experiences. In 1947, when Hou was four months old, Hou's family fled the Chinese Civil War and the place of Hou's birth—Mei County, Guangdong Province, China—for Taiwan. Although each filmmaker had elder family who dreamt of returning to their homeland, the younger Hui and Hou each saw their respective hostland as home. As a result, Hui's *Song of the Exile* and Hou's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* each explore differences in generational perceptions of homeland.

Hou's influence on Hui is extensive: In an interview on her thirty years' artistic work, Hui mentions that Taiwanese New Wave films, especially Hou's, have appealed to her ever since she watched Edward Yang's *That Day on the Beach* in 1983. More importantly, the kinship between Hui's and Hou's films manifests as a likeness of mood, narrative, and theme, which I delineate in my comparison of their works.

My thesis examines two characteristics of Hou's films that Hui's post-1990 films borrow from: 1) Hou's unique cinematic aesthetics, which emerged from his alignment of

Italian neorealism with traditional Chinese aesthetics, and 2) Hou's filmic representations of local geopolitics of cultural identity, especially identity confusion resultant from Taiwan's unique historico-cultural position as a postcolonial and diasporic land. I argue that Hou's influence on Hui's post-1990 work separates her later films from her earlier ones. In an interview with Lo Wai-luk, Hui agrees with Lo that the 1990s represent a different stage in her filmmaking career and says that she has since continued to learn from "Taiwan's new realism,"³ especially Hou's films (Kuang 178).⁴

To investigate how Hui learned from Hou after 1990, each chapter of this thesis compares a different set of two films, one by each filmmaker. Each of the three chapters addresses what Hui learned from Hou's films and what Hui's Hou-influenced, post-1990 films look like. In chapter one, I reveal strong ties between Hui's *Song of the Exile* and Hou's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. I argue that *Song of the Exile* marks a turning point in her career and that, since 1990, Hui has been learning from Hou's narrative style and themes. I point out that both films use voice-over narration to create a strong sense of nostalgia and that the Chinese diaspora is a thematic concern of each film. More specifically, each film takes the audience back to a past when its characters' respective diasporic experiences began. Yet, core to this return is that each film's newer generations have disconnected from these homelands and now consider their respective reconstituted homes their true home. In this way, these films provide a sense of nostalgia. In my analysis, I employ Khachig Tölölyan's, Hamid Naficy's, and Audrey Yue's theories of diasporic and transnational studies. As well, I

³ *Taiwanese new realism* is often used as a synonym for *Taiwanese New Cinema*, but the former emphasizes new realism as a fundamental characteristic of Taiwanese New Cinema. I define Taiwanese new realism in chapter two.

⁴ *Ann Hui on Ann Hui* (2010), edited by Baowei Kuang, is in Chinese. I translated all quotations from it from Simplified Chinese into English.

use Sarah Kozloff's film narrative theory to examine the two films' similar narrative techniques.

My second chapter builds on the previous by focusing on critical creative skills that Hui adapted from Hou and that she has been developing since, beginning with *Song of the Exile* and including her production of *The Way We Are* (2008). I compare Taiwanese new realism and Italian neorealism and point out that while the former embraces the latter's unique aesthetics of normalcy and everyday life, its incorporation of traditional Chinese artistic frameworks represents a neorealism in a Chinese mode. I then compare Hui's *The Way We Are* with Hou's *Dust in the Wind* (1986) to show both how Hui embraced Hou's synthesis of Italian neorealism and Classical Chinese aesthetics⁵ and how this enabled her to develop, in her post-1990 films, what Mirana Szeto calls her "poetics of insignificance" (51). I employ the traditional Chinese aesthetic concept *yi jing chuan qing*, or "expressing feelings with imagery,"⁶ to demonstrate how Hou and Hui similarly incorporate traditional Chinese artistic frameworks.

In my third chapter, I analyze Hui's most recent film, *Our Time Will Come* (2017), in light of Hou's *A City of Sadness* (1989). In doing so, I show how Hou's exploration of local geopolitics of cultural identity inspired Hui to investigate similar geopolitics of Hong Kong's cultural identity. Because Hui's *Our Time Will Come* represents local geopolitics of cultural identity that are also present in her *Song of the Exile*, this chapter's examination begets a review of the previous chapters. I show how Hou's influence shaped Hui's post-1990

⁵ *Classical* and *traditional* are interchangeable when in reference to ancient Chinese culture. I capitalize *Classical* to be consistent with China studies scholars.

⁶ All translations are mine, except as noted.

filmmaking trajectory, from *Song of the Exile* to *Our Time Will Come*, and I build on both Ackbar Abbas's discussion of Hong Kong's post-handover geopolitics and Peggy Chiao's discussion of Taiwanese nativism. I argue 1) that *A City of Sadness* is an exploration of Taiwanese identity as an always an in-process negotiation of colonialism, nationalism, and the lived realities of indigenous peoples (Abbas 11), and 2) that *Our Time Will Come* similarly manifests Hong Kong as a city without a fixed political and cultural identity.

Though Hou's impact on Hui is profound, this influence has gone mostly unnoticed by film scholars—no critical work has explicitly connected the two directors. To fill this gap, my thesis supports Hui's point that her post-1990 films represent a, then, new stage in her filmmaking career, and it clarifies that Taiwanese New Cinema, particularly Hou's films, played a crucial role in helping her reach this stage.

CHAPTER ONE

In a Search for Nostalgia: Chinese Diaspora in *Song of the Exile* and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*

Hui and Taiwanese New Cinema

Reflecting on her thirty years of cinematic creation, Hui once stated that her love for Taiwanese New Cinema emerged after she viewed Edward Yang's *That Day, on the Beach* for the first time in 1983:

In 1983, I began watching Taiwanese New Wave films. The first, I suppose, was Edward Yang's *That Day on the Beach*. My first reaction was Ah! We're done! I was not modest; rather, I sighed [with emotion] when I thought about how the characters seemed to be so close to real life How come they are confident enough to shoot something that looks so boring yet has certain tension? (Kuang 176–177)

Hui reveals her obsession with Yang's film and her surprise at how it was shot. She indicates that her enthusiasm for it motivated her to self-reflect on her filmmaking method, perhaps prompting her to consider filming like Hou—and certainly since the 1980s, Hui has been examining her filmmaking in relation to Taiwanese New Cinema.

Hui admits to loving Hou's 1985 film, *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*, immensely: She says, "Without any exaggeration, I can say I have studied this film for several decades. Every time director Hou Hsiao-hsien hears that I have said that I learn from him, he angrily asks, 'You are so old, how is it possible that you learn from me?' So, I dare not say it in front of him anymore, but indeed, he has influenced me deeply" ("Director Ann Hui's Favorite Ten

Films”⁷). Of course, Hou was not really “angry,” nor did he mean to attack Hui by calling her old—this is Hou’s form of humor, as is evident in his interviews and speeches. Here, “old” refers to seniority, so Hou meant Hui has more filmmaking experience than he does. In fact, the two directors know each other well (Fig. 1). Perhaps Hou thought Hui was simply being polite to him, but she truly admires him and loves his films a great deal.



Fig. 1. Hou Hsiao-hsien (second from the left) and Ann Hui (fourth from the right) attend the 50th Golden Horse Awards as the board of review. Source: <http://ent.ifeng.com>.

Hui notes especially appreciating *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*’s “storyless structure”: “The rise and fall of mood can evoke certain emotions in you, without the use of a story. If you feel that such films [as *That Day, on the Beach* and *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*] are appealing or that they resonate, it is because they are extraordinarily close to the audience, very straightforward, and there is no need for a story” (Kuang 177). Hui’s post-1990 films tend to pursue such storyless structures, a cinematic style Hui discerned in Taiwanese New Cinema. This 2009 interview reflects on Taiwanese New Cinema more than Hui’s previous interviews do—in those earlier interviews, she merely shares her initial feelings upon watching Yang’s

⁷ Original title: 导演许鞍华的十大电影

film in 1983. This suggests that her storyless structures might be the result of long-term study of Taiwanese New Cinema, especially of Hou's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. But *Song of the Exile* is merely the beginning of the trajectory Hui began by following Hou, for she would yet explore more in Hou's films.

In this chapter, I compare Hui's turning-point film *Song of the Exile* with *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* to discuss what Hui learned from Hou.

Song of the Exile and A Time to Live, A Time to Die

Director, author, and Taiwanese New Wave notable figure Wu Nien-jen had collaborated closely with Hou and Yang on screenplays before writing the screenplay for Hui's *Song of the Exile*. In her interview with Lo, Hui remarks candidly that she asked Wu to be her screenwriter because she was "very impressed by Hou Hsiao-hsien's films" (Kuang 46). Wu would go on to write the screenplays for Hui's next two films, *Zodiac Killers* (1991) and *My American Grandson* (1993), which she made immediately following *Song of the Exile*. Hui's collaboration with Wu is indicative of how she borrows from Hou's cinematic style, and it partly explains the kinship between *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *Song of the Exile*—importantly, though, Hui's basic story was not inspired by Hou's, as Hui already "had the plot in mind in 1983," two years before Hou's film would be released (Kuang 44).

Undoubtedly, Wu brought some of Hou's personality to Hui's *Song of the Exile*.

In this chapter, I analyze how *Song of the Exile* borrows from *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*'s narrative style (e.g., voice-over narration) and theme (e.g., the Chinese diaspora).

Both films center diasporic experiences, and both represent a visit, in a nostalgic mood, to a

past when their characters' diasporic experiences began. In representing Chinese diaspora, each film depicts its characters' strong awareness of how disconnected they have become to their homeland—i.e., mainland China, for both films, and Japan for *Song of the Exile*. I use Tölölyan's, Naficy's, and Yue's theories of diasporic and transnational studies to analyze how the two films similarly represent diasporic lived realities.

Song of the Exile is about a Japanese woman, Aiko, who marries into a Chinese family after falling in love with a Chinese nationalist soldier during World War II. After the war, the couple have a daughter in Manchuria⁸ and move to join his family in Macau, which is still a Portuguese colony. Aiko's diasporic foreign identity gives rise to a misunderstanding between Aiko and her husband's family. Her daughter, Hueyin, is more strongly bonded with the latter, so when Aiko and her husband move to Hong Kong, Hueyin refuses to leave her grandparents, staying with them in Macau until 1963, when her grandparents move to Guangdong Province and she rejoins her parents in Hong Kong. At this point, Hueyin still dislikes her mother and quarrels with her. Hueyin's father tells Hueyin that her mother is Japanese and that Aiko suffered after marrying him, both during her exile in China and, later, in Hong Kong. Accompanying her homesick mother to her mother's Japanese hometown, Hueyin comes to understand her mother's hardship and reconciles with her, though her mother now realizes Hong Kong has become her real home. By switching between the daughter's and mother's perspectives and by employing voice-over narration and flashbacks, the film indicates both Hueyin's memory of her mother and Hui's relationship with her own mother.

⁸ China's three northeastern provinces

A Time to Live, A Time to Die follows a Chinese immigrant family in Taiwan from the late 1940s to the early 1960s and is, like *Song of the Exile*, adapted from the director's life. After the Second World War, the film's family immigrates from China's Guangdong Province to Taiwan in pursuit of better living conditions (e.g., tap water). Meanwhile, political division between mainland China and Taiwan created by the Chinese Civil War prevents the family from returning. The film can be divided into three parts, each emphasizing three deaths in the family—the father, the mother, and the grandmother. The film follows main character Ah Hao from adolescence to adulthood and through his family's changes. The film's Chinese title (童年往事, or *Tong Nian Wang Shi*), which translates to “childhood memories,” further emphasizes the film's nostalgic representation of its protagonist's past, much like *Song of the Exile*'s title does. And like in *Song of the Exile*, the family's displacement is a key concern of this film.

“Film is a Kind of Nostalgia”: Mood and Narrative

Hou and Hui each emphasizes nostalgia. In fact, Hou often says “Film is a kind of nostalgia” (Jiang 59), which Hui would perhaps not deny.⁹ Hou expands on this in an interview: “There are so many precious moments, yet fragmented, hard to be named or classified—they are meaningless. However, they linger in my mind. Now I am almost sixty years old, so these things have been there for so long that they have become what I owe, and they must be paid back. That is why I must make them visual. They are, as I usually call, the best bits of the past” (Jiang 59). As semi-autobiographical films, *Song of the Exile* and *A Time*

⁹ Quoted from Baolong Jiang's interview with Hou Hsiao-Hsien, “Interviewing Hou Hsiao-Hsien: Film is a Kind of Nostalgia” (“专访侯孝贤：电影是一种乡愁”), p. 59.

to Live, A Time to Die each revolve around their director's memories—as Hou would say, “fragmented” “precious moments” of the past. Indeed, *Song of the Exile* recollects both its director's and its main character's pasts, and both films convey slow nostalgia via voice-over narration and flashbacks, which engage the audience in the film's emotional flow. *Song of the Exile* uses Hueyin's first-person voice-overs and flashbacks to unfold her psychological changes, which are associated with both her and her mother's different but related diasporic experiences. This narrative style represents the spiritual journey Hueyin undergoes as she recollects her past. Likewise, Hou uses first-person voice-overs in his *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, including at the film's beginning and ending, in his own voice, to underline his film's nostalgia.

A Time to Live, A Time to Die and *Song of the Exile* each employ voice-over narration to convey nostalgia. Kozloff defines voice-over narration as “oral statements, conveying any portion of a narrative, spoken by an unseen speaker situated in a space and time other than that simultaneously being presented by the images on the screen” (5). She adds that while “there are different types of voice-over narrators,” the “major division exists between ‘third-person,’ or ‘authorial,’ narrators and ‘first-person,’ or ‘character,’ narrators” (6). Kozloff points out that first-person voice-over narration can create many aesthetic effects, including “‘naturalizing’ the source of the narrative,” “increasing [the viewer's] identification with the characters,” “prompting nostalgia,” and “stressing the individuality and subjectivity of perception and storytelling” (41). Put simply, first-person voice-over narration can enable the viewer to share characters' moods. Hueyin's voice-overs in *Song of the Exile* are first-person narration, as are Ah Hao's in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. Hueyin's do not have a specific

addressee—she addresses them to the audience, thereby involving the audience both in her psychic realm and in the development of her emotions and consciousness. Aiko also provides a voice-over—when she tells Hueyin how she met her father in Manchuria—but hers is directed at Hueyin.

There are at least two types of narrative voice-overs in *Song of the Exile*. The basic type is without a flashback and is included twice—at the film’s beginning and at its ending, thus providing a supporting frame indicating that the whole story is of the narrator’s memory. Hueyin’s film-opening voice-over recounts her postgraduate life: “In the summer of 1973, I finished my studies in England and obtained my master’s degree. For me, life had just begun. I was happy at the time. The Vietnamese War and the Middle East War were just TV news footage, very distant from my real life. That year, I was twenty-five years old.” Her narration implies that the film that is about to follow will recollect her experiences after age twenty-five. Hueyin’s last voice-over indicates that the film is ending and notes that she and her mother have left Japan and have begun living with each other in Hong Kong.

The second type of voice-over includes a flashback and sequences the character’s experiences and memories. Commenting on Hui’s cinematic narrative technique, Rey Chow notes that “As Hueyin stands by the window,” after quarreling with her mother, “we hear her voice-over— ‘In my memory, mother wasn’t like that . . . She used to be a silent and reserved woman’—and we are then shown the flashback to the Macao period” (93). Chow writes that in such a scene “a character’s voice serves as the narrative consciousness guiding us back to the past, and the flashback in the form of images becomes subordinated to the voice” (93). Chow, here, is in keeping with Kozloff’s observation on the voice-over—

flashback relationship: they “fit together like hand in glove” (54). Kozloff argues that a voice-over–flashback can “move us into the past ‘when things were different’” and “create a contrast to the present” wherein “the story’s significance is only clear in relation to the discourse-now” (54). It is through such a voice-over–flashback in *Song of the Exile* that the film’s audience can understand Hueyin’s relationship with her mother.

Song of the Exile includes three voice-over–flashbacks: the first two are Hueyin’s and the last is Aiko’s. They represent, by contrast, a gradual transformation of these two characters’ feelings for each other and of Hueyin’s perspective of her mother. As Hueyin stands by the window, her first voice-over says, “my mother used to be a silent and reserved woman.” The film then flashes back to the family’s Macao period to portray Aiko as a distant, mysterious mother who is strange to everyone, including to her daughter, who does not yet understand Aiko. In this flashback, Aiko seems to the audience to be an irresponsible mother. The audience, experiencing Hueyin’s mood, is more likely to identify with young Hueyin and her grandparents and to, therefore, approve of their exclusion of Aiko.

The second voice-over–flashback occurs when Hueyin rejoins her parents in Hong Kong after her grandparents move to Guangdong Province. Over a flashback of the boat en route to Hong Kong comes Hueyin’s voice: “In 1963, I felt abandoned for the first time. Grandpa’s hope and love for China never faded, so in that summer, he and grandma moved back to Guangzhou and joined an uncle there—in order to serve his so-called beloved country and people.” The voice-over conveys both Hueyin’s disappointment with her grandfather’s decision and her depression for her displacement following her grandparents’ migration to China. The flashback shows Hueyin misrecognizing an elderly man as her

grandfather—the man is picking up a lotus root in a Hong Kong market stall much like she once saw her grandfather picking up a papaya in a Macao market stall. The scene explicitly manifests Hueyin's nostalgia and homesickness. This flashback, though, follows immediately from another, one belonging to Aiko. The previous flashback is without a voice-over and centers on Aiko's Macao period and on her diasporic experience in a family with a different cultural background than her own. A camera cut creates the two flashbacks' juxtaposition: it cuts from Aiko and her husband on the boat—leaving for Hong Kong and gazing into the distance—to Hueyin looking down at the sea on a different boat. The edit creates the illusion that the two characters are on the same boat at the same time, implying their common experience of involuntary displacement (Figs. 2 and 3). These juxtaposed flashbacks enable the audience to compare the two characters' diasporic experiences and to better identify with Aiko via an improved understanding of her earlier behavior. Then the scene cuts to the film's present: Hueyin looks down at her mother from the window. They have quarreled, and Aiko has telephoned her brother in Japan and decided to return there (Fig. 4). Hueyin's flashback means she is trying to understand Aiko, or at least Aiko's homesickness, by placing herself in Aiko's place. When Aiko comes home from the telephone station, Hueyin tells Aiko that she, Hueyin, will go with her, subtly revealing her attempt at understanding her mother's hard situation. This will lead a gradual transformation of her attitude toward her mother.



Fig. 2. Hueyin's parents on the boat leaving for Hong Kong.



Fig. 3. Hueyin gazing down at the sea from the boat.



Fig. 4. Hueyin looking down at her mother from the window.

By living with her mother's family in Japan, Hueyin, for the first time, experiences what her mother experienced as a stranger in Macau and now fully understands her mother's difficult past, completely identifying with her mother at this time. By way of a final voice-over-flashback, the film reveals the two characters' reconciliation. This voice-over-flashback is unlike the earlier ones, though: it is Aiko's and has an addressee—Hueyin. The shot's perspective switches from Hueyin to her mother, and as the addressee of her mother's voice-over, Hueyin enters her mother's psychic realm for the first time. Near the film's end, Hueyin stares at her mother, who is leaving their Japanese ancestor's tomb before departing for Hong Kong (Fig. 5). Hueyin's sentimental voice-over says, "When I see mother's leaving figure fading away, I think I probably understand her emotion now. Have not I also abandoned something so desperately like her for some time? But then, I was only fifteen, mother is nearly fifty now." This voice-over demonstrates Hueyin's great empathy and concern for her mother.



Fig. 5. Aiko's leaving figure from Hueyin's perspective.

Hou's use of voice-over narration is one of his films' most distinctive characteristics. Voice-over narration plays an important role in creating atmosphere and enhancing theme in

his 1980s and 1990s films—e.g., *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, *Daughter of the Nile* (1987), *The Puppet Master* (1994), and *Good Men, Good Women* (1995). For instance, the voice-overs in *Daughter of the Nile* and *Good Men, Good Women* evoke the restlessness of life in urban Taiwan. Jianye Huang, commenting on *Good Men, Good Women*, says, “The political idealism of good men and good women of the 1950s could not turn the wheel of the history; yet, the good men and good women of the 1990s have already sunk into the nihilism of materialism” (45).¹⁰ If materialism is central to Hou’s *Good Men, Good Women*, then the voice-overs of protagonist Liang Ching, which convey isolation, desire, and helplessness, effectively fit such representational purposes. The voice-overs in Hou’s own voice at the beginning and ending of *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, suggest that the whole film is a sequence of Hou’s own memories of his family. I-Fen Wu outlines that this film represents a “nostalgic preservation of” Hou’s “childhood and adolescence” (46). The film’s opening voice-over—“This film is some memories of my youth, particularly the impressions of my father”—is spoken over a sequence of long-take empty shots, including a close-up of Chinese characters on the door of the characters’ house, a Japanese-style tatami room, and an empty chair in the father’s room. These empty shots evoke a sense of period and, along with Hou’s voice-over, create a poetic, nostalgic atmosphere.

The two films show nostalgia in other ways: In Hou’s movie, Ah Hao’s grandmother harbors a constant desire to return to her hometown in mainland China. She often packs her clothing and leaves home yet cannot find the bridge she remembers (Fig. 6). Similarly, the grandfather in *Song of the Exile*, while living in Macau, repeatedly states he will return to

¹⁰ Quoted from Bin Li’s essay “*Good Men, Good Women*: Briefly Reading Hsiao-Hsien Hou” (“《好男好女》“素读”侯孝贤”).

mainland China—he even advises his granddaughter not to give up on China when she visits him during the 1960s Cultural Revolution. This shared motif of returning, as represented by the two films’ two older characters, could reflect an intentional reference by Hui to Hou’s film: for though the grandfather in *Song of the Exile* eventually returns to mainland China while the grandmother in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* does not, the two films’ similar nostalgia, pace, and sentiment represent a degree of kinship.



Fig. 6. Grandma and Ah Hao looking for the road back to the mainland.

Diaspora, Exile, and the Motif of Returning

Diaspora originally referred to the involuntary, historical dispersion of the Jewish community, but as globalization increasingly disperses marginalized groups, this concept, as William Safran points out, “has come to be used more and more loosely as an inclusive term for [ethnic, religious, and racial minorities] and other kinds of minorities who can trace their origins to a country or region other than that in which they reside” (255). Tölölyan’s essay, from the first volume of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, reflects this shift in diaspora studies: “to reaffirm that diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (5). Both *Song of the Exile* and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* are in

step with Safran and Tölölyan, here—by focusing on immigrant families, they each represent such transnational moments and diasporic experiences.

In comparing *Song of the Exile*'s English and Chinese titles, though, I contend that the film's English title might lead audiences to misrecognize its characters' diasporic experiences. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s (*OED*) definitions of *diaspora* and *exile* suggest that these terms sometimes intertwine in general meaning but differ in emphasis. Like Safran's definition, the *OED*'s third sense of *diaspora* reads, "The state or fact of having been dispersed from one's homeland or point of origin" (*OED*). Its primary definition for *exile* is the "prolonged absence from one's native country or a place regarded as home, endured by force of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for some purpose" (*OED*). According to the *OED*, both concepts can describe a group, or members of that group, who are either voluntarily or involuntarily dispersed from their homeland. *Exile*, though, emphasizes a "prolonged" or perpetual "absence from" one's place of origin, while *diaspora* may not have such emphasis. While *Song of the Exile*'s English title can indicate Aiko's life in Macau and Hong Kong as a Japanese expatriate, Aiko returns to her Japanese home and could have gone back any time she wished—it isn't that she longs to return home but cannot; rather, she does not want to commit to returning.

In contrast, diaspora studies teach that *rerooting*, or reconstituting a home, in a hostland is a possible choice for diasporic people. John Durham Peters points out, in his article "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon," that "Exile locates the home in a homeland that is distant and for the time being unapproachable. Home becomes an impossible object, always receding with the horizon" (31). In contrast,

“diasporic cultural identity” exists as “a product of . . . mixing” with the hostland culture (Peters 38). Unlike an exile identity, a diasporic identity is not based on diasporic origins but on how the hostland is experienced. Accordingly, Aiko is an example of diaspora, not exile: At the film’s end, Aiko tells Hueyin that Hong Kong is more of a home to her than Japan is; as well, Aiko practices “mixing” with her hostland’s culture by indulging in Mahjong (38).

The film’s Chinese title, 客途秋恨 (*ke tu qiu hen*), which translates to “Guest [en] Route Autumn Regret” (Yue 7), is taken from premodern Chinese writing and a meaning closer to diaspora than exile.¹¹ Premodern Chinese scholars usually use *ke tu*, which means “guest en route,” to describe their journey of traveling somewhere distant from home, and *qiu hen*, meaning “autumn regret,” to express homesickness. But in premodern China, if one’s exile was not punishment for a crime and if they were not forbidden to return home by the government, then home was not unapproachable. Moreover, these travelers could return home since they were on premodern, single, and borderless Chinese territory. Yet further, such guests, or exiles, could become hosts, as Song dynasty poet Sushi did,¹² if they rerooted in a new place. Additionally, *Song of the Exile*’s Chinese title indicates the film’s multiple diasporic subjects: Aiko, the Japanese “guest” crosses multiple Chinese territories; Hueyin’s family, who crosses to Macau and to Hong Kong from their mainland origin; and Hueyin, who lives across nations. For these reasons, I treat *Song of the Exile* as a text on diaspora.

According to Tölölyan, a key diaspora studies issue is that one “must pursue, in texts literary and visual, canonical and vernacular, [and] in all cultural productions and throughout

¹¹ This title is originally the title of a Cantonese opera created in Qing dynasty, which is focused on the hard life of a prostitute who is away from her home.

¹² Su was exiled by the government multiple times, but he adapted to his new surroundings well by creating special cuisines with local food ingredients.

history, the traces of struggles over and contradictions within ideas and practices of collective identity, of homeland and nation” (3). Tölölyan’s critical approach serves as a methodological complementation to contemporary diaspora studies. As well, Yue argues that many diaspora studies focus “more on the conditions of displacement (and resettlement) in the hostland” (8) and on diasporic communities’ otherhood in geographically and culturally strange places. Tölölyan posits, though, that minorities inevitably suffer both from exclusion in the hostland and from the peculiar predicament wherein they are, on one hand, psychologically bound to the home they imagine and, on the other, physically and socially estranged from their homeland. Tölölyan suggests that what follows are contradictions within the diaspora between discourses of returning to the homeland and of reconstituting a home in the hostland. These contradictions are explicit in *Song of the Exile* and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. Both films focus more on the immigrant’s or the immigrant family’s relationship with homeland than on those characters’ struggles and exclusion from hostland society.

Neither *Song of the Exile* nor *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* center on “conditions of displacement”; rather they focus on how the diaspora sees homeland (Yue 8). Politically, Ah Hao’s family, in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, is more privileged than the native Taiwanese people because the “Chinese-speaking refugees newly-arrived . . . [have grown] to be the dominant group in post-war Taiwan” under the rule of “the Chinese Nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek” (Wu 45). Hueyin’s experiences in the first sequences of *Song of the Exile* suggest that absorption into the local community is not difficult for her: In the film’s opening sequence, Hueyin forgoes the precious interview opportunity that the BBC offers her and instead chooses to return to Hong Kong to celebrate her sister’s wedding, thus placing a

greater value on her family than on her beloved job. But when she reunites with her family and feels the gap between her mother's old-fashioned Chinese values (e.g., Aiko forcing Hueyin to wear a full red dress to her sister's wedding) and Hueyin's Western way of thinking, Hueyin says, "Maybe one day I will marry a foreigner and never come back again." This suggests that she has better adapted to a place that was strange to her than reintegrated with the family she used to live with. Of course, misunderstandings still exist in the hostland: when Hueyin gifts her necklace to her white friend, her friend regards the Chinese-style necklace as carrying Oriental mystery. Her friend seems to like the necklace but demonstrates a lack of understanding of Chinese culture. Yet, if the necklace symbolizes Hueyin's bond with her family, then it also symbolizes the bond between Hueyin and her white friend, one that suggests the friendship or love between them transcends their cultural barriers. Likewise, for Aiko, it is perhaps her love for her Chinese husband that enables her to endure and overcome the difficulty of living in a strange society.

Song of the Exile includes two homelands, China and Japan, and three hostlands—Macau, Hong Kong, and England. Hueyin moves to live with her parents in Hong Kong, a place that is strange to her, from her Macau homeland, where she once lived with her grandparents. But when she studies in England, Hong Kong becomes her home, where her mother and sister are based—the hostland Hueyin once lived in has become her homeland. This suggests that home is unfixed and can be anywhere diasporic people feel bonded to, which is to say that for diasporic people homeland is a fluid and changeable spatial and spiritual complexity.

Yet, because diasporas are shaped by the land they have become attached to, returning

can be complicated. Hueyin's relationship with her homeland aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's theory on land and borders, specifically their concepts of *territorialization* and *deterritorialization*. Border crossing is key to Deleuze and Guattari, here, and defines contemporary exile and diaspora. In his examination of "accented films"—or in other words, "the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make"—Naficy points out that diasporic journeys "take a number of forms" and are "deterritorializing and reterritorializing" (222). He writes that diasporas "cross many borders—not only physical and geographic but also psychological, metaphorical, social, and cultural borders" (222). Naficy describes diasporas, more or less, congruently with Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of flight" and suggests that their movement stratifies and dismantles all kinds of "signifying totality" or "determination[s] attributable to a subject" (3–4). In this sense, boundaries are constructed; and whether physical or spiritual, diasporic inward and outward journeys can break them.

Moreover, according to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomes, land has many more complicated division lines than stable forms of borders. In their collaborative work, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), they write, "Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions" (21). The Earth, Deleuze and Guattari point out, is a rhizome, which they describe as "the Deterritorialized, the Glacial, the giant Molecule" and "a body without organs" (40). Keith Woodward and John Paul Jones III, in their essay on political borders, explain that "deterritorialization and heterogenesis . . . are processes that bring forth socio-spatial complexity that was disguised by the functional and categorical divisions of

institutionalization” (240). For Deleuze, Guattari, Woodward, and Jones, returning is both a cultural construction and a problematic term that frames land–diaspora relationships as fixed. Hueyin’s experiences in *Song of the Exile* affirm Deleuze, Guattari, and Naficy and suggest that home is both a fluid space and an imagined complexity.

Deleuze and Guattari’s elaboration of land as fluid space explains why Hong Kong becomes the final destination of Hueyin’s and Aiko’s respective exiles, a floating land where inhabitants lack a fixed identity. Abbas points out that Hong Kong is a diasporic space: much of its population is “made up of refugees or expatriates,” and the city has retained, since colonial time, a “port mentality” wherein “everything is provisional, ad hoc” and “everything floats—currencies, values, human relations” (4). Moreover, Abbas argues that its evolution in the 1980s into a cosmopolitan city reinforces such a “‘floating’ identity” (4): as a free-market port and a colonial industrial city, Hong Kong seized upon opportunities afforded to it by increased globalization and by China’s economic reformation in the 1970s and 1980s; in doing so, it became a global city. Li Si-ming, in an essay on Hong Kong’s economic transition since the 1970s, argues that the most important factors for Hong Kong’s cultural transformation were a series of economic constructions, including “the development of local financial and service business,” the British colonial government’s investment in infrastructural development (e.g., “the underground traffic system”), and its “industrial transfer to the near inland” (54–56). Abbas interprets this transformation as “a movement from ‘organised capitalism’ to what [Scott Lash and John Urry] call ‘disorgani[zed] capital,’” or “a movement toward the space of flows of the ‘informational city’” (2). Hong Kong’s post-1980 social landscape welcomed globalism, a “new form” of capitalism marked by

“fluidity,” “flexibility,” and decentralization (Abbas 3). Abbas indicates that Hong Kong’s economy benefited greatly from such developments, which enabled the city to change “from a trading post in the nineteenth century to its present position as a premier financial center of Southeast Asia, from a colonial city to a global city” (3). Allen Chun argues that in this evolution, the colonial government portrayed itself “as a modern welfare state,” while effacing its “colonial self” (106). Chun goes on to point out that the cultural consequence of Hong Kong’s economic constructions is a “cosmopolitan syncretism” that “sublimate[s] the politics of ethnic difference” and “disrupt[s] fixed norms of identity” (106). By presenting Hong Kong as both a floating space and Hueyin’s and Aiko’s foothold after their respective life-journeys of exile, the film suggests Hueyin and her mother will reconstruct a new home in a land that is always changing.

Unlike for the younger Hueyin and Ah Hao, returning is still vitally important for the elderly generations in *Song of the Exile* and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. For instance, Aiko longs to return to Japan, even after living in Hong Kong for decades; Hueyin, though, only moves to Japan when compelled to do so, after her grandfather returns to mainland China following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Ah Hao’s parents, in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, likewise, long to return to the mainland: in writing to Ah Hao’s mother, Ah Hao’s father says that since he was not planning to stay in Taiwan long, he did not buy her a sewing machine and that he only used bamboo furniture. In contrast, the younger Hueyin and Ah Hao do not seem interested in the homelands their elders are tied to. Wu argues that “While Ah-Ha[o]’s parents sob in regret at leaving [Ah Hao’s adopted brother] alone in Guangdong after reading the letter [from the mainland], Ah-Ha[o]’s younger brothers

seem to be more excited about removing the foreign stamps to put in their album, rather than paying attention to hear from whom they have never met” (47). The younger generations are uninterested in events related to the mainland. Wu also points out that “Ah [Hao]’s parents are always framed inside the Japanese style house” and that the fence “is often shot with a closed entrance door” symbolizing “a boundary that divides inside from outside, the present and the past, reality and the imaginary, separating Ah [Hao]’s parents and grandmother from the shift in historical and cultural patterns” (48; Fig. 7). Likewise, Aiko, during her Macau period, is often framed by her room (Fig. 8). Wu argues that the discontinuity between parents and children “forms an unbridgeable chasm . . . in the realm of national history” (47). For instance, in *Song of the Exile*, Hueyin’s experiences do not resonate with her mother’s memories of Japan, and she does not reciprocate her grandfather’s hope for China.



Fig. 7. Ah Hao climbs over the fence to enter the house.



Fig. 8. Aiko in her room.

The elderly generation’s strong desire for return stems from three possible facts, which are, each, respectively, historical, psychological, or cultural in nature: they think returning is *historically* possible for them; they have *psychologically* “imagined” the homeland into “a nostalgically reconstructed past or a lost Eden”; and they believe that returning *culturally* preserves family kinship (Naficy 153). Most of the two films’ elders insist that they will return to their homeland sooner or later—Hueyin’s grandparents temporarily move to Macau to escape both the Chinese Civil War, Ah Hao’s family moves to Taiwan for better living conditions but do not plan to live there long, and Ah Hao’s grandmother frequently leaves the house to return to the mainland because she believes there is a way back. Their desire for returning is made possible because they believe doing so is possible.

Because they have a utopian vision of their respective homelands, returning is vitally important to both Hueyin’s grandfather and Ah Hao’s grandmother. The film’s flashback to Hueyin’s Macau period includes a scene of Hueyin’s grandfather listening to Hueyin chant the Tang dynasty poem “The Blackgown Alley” by famous poet Liu Yuxi (Fig. 9):

Now by the Redsparrow Bridge wild grasses are growing,
 And on the Blackgown Alley the evening sun is glowing,
 And the swallows which once graced the Wang and Hsien Halls,
 Now feed in common people's home without their knowing.¹³ (Ling 245)

This nostalgic poem reminisces about Blackgown Alley at its peak former prosperity, when inhabited by aristocrats like the Wang and Hsien families, which is unlike its present desolation. Because the sharp contrast between Blackgown Alley's past and present is historically and explicitly manifested in China, the poem underlines the grandfather's nostalgia for the lively, wealthy homeland of his past, even though that homeland is now ruined by wars, poverty, and desolation. The homeland he longs to return to is an imagined "lost Eden," not his geographic native land (Naficy 153). He persists in returning and longs to devote himself to China's reconstruction, perhaps because of his belief that "the sleeping dragon" will awaken and that China will, then, again flourish. Ah Hao's grandmother, in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, also idealizes her homeland. His voice-over at the film's beginning mentions that his grandmother is always "wrapping the silver papers to be used in the nether world after death." This afterlife in traditional Chinese culture also means a place of reuniting with ancestors, but such a reunion is possible only if one's shrine is set with the shrine of the ancestors—she must return to her homeland to meet her ancestors. Thus, when Ah Hao asks his grandmother why they will go back to the mainland, she answers, "Stupid! Grandma will take you to the ancestral shrine to pay homage to our ancestors!"

Ah Hao's grandmother's ancestor worship emphasizes Chinese family kinship, and in

¹³ Lin Yutang's translation; see Lin Yutang's book, *My Country and My People*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000.

Song of the Exile, Hueyin’s grandfather teaches Hueyin not to “wang ben,” or forget her origins. Both film’s elders are committed to preserving Chinese family kinship, yet, as mentioned, Hueyin’s grandfather’s hope for China does not resonate with Hueyin, and Ah Hao shows no interest in life in mainland China. As well, the father figure of each film is weak, dies young, and is mostly absent. In this way, neither film invests positively in Chinese patriarchal kinship; instead, they focus on the reconstitution of their characters’ identities.



Fig. 9. Hueyin chanting the poem.

Because the bridge that Ah Hao’s grandmother seeks never existed in Taiwan and since Hueyin’s grandfather’s homeland is less a true home than a land and culture in tatters under China’s Cultural Revolution, returning in these films is merely an empty signifier, or an irony. Dai argues that “the prominent presence of the grandparents in the domestic scenes of [Hou’s] films represents fragments of history, not bridges between memory and history” (244). Dai’s observation also applies to Hui’s film. Returning, here, is congruent with what Yue calls “a multiplicity of diasporic identities” (Yue 15). Yue considers “the activities of modern diasporas” to be “part of” a “trans-state ethnic network” and argues that a new field

of diaspora studies, derived from a perspective that highlights “the new habitus of cultural negotiation forged by migrant groups in host communities . . . shows how belonging and identities are expressed through the preservation, refashion[ing,] and adaptation of home cultures to suit host countries” (Yue 15). Yue goes on: “Underpinning this field is a weak or non-desire to return to the homeland” (Yue 15). In contrast to their elders, neither Ah Hao nor Hueyin seem bonded to their respective homelands in mainland China; rather, they are strongly aware of their reconstituted new home and of their rerooting in their respective host communities.

By comparing *Song of the Exile* and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, this chapter highlighted the two films’ similar plots, moods, narrative techniques, and thematic concerns. Both films depict a revisiting of the past, in a nostalgic mood, wherein the characters’ respective diasporic lives began. As well, characters from these films also possess a strong awareness of their disconnection to their homeland and of their connection to their reconstituted true home. These essential similarities suggest Hui had been learning from Taiwanese New Cinema since 1990. This shift, beginning with *Song of the Exile*, marks the beginning of her journey of borrowing from Hou’s films.

CHAPTER TWO

Dust in the Wind and The Way We Are: Italian Neorealism, Taiwanese New Cinema, and Ann Hui's "Poetics of Insignificance"

In an interview, Lo Wai-luk told Ann Hui that he views her filmmaking career as having three stages: “From your debut to the 1990s might be one phase. Then, the 1990s to *July Rhapsody* might be the second. After *July Rhapsody* is the third period, where you can play by heart” (Kuang 176).¹⁴ Hui agrees that the 1990s represent a separate stage of her career but disagrees that she has reached a third stage, insisting instead that she is still in the “middle stage” and still continuing to learn from “Taiwan’s new realism” (Kuang 178).

In this chapter, taking my cue from Hui, I examine how Hui has learned from Taiwanese New Cinema since the 1990s, including Taiwanese new realism’s and Hou’s shared cinematic aesthetics; Hui’s comments on Hou’s films and how they help contextualize Taiwanese new realism; and Hou’s influence on Hui’s films. I compare Taiwanese new realism with Italian neorealism and argue that the former represents a Chinese mode of neorealism in that it embraces the latter’s unique aesthetics of both normalcy and everyday life while incorporating traditional Chinese artistic frameworks. Specifically, I argue that Hou applies the concept of *yi jing chuan qing* (以景传情), which translates literally to “express the feelings with imageries,” to represent everyday life in his films, and that this same synthesis of Italian neorealism and Classical Chinese aesthetics is also evident in Hui’s post-1990 films.

Hou’s influence on Hui enabled her to develop what Szeto calls her “poetics of

¹⁴ This is a Chinese expression that implies Hui makes her films by following her own will.

insignificance” (51). I make this argument by comparing Hui’s *The Way We Are* with Hou’s *Dust in the Wind*. Szeto explains Hui’s “poetics of insignificance” as follows:

There is no dramatic confrontation, no tear-jerking agony, no gripping violence, no event. The film simply chronicles with tranquil regularity work and play, household chores and family duties, birthdays, funerals, and festival rituals. Surprisingly, the young audience in the cinema, so used to action and spectacle, do not find film boring. (Szeto 63)

This chapter builds on Szeto’s observations of the insignificant and of everyday life in Hui’s post-1990 films by demonstrating that Hui’s “poetics of insignificance” constitute a form of Italian neorealism that inherits Chinese aesthetics from Hou’s works. I explain the Chinese aesthetics of *yi jing chuan qing* and then investigate how Taiwanese new realism combines Italian neorealism and some Chinese aesthetics. To do this, I trace the transnational genealogy of realism and its evolution in the Taiwanese film industry. Finally, I explore how Hui has followed Hou’s lead in that her post-1990 films exhibit characteristics of Taiwanese New Cinema.

Yi Jing Chuan Qing

The first writings on *yi jing chuan qing* come from Zhang Yan’s *Ci Yuan*,¹⁵ written in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. That text explains *yi jing chuan qing* as the “blending of emotion and imagery.” Zhang emphasizes that imagery is central to a poet’s ability to express themselves and offers Tang poet Wang Wei’s poem “Wei Cheng Qu” as an example:

¹⁵ The title translates to *Etymology*.

Light rain is on the light dust,
 The willows of the inn-yard
 Will be going greener and greener,
 But you, Sir, had better take wine 'ere your departure,
 For you will have no friends about you
 When you come to the gates of Go. (“Four Poems of Departure”)¹⁶

Wang Wei’s rain and dust imagery conveys both a gloomy mood and the poet’s sorrow for his friend’s departure. Wang Wei also engages in wordplay here: *liu*, the Chinese word for *willow*, has the same pronunciation as the word for *stay*. Further, the gates of Go, located in Dunhuang, Gan Su Province, evoke deserts and windy, snowy wastelands.

Chinese imagery poems influenced the Anglo-American Imagist poetry movement, which “drew its literary source from classical Chinese poetics” (Liu 37). Western poets first encountered Classical Chinese poetry as “translations and imitations of Chinese poetry” in *Poetry* magazine during the 1910s and 1920s (Liu 38). Harriet Monroe, an important Imagist, began editing *Poetry* magazine after her visit to China and later appointed Ezra Pound as the magazine’s “overseas editor,” a position he used to introduce many Classical Chinese poems to Western readers (Liu 38). Other Imagist poets who showed interest in Classical Chinese poetry include Amy Lowell, Eunice Tietjens, and John Gould Fletcher.

Early modern Chinese theorist Guowei Wang used the term *jing* (境), which translates literally to “state,” to describe the relationship in Chinese poetics between *qing* (情), or “emotion,” and *jing* (景), which means “imagery.” He identified two states in traditional

¹⁶ The poem I quote here is probably translated by Ezra Pound; see below.

Chinese poetry: “the state with the presence of the subject” *you wo zhi jing* (有我之境) and “the state without the presence of the subject” *wu wo zhi jing* (无我之境; Wang 2). The former “observes the object through the subject’s perspective; therefore, the subject’s emotions are inscribed on the object,” while the latter “observes the object through the object’s perspective, hence, there is no subject, neither the object” (Wang 2). Yangxiu Ou’s “My tearful eyes ask flowers, but they fail to bring an answer, I see red blooms over the swing”¹⁷ demonstrates the notion of the state-with-the-presence-of-the-subject because this line has a specific subject in it. On the other hand, Haowen Yuan’s “Cold waves faintly rising up, white birds leisurely flying down” demonstrates the state-without-the-presence-of-the-subject (Wang 2).¹⁸

For Wang, the state-without-the-presence-of-the-subject does not necessarily foreclose the expression of emotion but indicates one can escape such a sentimental state to attain peace. In this way, the emotionless state is an evolved form of emotion. The state-without-the-presence-of-the-subject is much like object-oriented ontology, as described by new materialist theorists like Jane Bennett, Graham Harman, and Timothy Morton. Object-oriented ontology posits that objects are “mutually autonomous” and that one must withdraw from direct human–object relations to fully recognize reality (Harman 12). Harman suggests that object-oriented ontology’s “commitment to the mutual darkness of objects is what enables it to resist some of the fashionable holistic philosophies of our time, which hold that everything is defined purely by its relations and that the world is nothing but the total system

¹⁷ The original lines are “泪眼问花花不语，乱红飞过秋千去。” This passage is quoted from Yangxiu Ou’s “Die Lian Hua.” https://www.qeto.com/mip/article_25955.

¹⁸ The original lines are “寒波淡淡起，白鸟悠悠下。” This passage is quoted from Haowen Yuan’s “Ying Ting Liu Bie.”

of these relations” (12). Object-oriented ontology can also be used to analyze Yuan’s poem. The poem continues, “While thinking of the returning traveler, one is naturally anxious; but leisure is the inherent modality of things” (“Ying Ting Liu Bie”). In this line, external things are not bound by the human mind—they are innately leisurely. The external world no longer passively reflects the poet’s emotions; instead, it is its own significant “inherent modality.” This line suggests that when one thinks outside direct relations of self and other, liberation is possible. In this sense, object-oriented ontology’s commitment to autonomous objects aligns with Taoism, which deeply influenced Wang’s idea of two states. Equal communication is a precondition of a Taoist commitment to the unification of self and nature. There are no power relations in such a Taoist encounter between self and nature.

Yuan’s poem does not dwell on sad feelings; instead, it reflects on how to be in harmony with natural things—inclusive of one’s emotions, especially how to move past the pain of departure and separation. This theme manifests in the poem’s ending, which reads, “Looking back at my friend in the pavilion, I see a plain forest calm as a picture” (Yuan “Ying Ting Liu Bie”).

I next show how Yuan’s aesthetics of autonomous objects, as shared by object-oriented ontology and Wang’s two states, are fundamental to Hou’s films (Harman 12). Following this analysis, I discuss how Hou builds on Italian neorealism by incorporating these Chinese artistic frameworks into his films to present an aesthetic of both normalcy and everyday Chinese life.

Transnational Realism

As chapter one mentioned, Hui has expressed that she loves the “storyless structure” of new Taiwanese films (Kuang 177). Her articulation of this concept might help elucidate characteristics of Taiwanese New Cinema. For Hui, this structure involves being “extraordinarily close to the audience” and evoking audience emotion not through “use of a story” but by inviting the audience to allow their emotions to resonate with the film (Kuang 177). Hui’s storyless structure mirrors Cesare Zavattini’s description of story structures in Italian neorealism:

The most important characteristic, and the most important innovation, of what is called neorealism, it seems to me, is to have reali[zed] that the necessity of the “story” was only an unconscious way of disguising a human defeat, and that the kind of imagination it involved was simply a technique of superimposing dead formulas over living social facts. (50–51)

He further explains that “to insert a ‘story’ in reality” means to make the film “exciting and spectacular” and that “such a method evades a direct approach to everyday reality and suggests that it cannot be portrayed without the intervention of fantasy or artifice” (50). Hui’s storyless structure, an idea that finds expression in Taiwanese New Cinema’s straightforward representations of “real life,” thus has much in common with Italian neorealists’ approach to everyday reality (Kuang 177). Both are rooted in “an unlimited trust in things, facts and people” and oppose “illusory and equivocal erosion” of reality (Zavattini 51).

So, what does everyday reality look like in Italian neorealist films, and how does these films’ depiction of reality help us understand Taiwanese new realism? Here, my argument considers Zavattini’s analysis of a scene from Vittorio De Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves*

(1948):

The child follows his father along the street; at one moment, the child is nearly run over, but the father does not even notice. This episode was “invented” with the intention of communicating an everyday fact about these people’s lives, a little fact—so little that the protagonists don’t even care about it—but full of life. (Zavattini 54)

In this scene, it is not what happens, i.e., the plot, but *what is happening* that defines everyday life, as the latter is normal to the film’s characters. According to Zavattini, depicting reality this way reveals what we ignore both as normal and as mundane and reflects the “most deeply hidden human values” (51). André Bazin extends this idea: “Nobody is reduced to the condition of an object of a symbol that would allow one to hate them in comfort without having first to leap the hurdle of their humanity” (21). He suggests that the characters in Italian neorealist films are not subject to linear plot; instead, they are allowed to exist without having instrumentality to a plot, as people do in real life. Gilles Deleuze adds, “There is no longer a vector or line of the universe which extends and links up the events of *The Bicycle Thief*” and “even the insignificant events of *Umberto D* . . . have a vital importance for the protagonists” (247). In short, Italian neorealist cinematics of everyday reality privilege insignificant events over dramatic conflicts, “documentary quality” over spectacle, and humanity’s value over entertainment effects (Bazin 20).

Several scholars have noted Italian neorealism’s deep influence on Taiwanese New Cinema. Lu Fei suggests that Italian neorealism was introduced to Taiwan before the rise of Taiwanese New Cinema and that it was “highly praised [for] demonstrat[ing] the longstanding high public and official valorization of realism in Chinese culture in various

forms” (188). The Kuomintang-controlled Central Motion Picture Corporation reinforced the influence of Italian neorealism when it created the Healthy Realism movement in the Taiwanese film industry in the 1960s. Healthy Realism takes “Italian neorealism as its avowed model,” centers “on an image and ideal of Taiwan that favored rural settings and small-town communities,” and gravitates to themes of “cultural harmony, agricultural progress, and development” (Guest 30). Indeed, the movement selectively imitated Italian neorealism, privileged everyday life, and condemned and rejected neorealist approaches to exposing the so-called “dark,” “poor,” and “evil” side of society (Wang 104).

The future directors of Taiwanese New Cinema grew up in this cinematic environment. Despite their objections to the Chinese government’s use of Italian neorealist themes for propaganda purposes, they still inherited a neorealist focus for depicting reality. In stark contrast to Healthy Realism, Taiwanese new realism committed to uncovering and unpacking the so-called “dark” reality of life in authoritarian society (Wang 104). For instance, Yang’s *That Day, on the Beach* depicts “generational discontent” in modern Taipei, while Hou’s *A City of Sadness* depicts the February 28 Incident (Graham “*That Day, on the Beach*”).¹⁹

Commentators such as Jonathan Rosenbaum observe that “the element of realism” in Taiwanese New Cinema films from the 1980s is “akin to Italian neorealism” (“Narrating Taiwanese Identity”). Indeed, Hou’s *Dust in the Wind* and *The Boys from Fengkuei* explicitly reference Italian neorealist films. Wan, the protagonist of *Dust in the Wind*, is similar to the

¹⁹ The February 28 Incident, also known as the February 28 Massacre, was an insurrectionary movement launched by the Taiwanese people in 1947 against the Chinese Nationalist Party. The uprising was brutally suppressed, and thousands of civilians died. This incident marks the beginning of the White Terror period (1947–1985), when Taiwan was ruled under martial law and tens of thousands of perceived political dissidents were imprisoned.

father in *The Bicycle Thief*: Wan “is simultaneously and overwhelmingly faced with the sudden theft of his motor scooter, the danger of losing his vehicle-dependent job, and the moral indignation of his girlfriend when he threatens to steal a replacement” (Guest 32–33), a plot Guest reads as a “quotation” from Italian neorealist classic *The Bicycle Thief* (32). Guest also suggests that Hou’s *The Boys from Fengkuei* “quotes” another Italian neorealist film in a scene: the boys from Hou’s film sneak into a local movie theater and see Lucino Visconti’s 1960 film *Rocco and His Brothers*—their “voyage from their small town to the main island” parallels “the Sicilian family’s arrival at their Milan apartment” in *Rocco and His Brothers* (Guest 32).

Much like Italian neorealist films, Taiwanese New Cinema films are characterized by their rejection of the film star and by their “documentary quality,” “natural adherence to actuality,” and “faithfulness to everyday life in the scenario” (Bazin 16–25). As Chiao points out, Taiwanese New Cinema filmmakers

tried to break away from classical modes of storytelling and the Hollywood-esque star system. They opted instead to look for new ways to express themselves: elliptical structures and ambiguous narratives, long takes, real locations, complex approaches to space and *mise-en-scène*, natural lighting, non-professional actors, the creative use of language and sound, etc. (46)

Most characters in Hou’s early films are played by nonprofessional actors. Indeed, Shu-fen Hsin, who plays the protagonist in many early Hou films, was “discovered on the street” (Jiang 56). In an interesting parallel, De Sica discovered Lamberto Maggiorani and Enzo Staiola, the lead actors in *Bicycle Thief*, on the street as well.

By employing nonprofessional actors and by putting them in everyday situations, both cinematic movements aim to be faithful to everyday people and everyday life. Hou designs “details [and] scenes that are natural to people’s daily life” (Cai 50) and often spends “a long time finding the right way (the right people, the right shot, and the right situation) to achieve a sense of naturalness” in his films (Lo 83). In *Dust in the Wind*, Wan’s father gets drunk before Wan leaves for military service. Hou uses static, long-distance shots to depict a rock-lifting competition between Wan’s drunk father and a neighbor (Fig.10). There are no close-ups, only the characters’ staggered movements and incoherent speech. Hou’s technique, here, demonstrates Zavattini’s “most deeply hidden human values” by offering the audience a tender insight into the emotional turmoil of everyday life, albeit from a distance. Wan’s father abdicates his responsibility by getting drunk—something thoroughly ordinary and an expression of despair and powerlessness in the face of political authority. Although Hou places “unusual demands on the viewer,” his film’s “sophistication is understated, and its formal innovations are irreducibly bound up with the sympathetic observation of everyday experience” (Suchenski 7).



Fig. 10. The drunk scene.

Both Italian neorealism and Taiwanese New Cinema attempt to render visible people's otherwise invisible everyday attachments, struggles, and values, but these two movements actualize this goal differently. Taiwanese New Cinema filmmakers, Hou in particular, incorporate traditional Chinese artistic frameworks to facilitate a natural flow of emotions and ideas in film and often depend on *yi jing chuan qing* to portray everyday life as endowed with Taoist peace and delicacy. This is often done using natural landscapes, which can reflect the emotions of the characters, carry the moods of a film, and become an active character in the film, underlining the unity between the subjective self and the external world. Hou's *Dust in the Wind* and Hui's *The Way We Are* share some of these characteristics. I will analyze Hou's film first to better clarify the relationship between Hou's work and Hui's.

Dust in the Wind

To examine Hou's film aesthetics, I offer a close reading of *Dust in the Wind*—my reasons for which are mostly inspired by Guest. First, this film has not drawn as much attention from Western scholars or from mainland Chinese commentators as other Hou films, including *Assassin* and his so-called Taiwan trilogy—*A City of Sadness*, *The Puppet Master*, and *Good Men, Good Women* (Guest 27). Second, *Dust in the Wind* marks a turning point in Hou's directorial career: it “looks back at the ‘New Wave’ as a meditation on the precarious situation faced by Taiwanese cinema” in the late 1980s (Guest 28). That is, *Dust in the Wind* both represents a closing of the Taiwanese New Wave and happens to be one of the most representative works of Taiwanese New Cinema. Like Guest, I hope to contribute to “a more comprehensive assessment of Hou's oeuvre” by exploring Hou's aesthetics in detail (27).

James Udden points out,

A closer inspection of Hou's career overall reveals that while [*Good Men, Good Women*] may be the most significant change for him, it is neither the first nor the last. [After 1984, Hou] began to use a more distanced framing in *Boys* [from *Fengkuei*], and then began to use the static camera in an unorthodox fashion starting with *A Summer at Grandpa's*. Working for the first time with Mark Lee Pingbin in *The Time to Live, The Time to Die* resulted in a significant shift in lighting styles and more experimentation with depth of field. By the time he made *Dust in the Wind*, [he] was able to combine all of this into a complete package, marking the culmination of all of the changes that occurred during his New Cinema period. (198)

In short, Udden suggests that *Dust in the Wind* marks both the end of Taiwanese New Wave and the maturity of Hou's cinematic work. The film is among the most representative works of both Taiwanese New Cinema and Hou's oeuvre and is, therefore, a good entry point for my comparison of Hou and Hui.

Dust in the Wind is about a young couple from the mining village Jio-fen. Wan quits junior high school and leaves Taipei to find work. His girlfriend, Yun, follows him the following year and works as a tailor's assistant. Each work hard with family in mind—in the senses of their larger respective families and of the small family they hope to start together. But they are separated when the army conscripts Wan, and during his three years of service, Yun marries someone else. *Dust in the Wind*, like many of Hou's other early films, describes a fruitless love. For Jinhua Dai, this recalls François Truffaut's coming-of-age films, but “unlike the narcissistic, melancholic, and mocking tone in Truffaut's ‘Antoine Doinel’ series,

the tone of Hou's films narrating youth is meandering and slow, clear of narcissism and affectation" (243). I argue that the difference between Truffaut and Hou's narrative styles lies in Hou's incorporation of traditional Chinese aesthetics, which enables him to generate his own unique cinematic aesthetics and to achieve the unique tone Dai indicates. Here, I leverage Wang's theories on the relationship between imagery and emotions to explore how Hou incorporates Chinese aesthetics into *Dust in the Wind*.

The clearest indication that Hou consciously incorporates Chinese aesthetics into his films is his immense passion for traditional Chinese thought—Hou has long maintained that Chinese tradition is important to his thinking:

In [an] interview, [Hou] explained that by [Chinese] tradition, he means “the value system of Chinese philosophy that evolved from the three pillars of Chinese thinking—Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism I felt that Chinese tradition encompasses a beauty which I have always wanted to explore—something spiritual and dreamlike. (Suchenski 22)

By explicitly referencing Taoist aesthetics that emphasize unification of self and nature, Hou indicates that his films are a pursuit of Wang's state-without-the-presence-of-the-subject. As Suchenski points out, Hou has used his martial arts films, such as *The Assassin*, as an opportunity “to talk about ‘Taoism’” and “of people who ‘are like nature’” (22).

Hou's aesthetic style also borrows much from Congwen Shen, a famous figure in modern Chinese literary history. Deppman points out that Hou's literary connection to Shen “serves as an important link that helps explain [Hou's] self-distancing narrative style” (151). She suggests that Hou is profoundly influenced by Shen's technique of depersonalization:

Two effects of depersonalization in Shen's hands are that it conflates individual memory with national history, and it naturalizes a cyclical view of life and death. Hou explains that Shen often represents death simply as a death under the sun, which evokes not sorrow but a form of desolation. This self-distancing philosophy helps explain such technical decisions as Hou's use of the objective camera, establishing shots, discontinuity editing, and deep focus. (Deppman 153)

Deppman suggests that Shen's literary style evokes a "philosophy of detachment" that endeavors to liberate the self from both emotional and traumatic constraints and to cultivate an easy, frank attitude to life's ever-changing nature (155). In this way, Shen's Taoist aesthetic parallels Wang's state-without-the-presence-of-the-subject—because, as mentioned, the latter also teaches people how to liberate from their emotional constraints.

Other scholars have employed Chinese aesthetic concepts to study Hou's films, as I do. For instance, Lo interprets Hou's films by using *qi-yun* (气韵), another traditional Chinese aesthetic concept, which translates literally to "the melody of the air," and *qi-yun sheng-dong* (气韵生动), which translates to "an object is so lively that there is an aura surrounding it" (84). In doing so, he argues that Hou's cinematic images represent the flow of time and that they then "induce layers of empathy" to create "the temporality of emotion and a space filled with an aura of delicacy" (98). I am comfortable using this method because, "given the complexity of [Hou's] films and his situation, there are . . . endless avenues for inquiry into the significance of Hou Hsiao-hsien" (Udden 183). Dai also points out that "reading [Hou's] films is 'dangerous' not because they suggest a myriad of conflicting readings, but because they seductively invite clear and simple approaches to interpretation"

(239). Wang's perspective informs my reading of *Dust in the Wind*, especially my exploration of Hou's incorporation of Chinese aesthetics and Italian neorealism, with which he depicts delicate everyday lives and facilitates a natural flow of emotions.

Most of *Dust in the Wind*'s action occurs in Jio-fen, a small village in northeastern Taiwan (Fig. 11). The film's screenwriter, Wu Nien-jen, mentions in an interview that the site's "tranquility" and "peaceful atmosphere" and the "sense of that remote hometown," which "it brings to visitors," motivated the crew to film there ("Dust in the Wind: An Interview"). Hou's representation of Jio-fen's natural environment demonstrates this tranquility. For instance, most of Jio-fen's buildings are built into the village's hilly seaside. Architecture is significant to all narratives—it "tells a story through its material and immaterial characteristics such as the morphology, constructive choices, materials, arrangement of spaces, the lighting system," and so on (Mascio and Maver 654). Hou's use of Jio-fen's unique architecture reflects New Cinematic themes. For instance, the local hilly steps and streets make returning home a sublime ritual. In the opening scene, which includes static shots of village roads and mountainous landscapes, two protagonists travel home from a local train station. Shown from the far side of the road, they blend harmoniously with the scenery's layered trees and mountains (Fig.12). Hou's other films also employ similar shots, including long static shots of small figures moving along large mountains that hide the characters' feelings and conversations while cultivating a warm, peaceful everyday mood.



Fig. 11. The small village of Jio-fen.



Fig. 12. The two protagonists going home.

When Wan's family later travels to the train station to pick up Wan's father after he injures his leg, Hou employs two long-distance static shots—the first shows the family reuniting at the station, and the second shows them crossing a suspension bridge on their journey home (Fig. 13). The former shot is warm, intimate, and emotional: Wan waits anxiously at the station, runs to his parents as they disembark, and makes eager conversation with them. The latter is so distant that it is impossible to make out who is crossing the bridge, let alone their conversation. The shot draws the eye to trees moving in the wind and to a light trail of smoke ascending from below the suspension bridge. While the gentle, pleasant soundtrack blends the two shots into a single sequence, the sudden shift from a deeply

intimate moment to a distant one creates discontinuity and detachment.

Hou's editor, Liao Ching-sung, explicitly connects Hou's use of landscapes to Wang's notion of *jing*:

I am pretty sure that [Hou's own particular style] derives from the traditions of Chinese lyrical literature, which includes works of Du Fu, li Bai, and Wang Wei. These traditions include broad depictions of landscape in the endings or the transitions. The sentiments within are merged with the representation of the landscape. Hou focuses not only on the emotions of the characters, but also on the landscape—*the landscape is very noticeable in his shots*—which adheres closely to Chinese poetic traditions. (Suchenski 217)



Fig. 13. The suspension bridge scene.

By distancing the audience from the family in this sequence, Hou deconstructs the power of the viewer's gaze and decenters the film's characters by blending them into the surrounding landscape. The bridge sequence's discontinuity, for example, renders invisible the father's patriarchal authority and importance (e.g., the seriousness of his injury), which are central at the train station. Hou's imagery, thus, shows the beautiful tranquility in people's

everyday routines and in the similar but often overlooked joys of family.

The film's title indicates the hardships of love and life through its wind (风) and dust (尘) imagery.²⁰ Wan is always silent when facing his difficulties in life, including his father's injury and his separation and eventual estrangement from his love. He always escapes from or overcomes emotional turbulence. His placid attitude to life is manifest in his engagement with the natural landscape. For example, when Wan loses his motorbike, he goes to the beach, where he sees two monks performing a ceremony for a grieving family. The ceremony is calm—there is no crying or other signs of sorrow (Fig. 14). Hou then cuts to an empty shot of waves in a storm and a distant island (Fig. 15). Facing the sea, Wan possibly ponders the loss of his bike and the abnormality and severity of loss, yet the ceremony scene also suggests that Wan's loss, much like the loss of a family member, is one of life's changes and so must be faced in stride. He is resolute in other moments too. For example, when his wife leaves him, he weeps silently. And at the film's end, when he returns home from the army and joins his aging grandfather in a field to chat about crops and weather, their conversation is followed by another empty shot of both typhoon clouds approaching from above the mountains and, from amidst these clouds, a beam of light illuminating the village (Fig. 16). This empty shot represents Wan's ability to reflect on his "trauma with frankness and ease" (Dai 239), but because the film does not depict how Wan contends with his losses long term, the viewer must assume that Hou, like Shen, faces life's uncertainties and changes calmly.

²⁰ Dust and wind can form one word in Chinese: 风尘 (*feng chen*). This word is usually taken to mean a hard journey.



Fig. 14. The funeral ceremony.



Fig. 15. The seaside views.



Fig. 16. The clouds.

The Way We Are

After 1990, Hui's films take on characteristics of Taiwanese New Cinema—especially of Hou's films—by focusing on ordinary people's everyday lives. Like Hou, her films also

adapt Chinese artistic frameworks to depict and center everyday life. In this section, I analyze *The Way We Are* as an example of Hui's post-1990 learning from Taiwanese New Cinema. I lean on what Szeto calls Hui's "poetics of insignificance" to describe Hui's changed cinematic style, particularly her "layering of humble ordinariness" and her representation of everyday routine (66). Like Hou's, Hui's distinctive style "lies not in sensation and drama, but in the quiet layering of life's imperceptible traces" (51), a synthesis of neorealism and Chinese aesthetic characteristics.

Reflecting upon Hou's influence on her filmmaking career in a 1996 interview, Hui states,

I was very impressed by Hou Hsiao-hsien's movies. That is also the reason why I invited Wu Nien-jen to work with me as my screenwriter. I like [New Cinema] movies such as *That Day on the Beach*, *A Time to Live*, *A Time to Die* for many reasons: firstly, I was tired of making big budget commercial movies; secondly, I had always wanted to make some realistic films like theirs, representing Hong Kong's stories, our stories. But I was not quite successful on this. *Song of the Exile* has a very good screenplay but I did not do well in visualizing it. (Lo 46)

She goes on to explain how the concept of "cinematic time," which she learned from Taiwanese new realism, helped her fix this problem in *Song of the Exile* (46). She explains that "real time" is "the whole period of time you spend in performing an action" (46). For example, she says that in filming an actor walking from one side of a road to the other, "if the director cuts off the middle section of walking, there will be no real time in this part of the film" (46). In other words, it is not action but the continuation of an action that is important

in film—this is much like Zavattini’s emphasis of *what is happening*. Many of Hui’s post-1990 films show “real time”—e.g., the moving trains in *The Way We Are*, the child running to check on his grandmother in *Summer Snow*, and the floating boat in *Our Time Will Come*. Leaning on Hui’s explanation, I interpret Hui’s “real time” as a space–time in which characters’ emotional and physical states can become apparent through those characters’ insignificant daily routines. In this way, Hui incorporates both *jing* and Wang’s two states.

I analyze *The Way We Are* for several reasons: First, Hui has sought to represent a state of understanding of when it is necessary to keep “real time” in her films and when it is not. *The Way We Are* represents her attainment of this state. Lo says that the film “*July Rhapsody* relies on two episodes of unruly love” and that “these dramatic conflicts constitute a story” but that “*The Way We Are* doesn’t need such episodes anymore” (Kuang 176). In other words, dramatic conflicts require complicated editing and cinematic spectacle, which go against both Hui’s flow of “real time” and her focus on the everyday. Hui, herself, suggests that the success of this part of her film was shaped by her “studies of Hou Hsiao-hsien’s works” (Kuang 177). Much of the film appears as a documentary of characters’ daily routines: for example, she uses long takes, empty shots, and close-ups, much like Taiwanese New Cinema directors do. Second, *The Way We Are* is one of Hui’s most critically and artistically successful post-1990 films—it won Hong Kong Film Awards for best screenplay, best director, best supporting actress, and best actress. This film represents Hui’s greatest achievement since the 1990s.

Hui describes *The Way We Are* as “like a poem,” one about the quiet life of Mrs. Cheung, a middle-aged working woman played by Pau hei-ching (Kuang 154). Mrs. Cheung

shares an insignificant, happy life with her son, Cheung Ka-on, and neighboring Granny, an elderly working woman. They live in Tin Shui Wai in Hong Kong, a place Esther Cheung, Gina Marchetti, and Tan See-Kam say “conjures up crime stories, triad tales, and yarns about suicides, prostitution, and juvenile delinquency for most people in Hong Kong” (67), though they also say that Hui’s films take “interest in the trials faced by the ordinary members of the community” (74). The film has no dramatic plot: it merely examines, with human warmth, these characters’ normal daily routines—e.g., shopping, cooking, and meal sharing.

Tin Shui Wai is much like Jio-fen: both are rural communities, and the predominance of mundane, insignificant, and everyday life there—as distinct from the bustling self-importance of city life—reflects Italian neorealist and Taiwanese New Cinematic themes. Jio-fen was a small mining village when Hou made *Dust in the Wind*, and Tin Shui Wai was originally a swamp, unsuitable for human habitation. These sites’ tranquility and the locals’ peaceful coexistence with their environments appealed to Hou and Hui when they were each choosing locations for their films. Their films prominently feature, respectively, Jio-fen’s mountain landscape and Tin Shui Wai’s wetlands. Evoking nostalgia for premodern Tin Shui Wai, Hui’s film opens with a series of old, faded photos of Tin Shui Wai before it was developed (Fig. 17). It then presents a long, languid panoramic shot of Tin Shui Wai’s Wetland Park, giving the impression of a walk through the park and creating a peaceful mood (Fig. 18). The camera moves along a pedestrian overpass, revealing Tin Shui Wai’s natural and human landscapes—distant mountains and tall apartments. The camera movement suggests local communities have safeguarded the place’s personality, peace, tranquility, and diversity, thus strongly implying self-assured peace and harmony between people and their

environment, much in contrast to urban society.



Fig. 17. The faded old photo showing premodern Tin Shui Wai.



Fig. 18. A panoramic view of the Tin Shui Wai Wetland Park.

The Way We Are contains many long shots from behind of characters walking, a narrative technique Hou also employs in his suspension bridge scene in *Dust in the Wind*. Both films use distance to reject the viewer's gaze and to hide details of characters' feelings. This kind of shot also conveys ease and ordinariness. For instance, when the mother and son walk to the bus station, they are captured as they pass by a fixed shot from which they gradually disappear, and when Granny walks home from the grocery store, the camera follows her at a distance (Fig. 19 and Fig. 20). There are no close-ups; instead, the camera

treats its subjects as passersby. These panoramic scenes cast the characters as small, insignificant, and somewhat absorbed into their surrounding natural and social environments. The stresses of modern life in a fast-paced cosmopolitan city, like Hong Kong, or of working-class, single-parent poverty seem to disappear in these shots.

Like those of *Dust in the Wind*, the characters in *The Way We Are* exist tranquilly. To achieve this tranquility, the film shifts between deeply emotional states and states liberated from emotional constraints. For example, when Ka-on's grandmother tells him a story about his young mother, she tearfully says, "your mother is such a silly person. All she knows is *zuo*," which translates literally to *do* but here carries the meaning of "caring for other people." The grandmother continues, "She had been an apprentice since her age of fourteen. She worked to pay your uncles' tuitions." A shot of a series of old photos of Hong Kong's young women workers follows and then the camera switches to Mrs. Cheung, who has just finished work and is casually spending time with Granny at a shopping mall. Unexhausted by her work, Mrs. Cheung chats joyfully with Granny about Ka-on's national examination and about the lottery. The explicit emotional contrast between these shots conveys Hui's admiration for female workers, as represented by Mrs. Cheung, who attempts to calmly reconcile life's uncertainties and hardships.

Hui and Hou each use fixed camera angles to great effect, but such angles are something of a signature for Hou while Hui's technique is slightly different. Some of these differences stem from Hong Kong's unique characteristics—for to convey Hong Kong's small, cramped indoor spaces, such as the shopping mall where Mrs. Cheung works and Mrs. Cheung's house, Hui uses a fixed camera with narrow angles. The realism of these shots

portrays the daily struggles of crowded cosmopolitan Hong Kong. Also, while Hou tends to fix his long shots from a distance via wide-angle views, Hui's *The Way We Are* uses fixed camera angles for both wide, distant shots and narrow close-ups (Fig. 21). Dai argues that Hou's "films gaze squarely at history and its trauma with frankness and ease" (239). If Hou's camera is like a telescope that gazes from afar at Taiwan's past and present, then conversely Hui's camera is like a magnifying glass, in tiny spaces, amplifying the invisible significance of insignificant people's lives in Hong Kong. Hui amplifies not a notable story about Mrs. Cheung and her family but a story about human warmth that pervades their everyday lives.



Fig. 19. The mother and son going to the bus station.



Fig. 20. Granny walking home.



Fig. 21. The family dinner.

Conclusion

This chapter clarified that while Italian neorealism and Taiwanese new realism each demonstrate a particular aesthetic both of normalcy and of the everyday, Taiwanese new realism is imbued with a distinct feel via its incorporation of traditional Chinese artistic frameworks, especially relationships between imagery and emotion. This chapter showed how Hou's synthesis of Italian neorealism and Classical Chinese aesthetics led Hui to develop her post-1990 "poetics of insignificance." As the so-called daughter of Hong Kong, Hui is well-known for her films of everyday Hong Kong life.²¹ Her focus on invisible people and their daily routines and her ability to pose societal and political questions through this focus is commonly recognized as her idiosyncratic and valuable cinematic style. This chapter supports this perception but also traced Hui's journey by examining the contexts in which her films were made, including Hou's influences on her work.

²¹ "In Those Years, We Made Movies Together—Ann Hui" (那些年 我们一起拍电影—许鞍华). *Yang Lan One on One*. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8dhRXroitw>.

CHAPTER THREE

The Search for Cultural Identity in *A City of Sadness* and *Our Time Will Come*

Zhang Zhen considers Hui's *Our Time Will Come* an unconventional war film: rather than focusing on battle scenes, it portrays normal people's daily resistance against the Japanese occupation during the Second World War:

Ann Hui's camera has always focused on people's everyday lives. Although the film has been categorized as a drama, history film, and war film, the tempestuous war-time spectacles and dramatic effects that are usually key to many similar genre films are completely cast away. Instead . . . the film is as focused on anti-Japanese resistance as the characters' daily life. (Zhang, 68, my translation)

In this sense, the film is representative of Hui's "poetics of insignificance" (Szeto 66). *Our Time Will Come* reflects on Hong Kong history and shares themes with Hui's earlier *Song of the Exile*, which traces the city's geopolitics of cultural identity. In an interview, the film's screenwriter, He Jiping, mentions she was interested in working on this film because "this part of history [resistance to the Japanese occupation] has rarely been filmed from Hong Kong's perspective, and Hong Kong people should know their own story" ("Interviewing Ann Hui and He Jiping").

Like many of Hou's films, Hui's *Our Time Will Come* focuses on two fundamental elements: 1) Hong Kong people's everyday life and social reality and 2) the beauty of local landscapes. Via these elements, the film explores Hong Kong's historical memory, its inhabitants, and its unique position as a postcolonial, diasporic city without a clear, singular cultural identity. These themes on local geopolitics are prominent in many Hou films,

including *A Time to Live*, *A Time to Die*, *A City of Sadness*, and *Banana Paradise* (1989), which is no surprise since Taiwan, like Hong Kong, is haunted by its colonial past and since it maintains a complex relationship with mainland China and other former imperial powers.

In this chapter, I show how *Our Time Will Come* expresses themes from *Song of the Exile* in ways that are representative of Hui's post-1990 exploration of the "poetics of insignificance." I examine both Hou's aesthetic influence on Hui's war-film representation of the insignificant life and the extent to which this influence aids Hui's re-exploration of Hong Kong's geopolitics of cultural identity. I also compare themes of Hui's *Our Time Will Come* with those of Hou's *A City of Sadness*. Drawing from Abbas's discussion of post-handover Hong Kong, I argue that *Our Time Will Come* reproduces identity negotiation found in *A City of Sadness*. Abbas points out that Hong Kong's cultural identity is never fixed because it is always in a process of entanglement with multiple external effects (e.g., colonialism and nationalism). My comparison shows that Taiwanese identity in *A City of Sadness* is always an in-process negotiation of colonialism, nationalism, and the lived realities of indigenous peoples (Abbas 11), while *Our Time Will Come* embodies Hong Kong's political and cultural predicament of *mainlandization* and questions whether there are any solutions to mainlandization. Szeto and Yun-Chung Chen, in their essay, "Mainlandization or Sinophone Translocality? Challenges for Hong Kong SAR New Wave Cinema," describe mainlandization as Hong Kong's process of losing self-determination and of submitting to mainland China's ideological and political regulation: "By mainlandization, we are not referring to the tailoring of content based on essentialist assumptions about the cultural preferences and differences of Chinese audiences (who can be diverse and tolerant), but the

tailoring of cultural content to what SARFT perceives as acceptable or not in mainland China” (Szeto and Chen 120).²²

Hong Kong and Taiwan: Parallel Historical and Political Experiences

One of Abbas’s central ideas is what he calls the Hong Kong “*déjà disparu*,” or the already disappeared (16), which can be understood in two distinct ways: First, Abbas argues that as a city of diaspora, Hong Kong’s identity has always been “floating,” “temporary,” and “transient” (4). He argues that these characteristics contribute to the common perception of Hong Kong as a cultural desert:

Hong Kong has up to quite recently been a city of transients. Much of the population was made up of refugees or expatriates who thought of Hong Kong as a temporary stop, no matter how long they stayed. The sense of [being] temporary is very strong, even if it can be entirely counterfactual. The city is not so much a place as a space of transit. (4)

Abbas considers this “sense of [being] temporary” to be part of Hong Kong’s unique “port mentality” (4), which perceives “culture, like everything else, as that which came from elsewhere: from Chinese tradition, more legitimately located in mainland China and Taiwan, or from the West” (6). Abbas’s analysis also applies to Taiwan, a multicultural and postcolonial place that developed a hybrid culture after 300 years of colonial rule, including by the Netherlands, Spain, China’s Ming and Qing dynasties, Japan, and the Nationalist Party of China. For example, in *A City of Sadness*, the guerrilla movement Hinoe joins synthesizes the Chinese leftist tradition and the revolutionary spirit of Japan’s Meiji era.

²² SARFT: State Administration of Radio, Film and Television of China

Moreover, The Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 imposed Chinese identity on Hong Kong people, alerting them to their lack of indigenous culture. This new self-consciousness led the city's people to search for a Hong Kong-specific identity, one focused "above all on transitoriness" (Elliot 140). As Abbas points out, "Hong Kong as a subject" is "not so much a sense of *déjà vu*, as the even more uncanny feeling of what we might call the *déjà disparu*" (25). He goes on to explain that the feeling of *déjà disparu* means that "what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone [and that] we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been" (25). For Abbas, attempts at representing Hong Kong can only result in "the cultural self-invention of the Hong Kong subject" (1).

Taiwanese New Cinema began in the early 1980s, around the time that China and Britain signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Films from this era received international praise and demonstrated a collective search for a new Taiwanese identity. Although Taiwan's history is not as entangled in the global history of imperialism as Hong Kong's is, Taiwan still, also, struggles to define and express its national identity. Such identity construction occurs in the cultural context of ethnic opposition between Han Chinese people and indigenous Taiwanese people and is focused on "confusion" (Chiao 44). In other words, Taiwanese identity is also hardly definable. In asking "What is Taiwan?" Chiao wonders if it is "the 'Republic of China,' the 'Free China,' or 'Chinese, Taipei,' 'the official country name used at international events like the Olympics'" (44). That Chiao's confusion parallels Elliot's notion of "transitoriness" is perhaps indicative that Hong Kong's attempts to

construct a postcolonial identity may have been influenced by Taiwan's own attempts at asserting a national identity.

In the next section, I analyze *A City of Sadness* and *Our Time Will Come* and map Taiwan's search for a cultural identity as a possible inspiration for Hong Kong's own search.

The Complexities of Taiwanese History in *A City of Sadness*

A City of Sadness portrays the Lin family living in a small town near Taipei after the Second World War. The occupying Japanese forces have left Taiwan, but the Chinese Kuoming (KMT) forces are returned. The eldest son, Wenxiong, runs a bar called Little Shanghai, which sees good business after the war; the second son is gone, disappeared in Nanyang, a region of Southeast Asia, during the war; the third son, Wenliang, who was a translator working for the Japanese during the war, later struggles with mental illness after returning to Taiwan; and the fourth son, Wenqing, is a photographer who has been deaf since childhood, is nonspeaking, and communicates primarily through writing.

After Wenliang recovers from his illness, he begins smuggling drugs with a group of Shanghainese. When Wenxiong learns of his brother's activities, he stops him. But when Wenliang leaves the drug smuggling scene, his former associates take revenge—they charge him with treason for the work he did as a translator for the Japanese. Wenliang is imprisoned and, in prison, has a mental breakdown. The film portrays the February 28 Incident and the KMT's subsequent implementation of martial law in Taiwan. Disillusioned with the government's brutal regime, Wenqing's best friend and brother-in-law, Hinoe, joins a leftist guerrilla resistance movement. Wenqing secretly supports both Hinoe and the guerrillas, but

the nationalist army defeats the resistance fighters, and Hinoe is arrested. The film ends with Wenqing's arrest and the former Shanghainese gang shooting Wenxiong.

As Chiao points out, *A City of Sadness* is “seldom one-dimensional in its method, lingering instead on the intricate relationship linking Taiwan, Japan, and China” (48). For instance, Japan figures prominently. The two main Japanese characters, Ogawa and his daughter Shizuko, view Taiwan as their home and resist being sent back to Japan. Further, Hinoe tells a story about a young woman in Meiji-era Japan who commits suicide by flinging herself into a waterfall. Hinoe's sister, Hinomi, later becomes Wenqing's wife, and reiterates the story to him:

She was not tired of her life. She did not lose her will to live. She could not face the loss of her youth. Once lost, nothing means anything. Why does cherry blossom fall in the fullness of beauty? Carried by the wind. The note she left was an inspiration to all young people during the Meiji era, a time of idealism and heroic spirit.

The story foreshadows how many young Taiwanese, including Hinoe and Wenqing, will sacrifice their youth to resist the government's brutal regime. Moreover, how the characters organize against the government represents a unique Taiwanese synthesis of the Chinese leftist tradition and of the revolutionary spirit of Japan's Meiji era—thus, the guerrillas, represented by Hinoe, perform both Chinese and Japanese identity. In this way, the film shows how Taiwanese identity is formed via a series of negotiations with its past and present relationships with other cultures. As Chiao would suggest, the “inevitable result” of this negotiation is “identity confusion” (44).

The word *motherland* in English comes up multiple times in the film but lacks a specific referent: In a letter to Hinoe expressing his support of the guerrillas, Wenqing writes, “In life, far from the motherland; in death, returning to the motherland; both life and death are governed by destiny.” Similarly, later, in a letter to Wenqing, Hinoe writes, “Consider me dead. My life belongs to the motherland.” This raises the question of what motherland Wenqing and Hinoe are referring to, for they do not seem to be referring to either Taiwan or to China but instead to a hypothetical unified nation-state. When the intellectuals gather to celebrate the evacuation of the Japanese government, they chant “The Exile Trilogy,” an anti-Japanese song lamenting the loss of Manchuria, an official part of China’s territory. After the lyrics “what year . . . what month . . . Will we return to our beautiful hometown?” have been chanted, the camera moves to a distant hill along the harbor. If the “return” in these lyrics represents these intellectuals’ hope, then the empty shot indicates that their hope will not be actualized. As Wenxiong says, “Taiwan’s fate is always in the hand of outsiders.” Therefore, this distant, imaginary country remains an empty signifier, lacking actual referents or objects, and this remains the case throughout the film.

The film’s use of five languages—Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Taiwanese Hokkien, and Shanghainese—demonstrates an overall confusion of identity. Hou’s play with language precisely manifests what Chiao means by Taiwan’s “complex and hybrid character” (40). Further, Wenqing’s muteness is key, as each of the film’s languages, except for Japanese, share a common written language—*Han Zi* (i.e., they all use Chinese characters), the only language Wenqing can communicate in. The emphasis on *Han Zi* as a common written language symbolizes pan-Chinese cultural identity, while the multiple oral languages

demonstrate a hybrid Taiwanese identity. By including Wenqing as a protagonist in his film, Hou portrays Taiwanese identity as inevitably enmeshed in a cultural context heavily influenced, but not dominated, by China and Chinese culture.

Searching for Identity: Imagery, History, and Everyday Life in *Our Time Will Come*

Our Time Will Come portrays a primary school teacher, Fang Lan, who becomes involved in a guerilla mission initiated by Dong Jiang guerillas.²³ The Dong Jiang attempt to evacuate Chinese dissident intellectuals to safety so they will not be captured by the Japanese and then used to instill ideological control over the Chinese people. After the evacuation, a guerilla leader, Liu Heizai, invites Fang to join the army. Fang becomes an underground courier who delivers information about the enemy and spreads Communist and anti-Japanese propaganda. Her boyfriend, Li Jinrong, also works for the underground guerillas. The film ends with the Japanese capturing and executing both Fang's mother and Li. By focusing on "a few civilians' participation" in the anti-Japanese movement, the film demonstrates its deep investment in depicting a "realist representation of resistance and rescue" (Yeung 98).

Importantly, Hui's film was made after the 2004 signing of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) between Hong Kong and mainland China. CEPA stipulates that Hong Kong and China would coproduce films. According to Yeung, Hong Kong insisted that film production be included in CEPA to boost the city's flagging film industry, which had been affected by the 1997 "Asian financial crisis" and by the 2003 SARS pandemic (91). The trade agreement has benefited Hong Kong films in remarkable ways: for instance,

²³ An anti-Japanese army founded and led by the Communist Party of China in the Dong Jiang area of Guangdong Province

coproduced films “enjoy free entry to China’s mainland market without facing the constraints of the annual quotas of foreign films,” are “treated as domestic productions,” and thus enjoy a “profit margin larger than that of foreign films” from China’s enormous market (Yeh and Chao 185). But CEPA’s benefits come at a price: to be screened in China, Hong Kong films must be approved by Chinese state censorship organs.²⁴

Moreover, Yeung points out that there are two “major criteria for making co-produced films” under CEPA and that these “directly affect the end products” (92). Yeung adds that, first, “at least one-third of the leading artists [in these films] must be from the Mainland” and that, second, “the plots or the leading characters must be related to the Mainland” (92). To conform to the mainland government’s ideological standards without being reduced by mainlandization, Hong Kong filmmakers like Tsui Hark, Wong Kar-wai, and Fruit Chan employ allegorical techniques to represent Hong Kong’s post-handover geopolitics (Yeung 88). Abbas argues that post-handover Hong Kong filmmakers have been constructing local subjectivities and responding to social anxieties about Hong Kong’s cultural identity since the Sino-British Joint Declaration (23); however, the way these filmmakers hide their political opinions constructs Hong Kong subjectivity as an “absent presence” (Yeung 88). For example, in *Our Time Will Come*, Yeung interprets the Japanese occupation as a symbol of Chinese mainlandization imposed onto Hong Kong.

The rest of this chapter examines three major themes—1) space and memory, 2) Hui’s use of Chinese poetry, and 3) her use of satire—to explore how CEPA and the “absent presence” of Hong Kong’s subjectivity render Abbas’ argument even more persuasive when

²⁴ Such as the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television

applied to *Our Time Will Come*. First, in tracing Hong Kong's past, Hui constructs a structure that, both, is fragmented by time and space and manifests Hong Kong as an ever-changing place with a difficult- or impossible-to-define cultural identity. Second, the film's contrast of two Chinese poems—Mao Dun's "Dusk" and Su Shi's "How Long Will the Full Moon Appear"—represents two modes of Hong Kong protest against mainlandization: the former is a revolutionary manifesto, and the latter demonstrates a Taoist attitude toward life. The juxtaposition of these poems implies conflict within Hong Kong society, namely its struggle for its own identity. Third, Hui employs satire to represent people's everyday lives and to demonstrate disharmony between traditions and the present, a discord that echoes Hong Kong's postcolonial, post-handover politics. As Abbas argues, despite being ethnic Chinese, most Hong Kong people are "culturally and politically distinct from mainlanders" (2).

Space and Memory

Our Time Will Come demonstrates Hong Kong subjectivity's "absent presence" and the city's struggle for identity in two ways: through the director's narration of the story through flashback and memory and via the role of the city in those memories.

The film's story is told through memories of Zhang Jiabin, a taxi driver in contemporary Hong Kong who was once Fang's student and who later became a junior guerilla soldier. Like *Song of the Exile*, which employs flashbacks as a narrative device, *Our Time Will Come* tells its story nonlinearly by "cutting back and forth between past and present" reminiscently (Abbas 38). In fragmenting time and space in her narrative, Hui manifests Hong Kong's "spatial distortions" (Abbas 9). The camera cuts from the narrator in

contemporary Hong Kong to a series of empty shots of wartime Hong Kong. Also like *Song of the Exile*, the film uses voice-overs to tell its story and thereby evokes a fragmentary sense of time, including at the film's end when Liu bids farewell to Fang at the harbor. The camera moves slowly from Fang to the harbor in front of her and then moves yet further to Victoria Harbor in contemporary Hong Kong (Fig. 22). This seamless transition at the film's end between Hong Kong's past and present exemplifies the speed and scale with which the city changed over time. As I argued in chapter one, Hong Kong is like a floating land that is always changing its appearance. The transition is also a reminder to Hong Kong's people today to not forget their city's past.



Fig. 22. Victoria Harbor, contemporary Hong Kong.

Fang's literal point of view interconnects past and present: Zhang remembers Fang's story while Fang looks toward contemporary Hong Kong and to Victoria Harbor (Fig. 22). As Zhang tells Fang's heroic story, shots of the film's present are presented in black and white, indicating a different time, but at the film's end, when Zhang returns to his taxi and says goodbye to his friends, the difference between the two times is blurred because the shot

of contemporary Hong Kong is now in color. Here, Hui's technique, again, demonstrates a chaotic sense of time. Interpreting Hui's flashbacks in *Song of the Exile*, Abbas points out that the technique

does not just present to us a past that can elucidate the present through a chronological reshuffling. Rather, we are given a structure that is more spatial than chronological: the flashback technique shows us a past and a present that do not quite mesh, which seem initially to contradict each other; however, these discrepancies force a reevaluation of both memory and experience. (38)

Abbas further argues that these flashbacks deform linear time and “show the emotional confusions about ‘home’ that result from a rapidly changing cultural space” (38). *Our Time Will Come*'s ambiguous space–time likewise draws attention to Hong Kong as an ever-changing, discontinuous, and disappearing physical space.

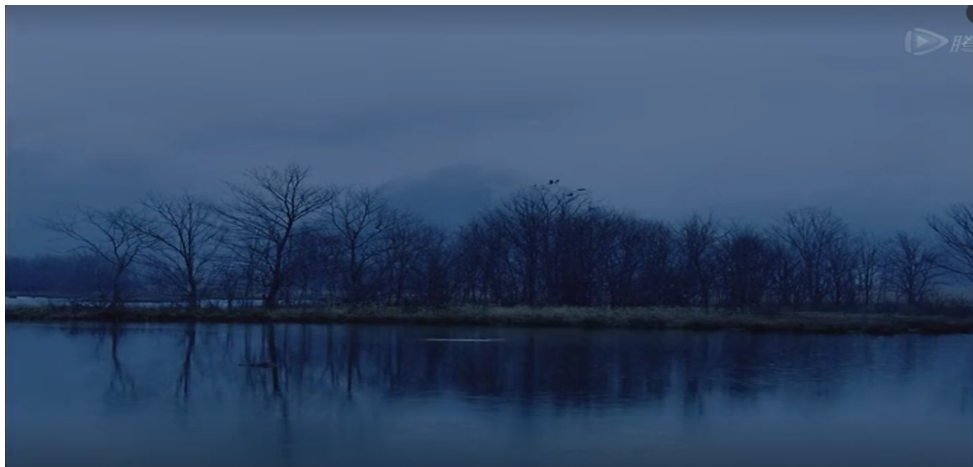


Fig. 23. An empty shot in *Assassin*.

Hui's distortion of Hong Kong's space invites a comparison to some Hou films: In films such as *Dust in the Wind* and *Assassin*, Hou employs series of empty shots depicting

rivers, flying birds, and floating mist (Fig. 23), a technique that Hui, likewise, uses in *Our Time Will Come*. Both films present these empty shots as through the eyes of each's main character. Given chapter two's discussion of *yi jing chuan qing*, what Hou's characters see in these moments closely relates to those characters' respective mental realities. In *Assassin*, for example, the flying birds above the trees (Fig. 23) manifest protagonist Nie yinniang's desire to escape the power games of the regimes within China's Tang dynasty. In this way, such shots present a Taoist sense of *becoming nature*. Chiao points out that *Assassin* gives Hou "a chance to talk about 'Taoism,'" or "of people who are 'like nature'" (22). Similarly, in *Our Time Will Come*, Fang, likewise, sees a series of nature images—e.g., mountains, mist, and a group of sea gulls from Old Hong Kong (Fig. 25). She looks into the distance, daydreaming, while waiting for a messenger (Fig. 24). Her gaze is suddenly interrupted by her comrade, who informs her that bandits are nearby. Hence, what Fang sees is ephemeral, more like a mirage than a real view of the city or its past.



Fig. 24. Fang looks toward the other side of the harbor.



Fig. 25. The natural landscape from Fang's perspective

That the film's main character is from mainland China and that Hui's film is largely shot on the mainland might signify Hui's deference to CEPA, but it might also be because Hong Kong no longer has any old towns that could function as believable or appropriate postwar settings. For instance, the Causeway Bay typhoon shelter, where the intellectuals gather before the evacuation in the film, evolves to become "today's Victoria Park" ("Our Time Will Come: Little Person, Big Time"); therefore, to represent the shelter, Hui shot the film in a fishing village in Taishan City (Fig. 26) in China's mainland. Further, most shots representing Old Hong Kong streets were filmed in Taishan City's Duanfen Town (Fig. 27) in China's Guangdong Province ("Our Time Will Come: Little Person, Big Time"). Abbas points out that "the apparently permanent," such as "buildings and even whole towns," "can be temporary, while the temporary," such as "abodes in Hong Kong," "could be permanent" (9). The ever-changing nature of Hong Kong's space is, as Abbas explains, "a consequence of speed" and economic developments that "have allowed [Hong Kong] to change from a trading post in the nineteenth century to its present position as a premier financial center of Southeast Asia, from a colonial city to a global city" (3). Hui's use of social and natural imagery from the mainland to represent historical Hong Kong hints at Hong Kong

subjectivity's absent presence and indicates that Hong Kong's spatial reality is, and has long been, ever-changing. *Song of the Exile* also demonstrates that the inhabitants of the diasporic Hong Kong lack a fixed identity.

While Hui's choices, here, once again recall Hou's *Assassin*, which was also largely shot on the mainland, the use of natural mainland landscapes has different consequences for each film. *Assassin* is a historical story about the politics of different regimes from China's Tang dynasty and depicts a heroine attempting to escape these power relations. Focused on separate multiple powers, Hou's representation of China, thus, recognizes Taiwan's political separation from China in contemporary politics. *Our Time Will Come*, though, presents imagined Hong Kong space. Although Hui might have employed Chinese settings, narratives, and characters to satisfy Chinese censors, given historical Hong Kong's absent presence, these filmic elements hint at Hong Kong people's search for a cultural identity.



Fig. 26. Shang Ze Xu Street, Taishan City. See https://www.sohu.com/a/228485336_167894



Fig. 27. A street in Old Hong Kong in *Our Time Will Come*.

Chinese Poetry

In constructing *Our Time Will Come*'s themes, Hui juxtaposes two Chinese literary texts—contemporary Chinese poet Mao Dun's "Dusk" and Song dynasty poet Su Shi's "How Long Will the Full Moon Appear." The former praises romantic revolution, and the latter depicts a Taoist life of ease. The contrast between them represents two modes of Hong Kong protest against mainlandization—or in other words, against the imposition of a single Chinese identity on Hong Kong people. The juxtaposition also symbolizes Hong Kong society's struggle for its own identity.

"Dusk" appears in the film three times: first as a voice-over, second when Fang recites it in admiration, and third when Fang thinks about her mother, who has been taken captive by the Japanese (Yeung 98). The text reads,

The wind has gone with the manifesto of the dusk.

As if they have melted suddenly, the myriad golden eyes of the sea have been flattened into a big, dark-green face.

There is a sad and solemn sound of a nomad flute from afar.

The black canopy of the night falls and is yet to fall.

The wind that traveled elsewhere has suddenly returned; this time as if it is drumming: Bellow! Bellow! No, not only wind, there's thunder. Wind comes with the thunder!

Waves are roaring in the choppy sea. Roll! Roll!

The storm came to the sea at night. (Mao Dun 163; translation by Yeung 99)

This poem is commonly read as the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary manifesto against the KMT. The poem was written in 1934 when the KMT was both trying to annihilate Chinese Communists and using military force to suppress Chinese leftists. The wind and thunder imagery symbolizes both unstoppable revolutionary force and a strong will to defeat the KMT. Like thunder and ocean waves, the revolutionary force will "[clean] the world and [bring] back lights" (Yeung 99). Dusk indicates the fall of night, darkness, and "a time when . . . dawn [light] awaits" (Yeung 99).

The film's inclusion of the poem can be interpreted from two perspectives: In Fang's time, the poem demonstrates a revolutionary manifesto against the Japanese empire, whereas for contemporary Hong Kong people, the poem resonates with recent political movements against the government. Yeung points out that the thunderstorm symbolizes "revolutionary activity" while the text "stresses the themes of revolution and hope," both in Fang's time and in contemporary Hong Kong (Yeung 99). In this sense, the poem represents Hong Kong people's aspirations for political revolution, as expressed by the 2014 Umbrella Movement, a movement begun as a response to China's refusal to grant Hong Kong universal suffrage.²⁵

²⁵ During the protests, the police used pepper spray to disperse the protesters, and the protestors used umbrellas to shield themselves, giving the movement its name.

In contrast to “Dusk,” Su Shi’s poem depicts a Taoist life of ease. Su wrote the poem while celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival alone, far from his brother, whom the poem is dedicated to, in hopes they would reunite one day. Hui plays with the idea of reunion, but in the context of the film, this means reunion after the war. The film infers this through full-moon imagery and its Chinese title, *ming yue ji shi you*, which translates, literally, to “when the moon will get full?” The poem reads:

How long will the full moon appear? Wine in hand; I ask the sky.

I do not know what time of year it will be tonight in the palace on high.

Riding the wind, there I would fly, yet I am afraid the crystalline palace would be too high and cold for me.

I rise and dance, with my shadow, I play. On high as on earth, would it be gay?

The moon goes round the mansion’s red through gauze-draped windows soft to shed her light upon the sleepless bed.

Against man, she would have, on spite. Why, then, when people part, is she often full and bright?

Men have sorrow and joy; they part if meet again; the moon is bright or dim and she may wax or wane. There has been nothing perfect since the old days.

So, let us with that man will live long as he can! Though miles apart, we will share the beauty she displays. (Sun 259; translation Yanchong Xu)

The poem is featured in the film when a Japanese officer asks Li Jinrong why the poem’s line “*ming yue ji shi you*” cannot be replaced with “*ming yue he shi you*,” since “*ji shi*” and “*he shi*” both mean *when* or *what time*. The difference between the two words lies in their tone—

ji is a *ze* tone, or falling tone, whereas *he* is a *ping* tone, or level tone. The characters' discussion of the poem demonstrates how the Japanese do not understand Chinese culture. The Japanese officer can be interpreted as symbolizing contemporary Chinese authority and its attempts at mainlandizing Hong Kong, though at least the Japanese officer tries to understand Chinese culture. Moreover, Su's Taoist realization at the end of the poem—"Men have sorrow and joy; they part if they meet again; the moon is bright or dim and she may wax or wane"—indicates that even when depressed, isolated, or lonely, one can still find pleasure in life by sharing the beauty of the full moon with everyone else who sees it. This theme evokes a Taoist life of ease. This Taoist attitude can be interpreted as a mild and silent way of opposing the mainland government's intervention in Hong Kong's political and cultural affairs. In using the Japanese officer as a negative example and given the invocation of the above mild Taoist attitude, the film calls for a conversation about Hong Kong cultural identity between the mainland government and Hong Kong people in hopes that the former will understand the latter.

Use of Satire

Abbas argues that the question of Hong Kong's identity "cannot be usefully posed by taking our bearings from the old [binaries] (like the difference between 'East' and 'West,' 'tradition' and 'modernity'" but should focus on "the very process of negotiating the mutations and permutation of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism" (11). Hui uses satire to demonstrate such negotiation in people's everyday lives. The *OED* defines satire as a "literary composition, and related senses" that uses "[humor], irony, exaggeration, or ridicule

to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, [especially] as a form of social or political commentary” (*OED*) Robert Elliott defines satire as an “artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature . . .” (“Satire”). Hui’s film uses ridicule to illustrate her characters’ everyday life and to demonstrate disconnect and negotiation between historical traditions and how seriously the war affected the lives of Hong Kong people. Hui also uses humor to depict people’s silent confrontation of the Japanese intrusion into their daily lives.

Focused on everyday lives, Hui’s film often depicts microcosms of Hong Kong’s sociopolitical situation following the Japanese occupation. For example, when Fang’s mother brings biscuits to Mao Dun’s wife, she initially wants to stack three biscuits on a plate, as stacking food is traditional in Chinese families, but she removes one biscuit on account of wartime food shortages. This scene is both funny and sad and mocks the rigid adherence to traditional norms in Fang’s time. This comes up again during Fang’s cousin’s marriage ceremony: Traditionally, a bride’s family would throw rice on the married couple, but the matchmaker asks them not to bother with this ritual. When Fang’s mother disagrees, the matchmaker, humorously, says, “People are starving, and you feed chickens?” Again, Hui employs what would be traditional scenes from everyday life to sow discord between rigid Chinese traditions and a Hong Kong shaped by war, occupation, and famine. Not merely a commentary on wartime famine, this satire demonstrates how Hong Kong culture was evolving within its historical experiences as an in-process negotiation of colonialism, traditional cultures, and local people’s lived realities. These scenes explain why Hong Kong’s

constantly shifting identity reveals the politics and cultures of postcolonial and post-handover Hong Kong as different from the mainland's. As Abbas points out, despite being ethnically Chinese, most Hong Kong people are "culturally and politically distinct from mainlanders" (2). Hui leans on everyday life to depict human warmth and delicacy in *The Way We Are*. She also uses scenes from everyday life in *Our Time Will Come* to critique outmoded conventions and to show that Hong Kong's cultural differences from China are shaped, in part, by the city's historical encounters with those nations. That the marriage scene occurs during heavy bombardment by Japan means that it specifically mocks the Japanese army. In opposition to the aggressive, self-serious Japanese intruders, the marriage shows Hong Kong people's fearless contempt for their intruders.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored similarities between Hui's *Our Time Will Come* and Hou's *A City of Sadness*, especially in terms of local geopolitics of cultural identity. Abbas's theory of Hong Kong's post-handover geopolitics applies to Taiwan in that both places experienced a long colonial history and have had to negotiate nationalism, colonialism, and local people's lived reality. Such negotiation in Hou's *A City of Sadness* refers to a hybrid Taiwanese identity, the opposite of a fixed singular Chinese identity. *Our Time Will Come* reproduces this negotiation to emphasize an "absent presence" of Hong Kong identity.

This chapter also elaborated on my first chapter's argument about cultural identity in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In *Song of the Exile* and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, Hui and Hou each explore what *home* and *homeland* mean to diasporic bodies—that home is imagined and

that hostland can become homeland. In this chapter, I examined the construction of subjectivity in the new homeland—i.e., a multicultural, diasporic, and postcolonial place. Identity confusion does not mean a failure of identity construction but rather an identity that opposes fixity, singularity, and cultural assimilation. Based on Abbas's argument, my comparative study of Hui's and Hou's films demonstrates that identity confusion is a cultural phenomenon that Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other places like them will have to face, for a long time, in their searches for local identity.

CONCLUSION

In September 2020, Hui was awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the Venice International Film Festival. In her speech, she said,

I want to revert this honor back to Hong Kong. It has given me an education and a scholarship to study in London. It has given me my life experiences, and my chances to work and find fulfillment. I treasure even my sufferings there and all those crazy cool people. And now I will go home and try to help younger filmmakers so that they will also get life achievement prizes in the future.

Zabrina Lo comments that Hui's camera "has documented some of the most powerful and candid stories about Hong Kong's most overlooked people" (Zabrina). Indeed, her films have revolved around people's everyday life ever since 1990. This thesis supports Lo's point that the 1990s represent a new stage in Hui's filmmaking career and argues that Hou's influence helped her reach this stage.

Hui is widely acknowledged as an auteur, and some scholars, therefore, approach her work based on the auteur theory. For instance, Kuang argues that binary themes of, for example, "past-present," "life-death," and "truth-illusion" are Hui's signature and run through her films (323), while Chang regards her as "one of Hong Kong's most renowned film auteurs since the late 1970s" (723). Andrew Sarris's articulation of the auteur theory emphasizes continuity in a director's work—the director "must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style" (562)—though this does not disallow for progress or development in a director's career. By focusing on director-on-director influence, this thesis points out

discontinuity in the career of this auteur, Ann Hui. It explores both 1990 as a demarcating line in her career and the influence of other directors in this shift within her work.

For my comparative analysis in each chapter, I selected a different film from each of the two directors. In my first chapter, I explored similarities of narrative style, mood, and themes in Hui's *Song of the Exile* and Hou's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*. I argued that these similarities demonstrate how Hui learned from Hou after 1990 and how *Song of the Exile* marks a turning point in her filmmaking career. In the second chapter, I compared Hui's *The Way We Are* with Hou's *Dust in the Wind*, pointing out how Hui synthesizes Italian neorealism and Classical Chinese aesthetics, much as Hou does. In the third chapter, I compared Hou's *A City of Sadness* with Hui's *Our Time Will Come* and examined the extent to which Taiwan's search for a cultural identity inspired Hong Kong's. I point out that *Our Time Will Come* reproduces the idea of identity negotiation present in *A City of Sadness*.

Hui's Golden Lion award for lifetime achievement demonstrates her impact on global cinema. As Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai point out, "Cinema from East Asia has arguably never had a more visible presence in the West than it does at present" (2). The kinship between Hou's and Hui's films can be mapped in a transnational cultural context by tracing at least two trajectories in contemporary East Asian cinema: 1) East–West aesthetic synthesis and its transnational dissemination and 2) intra-Asian "thematic and aesthetic intertextuality" (Lim 22). Both trajectories have contributed significantly to the perception of East Asian cultures.

Hou's and, later, Hui's syntheses of Italian neorealist aesthetics and Classical Chinese aesthetics challenge the "'Western impact and Chinese response' paradigm" that has

permeated almost all fields of Eastern Asian studies in the West (Zhang 286). Zhang Longxi argues that this paradigm considers China to be “an object of study” whose history and culture are “determined by the impact from the West” and that, accordingly, China is always undergoing “Westernization” without an “internal route of development” (286). Hou’s films overthrow this paradigm in that they do not merely passively receive Western cultural elements. Instead, they actively incorporate Western cinematic aesthetics to facilitate an East–West cultural exchange. The exchange of Italian neorealism with traditional Chinese aesthetics in Hou’s films embodies such a process of cultural communication. Made under the influence of this East–West cultural exchange, Hui’s post-1990 films demonstrate how successful and powerful this exchange is. Hui’s thematic and aesthetic borrowings from Hou manifest what Lim calls a “new era that moves away from the East–West binary that has dominated intellectual discourses throughout the twentieth century” (22). To follow Lim’s argument, the Hou-on-Hui influence “re-orientates our attention to intra-Asian cultural exchanges” (22). If Asia is always already an “idea in process,” as Milner and Johnson point out, then it is exactly these crossovers and transnational cultural exchanges and borrowings that facilitate such a cultural mobility in the continent and beyond.

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