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**Cinematic Rempaping of Taipei:
Cultural Hybridization, Heterotopias, and Postmodernity**

Yingjin Zhang
(Indiana University)

Summary

By way of observing changes in the cinematic remapping of Taipei in the 1990s, this paper attempts to extend our understanding of this global city beyond Jameson’s trope of modernization. As in Jameson’s famous piece, I will start with a discussion of director Edward Yang, but I will recontextualize Yang’s recent films in global cultural hybridization. To better situate recent cinematic changes, I will also mention certain early films set in Taipei.

Generally speaking, we may distinguish three phases of cinematic mappings of Taipei. First, in the 1960s and 1970s, the city was configured as an icon of urban modernity so as to support the Nationalist government’s drive to build Taiwan as part of a modern “Chinese” nation.

Second, in the 1980s, Taipei was refigured in New Taiwan Cinema as a site of distinct Taiwan experience, a site of cultural hybridization where the Chinese is shown to be merely one among many competing cultural forces in the formation of Taiwan identity. Third, in new

urban films of the 1990s, the earlier focus on Taiwan gradually faded, and Taipei has been transfigured as a series of heterotopia,s, where a wide range of postmodern spaces are (re)imagined and (re)negotiated. The change from “China” to Taiwan to Taipei in cinematic figurations of Taipei seems to dovetail the general movement from modernization and nationalization to globalization and hybridization in the age of transnational capitalism. But whether Taiwan can be adequately described as a “postnational” state is a question awaiting further investigation.

Hybridity, Global M lange, and Edward Yang's Remapping of Taipei

In his study of globalization as hybridization, Jan Nederveen Pieterse suggests, "we can construct a continuum of hybridities: on one end, an assimilationist hybridity that leans over towards the center, adopts the canon and mimics the hegemony, and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the center" (1995, 56-7). In many ways, Edward Yang's cinematic remapping of Taipei exemplifies what Pieterse calls "destabilizing hybridity." As well known by now, Edward Yang and his friend Hou Hsiao-hsien share the honor of leading New Taiwan Cinema in the 1980s. Unlike Hou, who concentrates on the ethnic-cultural makeup of rural Taiwan society and its traumatic local history in his representative films, Yang has made the metropolis of Taipei the foundation of his cinematic projects. That Day on the Beach (Haitan de yitian, 1983; hereafter That Day), Yang's solo directorial debut, establishes his reputation as a modernist auteur. A consistent female voice-over runs through That Day on the Beach, thus weaving out the texture of women's lives and endowing Yang's film with a strong sense of female subjectivity. Yet, Yang's retrospective narrative--punctuated by frequent flashbacks and fragmentary

remembrances from various characters--does not lead to a nostalgia for the past. Rather, it offers a promising end, where Lin Jiali (Sylvia Chang), formerly a tormented housewife, has been transformed into a strong-willed career woman by the unsolved or unsolvable mystery of her husband's mysterious disappearance one day on the beach.

That Day distinguishes several urban spaces, among them the domestic (associated with the ennui of a bourgeois housewife), the commercial (characterized by moral corruption and sexual degradation), and the transnational (represented by Jiali's childhood friend, an internationally renowned woman pianist visiting from Europe). Instead of celebrating globalized money economy, however, Yang situates his female protagonist firmly in the local, following her trajectory of growth from a Japanese-style house in a rural town to a modern apartment in the glocal city. If That Day is still restricted to the bourgeois spaces in Taipei, Yang expands his urban vision by including spaces of the lower classes in Taipei Story. Although they grew up together in two closely related families, Ah Lung (Hou Hsiao-hsien) and Ah Zhen drift apart due to their connections to two diametrically different urban space. The former manages a traditional fabric store in the old Ximengting, and the latter finds her way through modern establishments in the eastern district. Yang further extends his camera to the underworld (that is, the otherwise "invisible" criminal space) of Taipei in Terrorizer (1986), where White Chick, a teenage Eurasian streetwalker, stands simultaneously for the illegibility of the city and for the violence that threatens to erupt any time from any point in the urban landscape.

In Jameson's assessment, "Terrorizer is indeed very much a film about urban space in general" (1992, 153). In fact, Jameson is so impressed by Yang's attention to relationships between individual spaces (especially the boxed dwelling spaces) and the city as a whole that

he expresses his admiration for Yang's successful arrangement for "these two powerful interpretive temptations--the modern and the postmodern, subjectivity and textuality--to neutralize each other, to . . . draw on the benefits of both, without having to commit [himself] to either as some definitive reading" (1992, 151). The immediate result of Yang's simultaneous engagement with and distance from both interpretive categories is, I would argue, a heightened sense of hybridity in the global city. This hybridity is manifest not just in a certain simultaneity of modernity and postmodernity, but also in a multiplicity of urban spaces.

To a great extent, what Jameson says of Terrorizer is also applicable to Yang's two subsequent attempts at remapping Taipei--A Confucian Confusion and Mahjong (1992, 131):

In our own postmodern world there is no longer a bourgeois or class-specific culture to be indicted, but rather a system-specific phenomenon: the various forms which reification and commodification and the corporate standardizations of media society imprint on human subjectivity and existential experience. This is the sense in which Terrorizer's characters . . . dramatize the maiming of the subject in late capitalism, or . . . indict something like the failure of the subject under the new system to constitute itself in the first place.

Both A Confucian Confusion and Mahjong seek to dramatize the maiming of the subject and the sheer impossibility of reconstitute subjectivity in the postmodern world. A film intended to "examine the moral poverty of the post-economic boom society" (R. Chen 1994, 36), A Confucian Confusion starts playfully. The initial title and credit sequence is superimposed on a soundtrack of the press conference, in which Birdy, an acclaimed Taiwanese "master" (dashi) of theater, is asked why he is rehearsing a "postmodern comedy" set in Taipei (Yang Dechang 1994). The point Yang wants to make in the film is fairly simple: each character in his

postmodern comedy is confused, and each only acts out the assigned role without knowing the meaning and significance of his or her superficial, spontaneous, and oftentimes self-contradictory performances. The theme of confusion is carried over to Mahjong, in which Alison, a "poor little rich girl" from Taipei, who is completely confused and does not know exactly what she wants, is meant to represent every postmodern urbanite: "In a sense we are all like her," so Edward Yang explains in an interview (Chiao 1996a, 26).

As Bérénice Reynaud rightly points out, in Mahjong, "Taipei, a city invaded by franchises of the Hard Rock Cafe and pidgin English, has become a playground for transnational greed" (1996, 31). An early scene of the Hard Rock Cafe in Taipei, where some guitars reputedly belonging to the Beatles are on display, has already presented Taipei as a hybridized global city. Inside the cafe, the half-drunk Jay uses English to introduce "Hong Kong," a handsome employee in his high-fashion hair salon, to his "friend" Ginger, a white lady who previously owned a dubious escort service. Markus comes in with Alison, his new Taiwanese girlfriend, but their meeting with Ginger is cut short by the unexpected arrival of Marthe (Virginie Ledoyen), a naive yet stubborn French young woman who chases Markus all the way from Paris. "Everybody here speaks English!"--so exclaims Markus, who tries to explain to Marthe why he had to leave London when he had lost his job there. Near the end of the film, Markus further explains to Marthe why he enjoys working in Taipei: "These people have so much money. . . . In ten years the city will be the center of the world. The future of Western civilization lies right here." However, Marthe chooses Luen Luen, a kind-hearted local interpreter who has helped her all the time, over "the foreign devils [who] are simply too obnoxious, nasty, greedy, ridiculous or surreal" (Reynaud 1996, 31). In the final scene, Marthe

and Luen Luen embrace and kiss for the first time, in the middle of the busy street of a typical night market, thus conveying the director's hopeful endorsement of cultural hybridity in Taipei.

"Cultural hybridization," Pieterse writes, "refers to the mixing of Asian, African, American, European cultures: hybridization is the making of global culture as a global *mélange*" (1995, 60). Mahjong constructs Taipei precisely as a city of such global *mélange*, where the global languages--English and French--are intermingled with the local tongues--Taiwanese (a dialect denoting a speaker's lower-class identity) and Mandarin (spoken, respectively, with a heavy Taiwan or Hong Kong accent or with a standard Northern Chinese accent, subtly suggesting the origin of each speaker). Parallel to the Hard Rock Cafe in Mahjong, we also see a pub scene in A Confucian Confusion, but this time Yang's *mise-en-scène* features two government employees talking to each other against a wall-size projection screen showing a television broadcast of a women's basketball game in the U. S. Apart from such verbal and visual displays of a global *mélange* in Taipei, Yang's films often emphasize rock music and popular songs from the West. For instance, in his epic film A Brighter Summer Day (Gulingjie shaonian sharen shijian, 1991), a group of rebellious Taipei youngsters listen to and imitate the latest recordings of Elvis Presley. As Yang recalls, in the 1960s, rock signified anti-communism and functioned as a pro-government instrument that reinforced the alliance with the U. S., but it was the subversive side of rock that affected his generation.

As in the case of global *mélange* generally and rock music specifically, cultural hybridization may function in the same way as Bakhtin's carnival does, staging a chaotic show of simultaneity and multiplicity, and in the process effecting "a blurring, destabilization or subversion of that hierarchical relationship" between center and margin, global and local,

hegemony and minority, political establishment and counter- or sub-culture (Pieterse 1995, 56). In Mahjong the blurring or destabilization of the power relationship in Taipei has not escaped the observation of European cosmopolitans. Markus, for one, considers it extremely ironic that, given the heyday of nineteenth-century Western imperialist conquests around the world, the center of "Western" civilization would be relocated to the East (the formerly marginal or peripheral) in the twenty-first century.

Yang's consistent use of blurring, destabilizing, at times even contestatory hybridity in his remapping of Taipei must be self-evident by now. From That Day to Mahjong, he has maintained a critical stance toward the hegemonic discourse of capitalism. "Taiwanese society has changed for the worst in the last ten years," he asserts in a 1997 interview. "On the outside, it's all money, all wealth; everyone is putting on new costumes, new clothes, new fashion, whatever. It shows we are well off. But on the inside we are going the other way" (Kraicer and Roosen-Runge 1998, 53). Yang has made his subversive intent extremely vocal by holding Taiwan's government responsible for outrageous religious scams and widespread underground criminal operations. "The Taiwanese economy is about 40% an underground economy," he claims. "If this situation isn't corrected, then I would say the government is similar to a mob" (Kraicer and Roosen-Runge 1998, 53). Yang's suspicion of the government is most pronounced when he declares that he has abandoned efforts to show his films commercially in Taiwan; instead, the audience he has in mind is "just cinema-going people wherever they are," especially those in Japan, Europe, and North America (Kraicer and Roosen-Runge 1998, 55). Indeed, Yang has very much positioned himself as a "hybridized" and globe-trotting cosmopolitan (living at least part-time in the U. S.), keeping a close eye on the local situation in Taiwan while forging a transnational cinephile affinity with his audiences

around the world. Given the transnational pattern of financing, distributing, and exhibiting his latest films and his unfailing attention to the global/local, it is only appropriate that we approach Yang's Taipei a global city, a site of global *mélange*.

Farewell, "South" (Nanguo): Taipei, Heterotopias, Postmodernity

There is yet a further connection between cultural hybridization and recent configurations of Taipei in Taiwan cinema. From the perspective of Homi Bhabha's work on postcolonial studies, Pieterse suggests that hybridity can be a condition tantamount to alienation, a state of homelessness. Indeed, due to specific cultural and political situations in Taiwan, alienation and homelessness have been two recurring themes in urban films set in Taipei. Our Neighbors (Jietou xiangwei, 1963), for example, features a group of "homeless" mainlanders who interact with native Taiwanese to build a new communal life in Taipei. Both Early Train from Taipei (Taibei fade zaobanche, 1964) and Kang-Ting's Tour of Taipei (Kang Ding you Taibei, 1969) dramatize the sense of alienation felt by protagonists--female as well as male--from rural Taiwan who arrive in Taipei and literally lost themselves in the big city. Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing? (Da cuoche, 1983) and Two Sign-Painters (Liangge youqi jiang, 1990) further explore the impact of Taiwan's urbanization and economic boom on marginal characters (a mute veteran and an aboriginal youth) in the metropolise. In varying degrees, Taipei films like these reflect on the process of hybridization in Taiwan's ethnoscaples and ideoscaples over half a century (P. Cheng 1995, 130-6; Lin Wenchi 1995).

In the 1970s, Taiwan filmmakers were obsessed with images of Taiwan as a legitimate nation-state that claims a long history of Chinese (read "mainland") culture (Lin Wenchi 1998). The deep anxiety over homelessness and rootlessness that troubles many hybrid

characters in Home, Sweet Home (Jia zai Taibei, 1970) is therefore diagnosed as "curable" through their voluntary abandonment of their otherwise promising careers in the U. S. and their whole-hearted participation in the rebuilding of Taiwan. In the 1980s, New Taiwan Cinema sought to reinstate the values of nature and the native soil in opposition to urban alienation and disillusionment, thus projecting a series of conceptual binaries, such as rural and urban, tradition and modernity, innocence and corruption, stability and disorder. The images of Taipei that emerge from New Taiwan Cinema are chaotic, kaleidoscopic, though at times energetic and visually enticing. Whereas Home, Sweet Home features an initial montage sequence of the dragon dance, Peking opera masks, and traditional variety shows, all encoding Taipei as a city saturated in Chinese culture, in Super Citizens (Chaoji shimin, 1985), the initial montage sequence of monumental structures in Taipei (among them Yuanshan Hotel, Sun Yat-sen Memorial, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, Chung-hwa Shopping Center, as well as temples, mosques, and churches) aims to convey a sense of disorientation and alienation on the one hand--which is enhanced by a scene of a madman directing traffic outside the Taipei Railway Station--and to preserve public memory in a collage fashion on the other. In the 1990s, nevertheless, urban cinema in Taiwan increasingly configures Taipei as a globalized city, its space hardly recognizable, its identity hybridized and dubious, and its history swept away by the incessant flows of transnational capital.¹ In brief, Lin Wenchi (Lin Wenqi) concludes, if new Taiwan cinema attempts, by way of emphasizing the experience of Taiwan's native soil

¹. In his study of the historical transformation of Taipei's images in Taiwan cinema, Ching Chih Lee (Li Qingzhi) goes further than Lin Wenchi and offers this periodization: (1) the reconstruction period of the 1950s; (2) the sealing-off period of the 1960s; (3) the void period of the 1970s; (4) the breakaway period of 1980s; and (5) the puzzle period of the 1990s. Each period is dominated by certain urban images and architectural styles: (1) Japanese colonial architecture and shanty-town structures; (2) palatial architecture and national

and its people's (often repressed) memory of the past, to prove that Taiwan is no longer the imagined "China" of the 1970s, Taiwan cinema of the 1990s informs its audience, by means of the manifestation of "postmodern urban spaces," that Taiwan is no longer the imagined "Taiwan" of the past decade (1998, 110).

What Lin calls "postmodern urban spaces"--not all of them necessarily "postmodern," though, as should be clear below--cover a wide range of new images and perceptions of the city. First, moving from rural Taiwan to urban Taipei, one is said to experience a transition from the "bird's space" to the "worm's space" (chong de kongjian) (Zhan Hongzhi 1996, 20). The former is typically captured by Hou Hsiao-hsien's long-take landscape from a static camera, whereas the latter characterized by claustrophobia engendered by the loss of the horizontal view of a vast span in the countryside. Examples of the worm's space--or what Jameson terms "space of confinement" in connection with Terrorizer--abound in A Confucian Confusion and Mahjong, as well as in Vive l'amour. In Tsai's film, three Taipei loners find a temporary "home" in an empty apartment for sale without understanding one another or securing any stable relationship.

Second, home, which was earlier imagined as a self-stabilizing entity, for instance in Osmanthus Alley and Passion in Late Spring, both analyzed in Chapter 6, has been transfigured as an alienated, dystopian space, or even a "schizo-space," in which one no longer feels emotionally attached to anyone or anything, not to mention feeling psychologically "at home" (Keith and Pile 1993, 2-3). In Mahjong, Red Fish's father twice disappeared from home, hiding from his wife and his creditors, and eventually committing a double suicide with his new mistress. In Rebel of the Neon God (Qingshaonian Nezha, 1992), Hsiao Kang would

construction methods; (3) mansions and orphanages; (4) diverse city and garbage mountain;

rather keep away from home and seek excitement in a hotel room, a video game arcade, and a skating ring. In The River (Heliu, 1997), the gay father and son both seek sexual pleasure outside their home and other socially sanctioned places, thereby collapsing the traditional spatial demarcation of inside and outside. In Tonight Nobody Goes Home (Jintian bu huijia, 1996), practically everyone in the family has left home, father, mother, daughter and son all pursuing their sexual interests elsewhere.

Third, urban adventurers can create a new kind of space when riding a scooter or driving a car at high speed. In films like Goodbye, South, Goodbye (Nanguo zaijian, nanguo, 1996), Taipei youngsters experience a rare sense of freedom, control, or even agency when they race their motors through the alienating and depressing urban landscape, which appears from inside the car windows as distorted, flattened, compressed, eerie--a spectacle of monstrosity devoid of any traces of human value (Li Zhenya 1998, 131). The space thus experienced is, understandably, linked to the motifs of rebellion and transgression, as in the case of Rebel of the Neon God. Furthermore, this new sense of fluid time-space is visualized by thoroughfares and bridges that cover the city like a giant web and transform it--especially at night--into an unfathomable labyrinth. In Treasure Island (Zhiyao weini huo yitian, 1993), a myriad of flashing neon signs and shiny headlights of speedy cars foreground Taipei in a MTV fashion (R. Chen and Liao 1995, 151).

Fourth, unlike the street-level view favored by New Taiwan Cinema, which at least facilitates a sense of proximity, legibility, and therefore subjectivity, as in Taipei Story and Daughter of the Nile (Niluo he de nüer, 1987), the 1990s saw the emergence of a new sense of space associated with the aerial view. In The Red Lotus Society (Feixia A Da, 1994) and

and (5) fringe spaces and overpasses. See C. C. Lee 1995.

Super Citizen Kuo (Chaoji da guomin, 1995), the aerial view surveys the Taipei landscape from above, at once rendering a breath-taking feel of superiority, a titillating jouissance of voyeurism, and an effect of complete distanciation and defamiliarization between the viewer and the city. The visual and psychological effect in question here resembles what de Certeau theorizes about the view from the summit of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Once on top, one feels that the "bewitching world" below has been "processed" into a text that lies before one's eyes, but this readable "panorama-city" is but a representation, an optical artifact, a visual simulacrum (1984, 92-3).

Fifth, the digital space, equally imaginary if no less surreal than the aerial view, is produced through characters' constant use of telephones, mobile phones, pagers, fax machines, KTV, video games, and the like. In Good Men, Good Women, a fax machine keeps sending the female protagonist, from an unknown source, pages of her diaries written three years ago, thus blurring her perception of time-space and merging her own private memories with the historical drama she is rehearsing on stage. Jean Baudrillard's words seem a fitting description here: "Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium From medium to medium, the real is volatilized . . . [and] becomes reality for its own sake" (1988, 144-5). As a matter of fact, a reproductive medium like telephone or photography has already been used to produce such hyperreality in urban experience in film such as Terrorizer. In both Terrorizer and Good Men, Good Women, simulacra and the hyperreal created by modern technology combine to weave out a postmodern text.

Sixth, a "postmodern liminal space" may be obtained from the interstices between public and private, old and new, demolished and reconstructed, natural and artificial. The best

examples of this include the construction sites of the city park and the fast-rail system (MRT) captured or alluded to in Vive l'amour and Mahjong. Unlike public spaces of consumption (such as hotels, restaurants, shopping centers, and shopping streets), the liminal space simultaneously symbolizes despair and hope, destruction and regeneration, disappearance and reinscription--in short, a space beyond good and evil, beyond hatred and love, beyond any fixed meaning or signification.

Concluding Remarks: Postmodern, Postnational, Transnational

It is worth noting that Lin Wenchi's elaborate catalogue of postmodern urban spaces--to which I have added my own examples and interpretations above--serves to drive home this argument: namely, in its new representation of Taipei, Taiwan cinema of the 1990s documents the disappearance of what Henri Lefebvre calls the "absolute space," a space that has acquired fixed social and political meaning over a long period of historical accumulation, a space manufactured for the express purpose of legitimization of and identification with the nation-state (Lin Wenchi 1998, 112). Along with the disappearance of the absolute space, Lin continues, the clearly articulated sense of totality (history) and belonging (identity) has also vanished in recent Taiwan cinema. Not surprisingly, all this sounds postmodern. Indeed, if we follow Frederick Buell and envision "a postmodern world of disaggregated production, global population flows, and heightened international circulation of a smorgasbord of cultural simulacra" (1994), then Taipei will definitely appear to be a postmodern city.

The final question I like to raise is how we position the postmodern vis-à-vis the postnational and transnational. In a section titled "Taipei or Not Taipei" in his essay on Chinese cinema and nationhood, Chris Berry argues that, through the enunciation in City of

Sadness (1989), “we have a collective self that is hybridized and riven with difference, a subject that cannot speak, and at least the shadow of a post-national imagined community founded on hybrid space” (1994, 59). It is widely acknowledged that Hou Hsiao-hsien’s landmark film fundamentally undermines the legitimacy of the Nationalist government’s nation-building project over a forty-year period (Yip 1994). But if we accept Berry’s claim that taiyu or “Taiwanese” is a terminology that has “nationalized the dialect” (1994, 61), then Hou’s films, with their trademark use of the Taiwanese dialect amidst other languages and dialects, may not aim so much at postnationalization as renationalization. In other words, with his insistence on rewriting Taiwan history from the perspective of those Taiwanese who are deprived the right to speak but who are deeply rooted in the land, Hou does not simply go beyond or abandon the national (in the sense of nation-state) but rather returns to what is to him truly national (in the sense of nation-people). This emphasis on Taiwanese experience, along with other cinematic achievements by Hou and his generation of filmmakers, has led Douglas Kellner to believe that “the new Taiwan cinema has produced . . . a distinctive national cinema” (1998: 101). If we pursue Kellner’s line of thinking further, the kind of national cinema represented by New Taiwan Cinema—with its concentration on Taiwan—would differ diametrically from the kind sponsored by the Nationalist regime—with its focus on Chinese culture—during the martial law period. If so, New Taiwan Cinema cannot be adequately described as simply “postnational.”

Detached from the iconography of the land and criss-crossed by the forever changing hybrid urban spaces, Taipei projected as a global postmodern city in more recent Taiwan films appears to have at best a tenuous connection with the nation, regardless of whether the nation in question is imagined as Chinese or Taiwanese. Does this lack of interest in a distinct

national, cultural, or any other collective identity in new urban cinema from Taiwan finally bring us to the terrain of the postnational? Do these new urban films belong to a postnational cinema? If so, how does the state's role in providing subsidy that sustains the production of several of these new urban films complicate the notion of the postnational? Given this symbiosis between film production and state regulation in Taiwan, is it more accurate for us to see Taiwan cinema as part of a transnational cinema—not just transnational Chinese cinema that connects Hong Kong and Taiwan (Lu 1997) but also—and increasingly so—a transnational cinema that include other Asian nations such as Japan? In conclusion, the relationship between postmodern, postnational, and transnational is one area in Chinese film studies that deserve our further investigation.