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**Yang Dechang's urban soul:
director's early films**

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前言

在七零年代至八零年代初，台湾社会经历了很大的改变。

从六十年代末到七十年代，台湾开始了快速的经济增长，提供新台湾电影一个发展和培育的环境。

尽管台湾政治和外交边缘化程度越来越高，但台湾曾经历经济发展和工业化过程仍然剧烈的改变了社会。

教育得到改善，人们可以从更广泛和更高品质的教育中受益。

工业化和经济增长扩大了城市与乡村之间的差距。结果，城市人口增加，中产阶级人数也增加。

更好的教育和经济稳定带来了新的需求。八十年代初期，环境保护，女权主义和其他社会运动变得活跃并开始蓬勃发展。

人们认为有必要重新定义台湾及其国际地位，因为自 1971 年台湾被赶出联合国以来，越来越多的国家已经结束与台湾的外交关系并承认中华人民共和国作为中国唯一的官方政府。

蒋介石于 1975 年去世，而此一事件进一步加速了改革过程。他的儿子蒋经国在 1978 年接替了他，并开始允许更加自由化的文化表达。

尽管有了这些巨大改变，但戒严仍然存在，国民党则透过审查和控制媒体的方式，继续保持对社会和选举共识的强大控制力。

然而，越来越多的社会力量转化为需要定义或重新定义国家身份的共识。新一代既不对“反击中国”感兴趣也不会无条件地接受每一个西方的影响。

相反的，他们觉得有必要重新定义西方与台湾之间的关系，根据自己的世代和角色来探讨台湾历史，试图找寻它的根源，以发展更美好的未来。

1982 年被视为是台湾新电影诞生的一年，也同样是台湾新电影浪潮的开始。在此之前，台湾的电影几乎都是被政府的宣传政策影片还有商业影片主宰着，像是功夫动作片以及爱情电影。到后来，民国七零年代后到八零年代初，因为观众的兴趣越来越缺乏，使得台湾的电影市场变得逐渐缩小。情况愈来愈恶化，台湾电影甚至失去了海外市场，国内的市场则是充斥着香港以及好莱屋电影。

这个情况达到了危机关头。一些大手笔经费的电影在票房表现不佳之外，中影公司(中影股份有限公司，政府拥有的主要电影制作公司)决定施行一个新的政策—新人政策。新政策执行也接着大手笔资金电影的评论：“低资金/低风险政策”电影会比那些政策宣传背景且不断票房惨败又花钱的电影更受喜爱。

小野和吴念真当时已经是作家和编剧家。他们是在第一群人之间从中影公司招募而来的。他们很自由的移动，于是他们提出了一种仅用少少的资金的电影，在当时成为了新一代导演的测试前锋。

《光陰的故事》在 1982 年发行。这部电影是由四集组成，每一集都是由不同的年轻导演导出的作品。这部电影因为它的新颖，所以被视为是具有革命性质的电影。它与先前一些英雄性和戏剧故事叙述性不同，它引出了一些特定的特色，这些特色将会是接下来新台湾电影制作的重要题目。电影主题是从那些很真实的生活态度，很平凡无奇的日子所发想。没有特别的目的地去感动观众。《光陰的故事》是第一个尝试去演出台湾过去生活样貌的电影。第二集《指望》也是楊德昌导演的处女作品。

电影的热卖鼓舞了中影公司去支持新导演，接下来的 1983 年，另一个混合电影上映《兒子的大玩偶》（1983）。这部电影由三集组成，是根据黃春明的三部乡土文学短篇小说拍摄的。

在这几十年的旅程，新台湾电影的导演陆续产出成功的电影。事实上，新台湾电影的成长过程并不是那麼顺利，在刚开始的成功之后，这股风潮很快就退却了。

很多票房惨跌发生，在热潮以后，观众开始对这种知识性的电影感到乏味，反而更喜欢好莱屋以及香港的一些好作品。虽然有些国际电影节给新台湾电影很多赞赏，但也有电影评论家说新台湾电影不够商业化。

有些电影现在被视为这个电影潮流的象征，但在那个时候的票房却表现不佳，像是《青梅竹馬》、《風櫃來的人》以及《冬冬的假期》。所以制作公司对于新电影的投资越来越少。电影应变成只是一种商品，而不是艺术品。

其他重要不容忽视的因素也包括台湾电影文化的素养，还有政府对于文化作品的强大压力。导演以及作家必须用力争取正式官方的认可，并让电影各方面看起来都像是艺术，而不是纯粹商业用途的工具。

审查制度的问题也逐渐浮现，导演被指控暴露台湾不好的一面，并创造出国家坏印象。《戀戀風塵》这个作品当时因为被指控传达台湾负面的印象而被禁播。

1947 年，曾经被执行的军事管制法被废除。同年，台湾电影发表宣言出版了。这篇宣言的名字是《民国七十六年台湾电影宣言》。

张英进在他们的书（Encyclopedia of Chinese Film）说道，不管是什麼原因造成，新台湾电影浪潮在 1987 年已经结束。然而，这个宣言不代表着电影浪潮的结束，而是强调在审查制度以及军事管制法的压力下，它的开拓旅程结束了。

一位学者和作家（Douglas Kellner）接受了这样的想法在他的论文《八零年代新台湾电影》里，分别出台湾新浪潮跟新台湾电影。他认为虽然浪潮在 1987 年结束，但是它

制造出了很多条件帮助后续新台湾电影的发展。换句话说就是，如果真的说新浪潮结束了，那也代表九零年代的电影那些高能见度以及充满机会的精神持续延续，不管先前是怎麼样的起起落落。事实上，在浪潮被视为结束的两年后，侯孝賢的《悲情城市》在1989年威尼斯电影节前获得了金狮奖，是前所未有台湾电影历史上的荣耀。

必须承认的是，不管如何，1987年后，有些许改变。台湾新电影失去了它特别的社群结构以及一群相同人格特质、相同群体的导演、编剧和所有艺术家的关系连结，这个断裂并不是出自于风格或理想的冲突，而是来自于导演们需要找到他们在影业里专属的空间。他们确切感觉到需要去实验以及独立地订出自己的电影风格。现在军事法律已被解除，他们能有个多自由发挥的空间，他们想要独自订定出主题而不是群体讨论。然而他们的合作将会持续好几年。像是吴念真同时是侯导演和杨导演的编剧。

台湾电影中，关于岛屿的过去及其历史的问题、定义自己的文化和民族认同的必要性、重新定义以前在电影中缺席或在台湾文化中，被压制的当前社会问题是经常被当作主题的题材。对于过去的反思类型的题材，通常以电影制作者以自传体、童年记忆或个人经历的形式呈现。

使用自传体记录真实事件反映了重建被任何政治迫害剥夺权利、或政府宣传活动的集体历史记忆的必要性。这类型的代表作品有以下：侯孝賢所制作的《冬冬的假期》(1984)、《童年往事》(1985)、《戀戀風塵》(1986)，吴念真所製作的《多桑》(1994)，楊德昌的作品《牯嶺街少年殺人事件》(1991)。侯孝賢导演的《悲情城市》(1989)是第一个勇敢挑战228事件的电影，对台湾的电影历史是个划世代的突破。

新台湾电影导演试图处理个人发展、现代化以及都市化造成的问题。传统的大家庭不再，新型态的家庭产生。社会阶级被重新安排之后，都市中的中产阶级变成主要的阶级。台湾渐渐开始透过商业连结，而非借由政治或民主关系去重塑与其他国家的关系。因此，台湾受到国外文化的影响非常显著，尤其是来自美国或日本的文化，因为与这些国家的贸易关系。

人际关系的梳远、不平等、犯罪、物质主义和城乡差距，这些主题被记录在杨导的《海滩的一天》(1983)、《青梅竹马》(1985)、以及《恐怖份子》(1986)。

少数族群在屏幕上找到发声的空间，他们的情况往往处于不利地位甚至是被边缘化，成为被社会批判的触发因素。妇女在资本主义社会中的角色、及其遭受历史和社会变革的后果，在杨德昌的电影中具有重要意义。导演着重于女性从古代价值观、父权制传统、旧的刻板印象及束缚中解放的必要性。

杨导演的镜头专注于城市中的中产阶级，故事的背景大致上都设在台湾，而侯导演主要关注于农村无产阶级。城乡差距和个人成长经历也是侯导演最爱的主题。

Hong Guo-Juin 指出，侯导演和杨导演的作品风格和主题往往反映整个社会脉动台湾新电影的动态，并且可以代表新台湾电影中的两个不同的分流。

尽管过去《牯岭街少年杀人事件》的“介入”，杨德昌导演仍然专注于当代的台湾城市生活、其新兴的中产阶级文化、社会问题诸如经济发展、日益疏远的大都市台北等等。他早期的电影，《海滩的一天》、《青梅竹马》、《恐怖份子》，都处理这些主题。不过，杨德昌后来的电影，《独立时代》(1994)、《麻将》(1996)和《一一》(2000)也都是可以当作标志性的。

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INTRODUCTION

During the Seventies and the early Eighties of the Twentieth Century, Taiwanese society went through a lot of changes.

The rapid economic growth experienced by the island from the late Sixties through Seventies, provides the context in which the New Taiwan Cinema could be nurtured.

Despite its increasing political and diplomatic marginalization, Taiwan experienced a great economic development and industrialization, that in turn change its society dramatically. School system improvements allowed people to benefit from a more extensive and qualitative better education. Industrialization and economic growth widened the gap between cities and countries. Consequently, the urban population increased along with the middle-class prominent role in the society.

Better education and relative economic stability brought about new needs. Environmental protection, feminist and other social movements became active and flourished in the early Eighties.¹

People felt the need to redefine Taiwan and its international position. Since 1971, when Taiwan was ousted from the United Nations, more and more countries ended their diplomatic relations with the island, indeed recognizing the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the only official government.²

Chiang Kai-shek's death in 1975 further accelerated this process of change. When his son Chiang Ching-kuo succeeded him in 1978, more liberalized cultural expression started to be allowed. Despite these important changes, martial law was still in force and Nationalist Party continued to maintain a strong control over social and electoral consensus by means of censorship and media direction.

However, the increasing social dynamism translates into a growing need to define Taiwan's national identity.³ New generations were neither interested in 'fight back to China' nor they were prone to accept unconditionally western influences. On the contrary, they felt the need to redefine the relationship between the West and Taiwan itself,⁴ and, in order to develop a better future, they tried to find Taiwan's roots looking at its history.

¹Guido SAMARANI, *La Cina del Novecento. Dalla fine dell'Impero ad oggi.*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2004, p. 371.

² LIN Ying-Chia, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Development and Decline of New Taiwan Cinema, 1982-1986*, PhD diss., Denton, University of North Texas, 1993, p. 51.

³ Guido SAMARANI, *La Cina del Novecento...*, op.cit. p. 373.

⁴ LIN Ying-Chia, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Development and Decline...*, op. cit. p. 52.

1982 is acknowledged as the birth year of the Taiwan New Cinema (*Taiwan xin dianying*), which is also referred to as Taiwan New wave. Up to that year, the Taiwanese films' market was dominated by state-sponsored, propagandistic and commercial films, such as kung-fu action films and romance movies. Moreover, late Seventies and early Eighties saw Taiwanese films' market become smaller and smaller because of a reduction in audience's interest. To further worsen the situation, Taiwanese films lost their overseas market, and the domestic one was flooded with Hong Kong's and Hollywood's films.

The situation reached a point of crisis. Several big budget movies didn't do well at the box office and the CMPC (Central Motion Picture Company, the main state-owned film production company) decided to implement a new policy called *xinren zhengce* (policy of the newcomers).⁵ New strategies were implemented along with a substantial spending review: since movies with a propagandistic background entail high production costs and have been proved to be repeatedly box-office failures, type of 'low budget/low risk policy'⁶ films were preferred.

Xiao Ye⁷ and Wu Nien-jen⁸, at the time already writers and screenwriters, are among the first to be recruited by the production company. They proposed a portmanteau film realized with a very limited budget that at the same time served as a testing ground for a new generation of directors.

In Our Time (*Guangyin de gushi*, 光陰的故事, Tao Dechen, Yang Dechang, Ke Yizheng, Zhang Yi) was released in 1982. The film, composed of four episodes each of which directed by a different young director, is considered a revolutionary film because of its innovations. It departs from the heroic and melodramatic narratives, typical of the previous films, introducing some peculiar features that will become recurrent in subsequent New Taiwan Cinema's productions.⁹ Filmic themes, treated with a realistic attitude, are prosaic and drawn from daily life. *In Our Time*, is the first film attempting to treat

⁵ Marco DALLA GASSA, Dario TOMASI, *Il cinema dell'estremo oriente: Cina, Corea del Sud, Hong Kong, Taiwan, dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, Torino, UTET Università, 2010, p.408.

⁶ James UDDEN, "Taiwan", HJORT, Mette, PETRIE, Duncan (edited by), *The Cinema of small Nations*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p.152.

⁷ Hsiao Yeh, pen name of Li Yuan (31 October 1951) is a Taiwanese novelist and screenwriter. Hired by the Central Motion Picture Corporation in 1981, Hsiao Yeh collaborates during the years with many New Taiwan Cinema's directors.

⁸ Born in 1952, Wu Nien-jen (also Wu Nianzhen) is a famous scriptwriter, director, actor and author. He is considered one of the founders of the New Taiwan Cinema. Hired in 1978 by the CMPC as screenwriter, he contributed to create some of the most representative features of the movement such as *The Sandwich Man*, *That day, on the beach* and a *City of Sadness*. He has also acted in a number of films, like the remarkable performance in Edward Yang's *Yi Yi: a one and a two* (*Yi yi*, 一一, 2000).

⁹ ZHANG Yingjin, *Chinese National Cinema*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004, p. 244.

Taiwan's past.¹⁰ The second episode, 'Expectations' (*Zhiwang*, 指望, 1983), is directed by Yang Dechang (Edward Yang).

The movie's box-office success encouraged CMPC to support new directors, and the following year another portmanteau film was released: *The Sandwich Man* (*Erzi de da wan'ou*, 兒子的大玩偶, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Zeng Zhuangxiang, Wan Ren, 1983). The film, composed by three episodes, was drawn from three short stories written by the 'nativist' writer Huang Chunming (Hwang Chun-ming).

The same year was released Yang Dechang's *That day, on the beach* (*Haitan de yi tian*, 海灘的一天, 1983), usually acknowledged as the first full-length feature of the Taiwan New wave.¹¹

Over the course of the decade, directors continue to produce films with alternate success. In fact, New Taiwan Cinema's growth process was not smooth: after its initial fortune, this new cinematic trend's popularity fell off soon.

Some serious box office failures occurred: after a brief enthusiasm, the audience grew tired of these 'intellectual' films, preferring Hollywood's and Hong Kong's escapist productions. Although some international film festivals gave New Taiwan Cinema a lot of acclaim, film critics accused these movies of not being sufficiently commercial. Some works, now considered emblems of this cinematic trend, at that time performed poorly at the box office: *Taipei Story* (*Qingmei zhuma*, 青梅竹馬, Yang Dechang, 1984), *Boys from Fengkuei* (*Fenggui lai de ren*, 風櫃來的人, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1983) and *A Summer at Grandpa's* (*Dong de jiaqi*, 冬冬的假期, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1984) among the others.¹² Thus, production companies invested less and less in New Cinema's movies. The lack of a proper film culture on the island further worsened the already precarious situation.

Censorship problems arose: directors were accused of exposing the negative sides of Taiwan, creating a bad image of the country. The production of *Dust in the Wind* (*Lianlian fengchen*, 戀戀風塵, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1986), for example, was blocked because of the pessimistic image of the nation the film was accused to convey.

¹⁰ Corrado NERI, *Il Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese: Breve storia del Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese 1982-1987*, in "AsiaMedia", 2016, <https://bit.ly/2OtBIFn>, retrieved Sept 28, 2018.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² LIN Ying-Chia, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Development and Decline...*, op. cit. p. 77.

In 1987 martial law, that was in force since 1947, was abrogated. The same year Taiwan Cinema Manifesto (*Mingguo qishiliu nian Taiwan dianying xuanyan*) was published.¹³

Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao in their *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* state: 'For whatever causes, New Taiwan Cinema as a cohesive concept was dead by 1987.'¹⁴ However, could be argued that this manifesto did not mark the end of the cinematic trend, rather it underlines the end of its pioneering period under the pressure of censorship and martial law.¹⁵

Douglas Kellner embrace this concept in his essay 'New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s' distinguishing 'Taiwanese new wave' from 'New Taiwan Cinema'. He argues that while the former is generally considered to be ended in 1987 as we said, however, it has produced the preconditions to develop a real New Taiwanese Cinema. In other words, if it is true that the new wave as such ended, it is also true that in the Nineties a cinema highly visible and rich in possibilities continued to exist, regardless of the earlier movement.¹⁶ In fact, just two years after the presumed death of the cinematic trend, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A City of Sadness* (*Beiqing chengshi*, 悲情城市, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1989) won the Golden Lion at the 1989 Venice Film Festival, an unprecedented honour in the history of Taiwan's cinema.¹⁷

It must be acknowledged, however, that after 1987 some changes occur: Taiwan new wave lose its peculiar community structure. Relationships among directors, screenwriters and all the artists involved, evolve from a cohesive group to the emergence of definite personalities. It is not a fracture due to stylistic or ideological contrasts, but this change is more owed to directors' desire to find their own cinematic space. They feel the need to experiment and to independently define their own cinematographic style. Now that the yoke of the martial law is levied and more freedom of expression is allowed, they want to deal with themes not as part of a group but as independent authors. However, their collaboration will continue through the years: consider, for example, that Wu Nien-jen works as screenwriter for both Hou

¹³ Corrado NERI, *Il Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese: Breve storia del Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese 1982-1987*, in "AsiaMedia", 2016, <https://bit.ly/2OtBIFn>, retrieved Sept 28,2018.

¹⁴ ZHANG Yingjin, XIAO Zhiwei, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, New York and London, Routledge, 1998, p. 59.

¹⁵ Corrado NERI, *Il Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese: Breve storia del Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese 1982-1987*, in "AsiaMedia", 2016, <https://bit.ly/2OtBIFn>, retrieved Sept 28,2018.

¹⁶ Douglas KELLNER, 'New Taiwan Cinema in the 80s', in *Jump Cut*, no. 42, December 1998, pp. 101-115. Retrieved from *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1998, 2006, <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC42folder/80sTaiwanCinema.html>, retrieved Sept 28, 2018.

¹⁷ ZHANG Yingjin, XIAO Zhiwei, *Encyclopedia of...*, op. cit. p. 59.

and Yang and for the latter will also play the role of NJ, in *Yi yi: a one and a two* (*Yi yi*, 一一, Yang Dechang, 2000).¹⁸

New Taiwan Cinema played an important role in helping to reexamine Taiwan's culture developing a 'national cinema'. Recurrent themes concern questions about the past of the island, its history, the need to define a cultural and national identity, the necessity to redefine social problems previously absent in cinema or suppressed in Taiwanese culture at large. Introspection regarding the past, is often rendered in the form of filmmaker's own autobiography, childhood memories or personal experiences. The use of autobiography to record real facts, reflect the will to rebuild a collective historical memory deprived of any political distortion or governmental propaganda. Representative in that regard are Hou Hsiao-Hsien's already mentioned *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984), *A Time to Live, a Time to Die* (*Tongnian wangshi*, 童年往事, 1985), *Dust in the Wind* (Lianlian fengchen, 戀戀風塵, 1986), Wu Nien-jen's *A Borrowed Life* (*Duosang*, 多桑, 1994) and Yang Dechang's *A Brighter Summer Day* (*Gulingjie shaonian sharen shijian*, 牯嶺街少年殺人事件, 1991). *A City of Sadness* (*Beiqing chengshi*, 悲情城市, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 1989), was the first film who dared to depict the February 28th incident¹⁹, an epochal twist in Taiwan's filmic history.

New Taiwan Cinema's directors try to cope with the problems caused by industrial development, modernization and urbanization. The traditional extended family could no longer be supported, and new kinds of family were established. Social classes were rearranged and the urban middle-class become the prominent one. Taiwan's relationships with other nations were reshaped: business connections replaced political and diplomatic relations.

Therefore, influences from abroad became more obvious, especially those from American and Japanese culture, because of Taiwan's trade transactions with these states. Alienation of the human relationships, indifference, crime, materialism and the gap between city and country, are themes present in Yang's *That day, on the beach* (*Haitan de yitian*, 海灘的一天, 1983), *Taipei Story* (*Qingmei Zhuma*, 青梅竹馬, 1985) and *Terrorizers* (*Kongbu Fenzi*, 恐怖分子, 1986).

Minority groups find space on the screen and their situation, often underprivileged or marginalized become the trigger for social criticism.

¹⁸ Corrado NERI, *Il Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese: Breve storia del Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese 1982-1987*, in "AsiaMedia", 2016, <https://bit.ly/2OtBIFn>, retrieved Sept 28, 2018.

¹⁹ Also known as the 2.28 incident (二二八事件), was an anti-government uprising broke out in Taiwan in February 28, 1947 and that was violently suppressed by the army.

Women's role in capitalistic society and the consequences they suffer from historical and social changes acquire a huge importance in Yang Dechang's filmography. Often, they are represented split between ancient values, patriarchal heritage and the need of liberation from old stereotypes and impositions.

Yang's camera is focused on urban middle class, the story is always set in Taiwan, whereas Hou's principal concerns are proletarians in rural settings. Gap between city and country, and the experience of growing up are Hou's favorite themes.²⁰

Hong Guo-Juin notes that looking at Hou's and Yang's works, they could represent two distinct subgroups in New Taiwanese Cinema. The themes they confront in their movies are often mirrored in the entire movement's production.²¹

Despite an 'incursion' in the past with *A Brighter Summer Day*, Yang is focused on contemporary urban Taiwan and its emerging middle-class.

His early movies, *That Day, on the Beach*, *Taipei Story* and *Terrorizers* are emblematic in this sense, but also his later production deal with these themes: *A Confucian Confusion* (*Duli shidai*, 獨立時代, 1994), *Mahjong* (*Maijiang*, 麻將, 1996) and *Yi yi: a one and a two* (*Yi yi*, 一一, 2000).

Western influences in Yang's movies are clear: he studied and lived for many years in America, he watched western directors, Italian neorealists included. Michelangelo Antonioni's influences can be spotted in Yang's works (at least in his early movies). In *That day, on the beach*, *Taipei Story* and *Terrorizers* parallelisms with *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*, Antonioni, 1959), *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, Antonioni, 1962) and *Blow-up* (Antonioni, 1966) could be noticed here and there: disappearances, couples destroyed by money, a bewildering reality. Modernism and postmodernism are adjectives often referred to Yang's films.

On the contrary, Hou Hsiao-Hsien focus on Taiwan's rural past. He portrays the national transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. His works are influenced by nativist novels and his films share similar subjects with nativist literature (*xiangtu wenxue*).²² Hou's themes concern small villages, poor people belonging to the lower classes, the needs to find nation's roots and to restore a set of values destroyed by the rampant urbanization.

²⁰ LIN Ying-Chia, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Development and Decline...*, op. cit. p.80.

²¹ HONG Guo-Juin, *Taiwan Cinema: a contested Nation on screen*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p. 120.

²² Corrado NERI, *Taiwan: cinema e letteratura*, in "AsiaMedia", 2016, <https://bit.ly/2P4Gn8o>, retrieved Sept 28, 2018.

They also differ in their stylistic choices: Yang adopts an intricate narration with numerous flashbacks, manipulations of images and sounds, and a high degree of abstractness, whereas Hou's style is more realistic. He uses a steady camera favoring long and medium shots.

Despite their differences in themes (country and city, past and present, traditional and Westernization²³) and in the way they approach reality, both the directors try to reconfigure the nation's identity: Hou's temporal retrospection travels deep into the past, while Yang maps the spatial present of Taiwan.²⁴

It seems opportune to me to define the reasons that pushed me to delineate the analysis of Yang's works to the period 1983-1986. The motivations are several. First of all, Yang's early works (*That day, on the beach* (1983), *Taipei Story* (1984) and *Terrorizers* (1986)) are released in this period.

These three films are fully inserted in that experimental period that was the beginning of the New Taiwan Cinema. Collaboration among director was common. After 1987, directors begin to feel the need for well-defined spaces to express themselves. The time for collective films and mutual advices is over. Artists follow more solitary paths to define their identity as filmmakers and not as a group.

Secondly, Yang Dechang's stylistic development could be noticed through these three features. Western filmmakers' influence on the director's filmography is clear from the very beginning and his style is already far from the conception of traditional realism. However, *That day, on the beach's* narration, despite its strong ellipses and subsequent flashbacks, has not that turbulent rhythm and structural abstractness of *Terrorizers*, that is considered a self-reflexive, postmodern masterpiece.

In addition, they are representative of many of the themes that would run throughout Yang's later production. New forms of modernity never depicted before find place in these films: Taiwan's unique position, located between traditional and Western values, is the mirror of an urban middle class in the midst of redefining itself. A society that struggle to maintain an appropriate balance between old and new. The experience of this journey to modernity is filtered thanks to family and couple. The revolution that is happening outside has its effects on the private sphere of the characters. Often, women are agents of the action: depicted in their complexity, often they seek for emancipation. Relationships between men and women are investigate in their intricacy and redefined in modern way, using a prospective that

²³ It must be noted that the distinction is not so marked. Each director made 'incursion' in the other's 'field': Hou's *Daughter of the Nile* (*Niluohe de nü'er*, 尼羅河的女兒, 1987) and *Millennium Mambo* (*Qianxi manbo*, 千禧曼波, 2001), for example, are movies set in contemporary Taipei.

²⁴ HONG Guo-Juin, *Taiwan Cinema: a contested...*, op. cit. p.121.

distance itself from the traditional Confucianist's vision of the woman. Yang points out his perception of Taiwanese society on the cusp of great change by using the metaphor of the couple and of the family.

These three works are important because they portray a society in the depths of an epochal shift: the following film will be as much substantial as the former, but they will never be able to depict such an epoch. The Taipei portrayed in *A Confucian Confusion* or in *Mahjong* is a city already completely urbanized and overcome by globalization. Values bewilderment is still perceivable, but Taipei and its dwellers are no more realities in constant flux (or at least less than before). Moreover, martial law abrogation, over time will allow more freedom of contents, thus making works created before its annulment even more stunning

CHAPTER 1 - That day, on the beach.

That day, on the beach (*Haitan de yitian*, 海灘的一天) is Yang's first feature-length movie after his cinematic debut with *Expectations* (*Zhiwang*, 指望), the second episode of the portmanteau film *In Our Time* (*Guangyin de gushi*, 光陰的故事). Released in 1983, *Haitan de yitian* is considered as the film that marked the start of the New Taiwan Cinema also because of the innovations of the cinematic techniques adopted, which had never been seen before.¹

Although this is Yang's first full-length film, it already contains the main elements that will develop into director's stylistic signature. The experimental approach adopted here for the first time, will become recurrent, developing itself in a real cinematic style.

Some of the themes debated in *That day, on the beach* will be explored more in depth by the director's subsequent production. They substantially hinge on middle class struggle to find new value in the fast-changing environment of the urbanized city.

Particular attention is given to women. From his debut until his last work, Yang always analyzes and depicts female characters' universe with pointed interest.

1.1 The Country and the City

Yang sets *That Day, on the beach* in Taipei, telling a story that spans from the fifties through the eighties.² Exactly in this thirty-year period, Taiwan experiences a deep change, transforming itself from an agricultural to an industrial society. This change obviously has repercussions upon the social structure. Among the most important consequences of this evolution, there is the 'growing sociocultural gap'.³ Cities, more and more become the core of political, educational and commercial development. Urbanization increases (the agricultural population dropped from 56% in 1953 to 19% in 1983, when the film was released),⁴ most of the resources are concentrate in urban centers. Consequently, cities are

¹ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang: the first decade of his film career (1982-1991)*, PhD diss., University of Southern California, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1995, p.52.

² Ibidem p.63.

³ YIP June, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2004, p.182.

⁴ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. p.63.

perceived as more cosmopolitan while countryside is considered as the place in which more traditional ways of life persist.

It is, thus, clear how the dismantling of the agricultural social structure, is accompanied with the erosion of the established values of authority, cooperation, and diligence that were always observed in rural areas.

Jia Li's family is a perfect example of the traditional agricultural society built on patriarchal authority and Confucian's precepts: a great emphasis is set upon family's ethic, respect of the defined relations of superordination and subordination is required.

The authority of paternal power is incontrovertible: the father is the head of the household and his decisions are unquestionable. This patriarchal structure was further strengthened during the Japanese occupation. Japanese culture in fact strictly obeyed the feudalistic patriarchal system.

Jia Li's family is built upon that traditional values: her mother's demure attitude and the great respect she shows to Jia Li's father are nothing more than one of the Confucian's five ethics. Jia Li's and Jia Sen's relationships with their father are built according to the Confucian's concept of filial piety.

The Japanese style-house where they live, paired with their Japanese lifestyle (they wear Japanese-style clothes, use futon, the Japanese traditional bed), and the use of the Japanese language⁵, are devices by which Yang's depicts the old, rural society.

We have to bear in mind that Taiwan has been part of Japan from 1895 to 1945, when after the World War II, Taiwan was 'returned' to China.

The city is deeply linked to ideas of future, progress, economic opportunity, freedom. It is clear, therefore, how Jia Li's journey toward adulthood involves a move from the country to the city.

Even if her family's country house is depicted as an idyllic place and reminds her the childhood period, it is also the place in which she is subjected to her father's will. Instead, Taipei is the place in which she can finally be independent and free from any oppositions.

Jia Li's resistance against paternal power is the symptom of the conversion of society and of its values. She, running away from her arranged marriage, is excluded from the family.

Jia Li's escape depicts the demise of the traditional authority of the father, in a more and more globalized society. Her behavior is even more stunning because is a woman (usually placed in a subordinated position) the one who dares to rebel.

⁵ Jia Li and Jia Sen call their parents using Japanese words for mother and father.

Jia Li elopes and in Taipei she marries De Wei. This announces the coming of a new era of free love. The family they build is far from the traditional idea. They are just two people, no children to preserve the family name. The wife is no more subjected (or at least less subjected) to husband's 'power'. Jia Li asks her husband where he goes and what he does.

However, she soon discovers that to the countryside's stagnation (and security) correspond city 's 'fragmentation of experience'⁶ and alienation. Her insecurities and frustrations increase.

She is trapped in "an undefined present' caught between the conflicting impulses associated with the country and the city'.⁷ The same time, De Wei is trapped with her.

They will find different solutions to break free from their entrapment.

1.1.1 Four types of men.

Jia Li's father is the representative of the older generation. He is depicted using the traditional attributes of a Confucianist father: stern, aloof and impersonal but always fair in judgement.⁸

Jia Sen, on the contrary, is already 'affected by' a new conception of life brought in by the industrial era, in which the traditional authority of paternal power is questioned, and personal liberty is emphasized.

He in fact dares to fight the arranged marriage, breaking that filial devotion that he owes to his father.

However, he is not imbued enough with modern values to win his battle against the parent. He succumbs to his father's will, thus reestablishing the traditional balance between father and son.⁹

De Wei himself is unable to adjust to the cold industrial society: for this reason, he starts to have anxiety problems and becomes the patient of a psychiatrist. He still believes in traditional value and asks Jia Li to be obedient and to trust him (夫妇, wife is obedient to his husband). However, he still succumbs to his psychological weakness.

⁶ YIP, June, *Envisioning Taiwan...*, op. cit. p.192.

⁷ Ibidem p. 205.

⁸ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity: a cultural-historical investigation of film experience in Taiwan in the 1980s*, PhD diss., University of Southern California, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1993, p. 190.

⁹ Jia Sen life is already planned by his father who force him to follow his path becoming a doctor. He is destined to inherit the family clinic. Here we can spot a parallel with Yang's life. In fact, he affirms that when he was young he was interested in drawing. He dreamed to become an architect but eventually he takes a degree in computer science.

De Wei is a character who contributes with his fragilities to reshape men's cinematic image. The 'positive' image of men, either represented as family's authority or kung-fu practitioners, is replaced with a more 'human' representation.¹⁰

Finally, Ah Tsai represents a man who adapts to society's development. He is the male counterpart of Hsiao Hui. His actions are led by utilitarian reasons: he marries in order to inherit, or at least to obtain a leading position, inside her wife's father's company. Then he hired her friends, including De Wei, not because of friendship or interest in his friends' economic comfort, but just to *strengthen his position by gathering a loyal group of old buddies*.¹¹

When De Wei confesses him his marriage's problems, the only concern he shows is towards his business affairs, warning De Wei that he will fire him without considering their friendship, if he fails in business.¹² Finally, even when he reaches Jia Li on the beach, is not her husband's disappearance what worries Ah Tsai, but the money De Wei stole from his company.

1.1.2 Three types of women.

With the rise of the New Taiwan Cinema, women's filmic representation increased. *That day, on the beach* is a good example, because it both offers the viewpoint of a female character, and addresses issues such as female desire to break free from patriarchal power, to be free to marry someone of her choice and also to reach an economic independence.

In *That day, on the beach* we can encounter, three different 'types of women'. Through these women, in my opinion, is possible to trace a sort of evolution of the woman's position inside society.

The first example is Jia Li's mother. She represents a woman who strictly observes traditional values, sticking to the rule of female conduct and showing obedience to her husband (as *wu lun* precepts require). She is a mother because she has the duty to give continuation to the family line. She tolerates her husband infidelity for the sake of the family, which is the most important thing to preserve.

There is only a tiny detail that gives new light to this woman. She knows Jia Li's is escaping, but she does not stop her.

¹⁰ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity...*, op. cit. p. 192.

¹¹ Jia Li uses these words when she describes Ah Tsai.

¹² LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. p. 67.

Jia Li's mother's disadvantaged position inside the family is depicted by the way the director frames her. She is rarely at the center of the frame but often is placed to its far end. Emblematically, the woman, conquers a central position in the frame just after his husband's death.

Hsiao Hui's social position is diametrically opposite. Her depiction recall, to a certain extent, female stereotypes in previous film production in which women were portrayed as either helpless and submissive housewives, or dangerous and promiscuous prostitutes. Of course, she would belong to the second type. However, limit her personality simply to an unscrupulous enchantress, would be disparaging. She builds relationships with other people on the basis of how much she can obtain from them. She uses her appeal to lure De Wei. She does not love him but, in order to develop her business, she makes uses of De Wei's insecurities. She is the metaphor for self-interest and thirst for power that characterizes industrial Taipei.¹³ Money and personal interest are stronger than the concern for a marriage. Hsiao does not show any regret for treating an affair with a married man. When Jia Li discovers that she is De Wei's mistress, she asks her if she loves him. Hsiao Hui's attitude is summarized in her reply: *I imagine that you grew up in a very peaceful, storybook world. The world I grew up in, taught me that it's a world without love.*

Finally, Jia Li is virtually placed halfway between her mother's traditional attitude and Hsiao Hui's modern, even masculine behavior. She is the emblem of the modern middle-class. Unable to adjust to social changes, she is frustrated and insecure. She has no need to worry about earning a living, so her problems are essentially shifted to existential dramas.

The core of her bewilderment turns around her conception of marriage. By choosing her husband, contrasting the patriarchal power, she proves to be a modern woman. She wants to choose for herself, a sort of self-determination. However, she still relies on old values: she, like her mother, is unable to find her own dimension, always relying on her husband both emotionally and financially. She even forgives De Wei infidelity. In her innermost part, she is still linked to the ancient wife's stereotype, thus leading to her incapability to break free from De Wei. Only at the end of the movie she completes her 'transformation' becoming an independent businesswoman.

Her shift from a relatively traditional position¹⁴ to a modern woman, however, has a price. She must abandon her romantic ideal and resign her dream and herself to a completely different world. Jia Li

¹³ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. p.65.

¹⁴ She takes care of the house (even if she hired a housekeeper), she goes to the supermarket, she is portrayed in the kitchen, she is depicted at work just one time. Her hobbies are the most stereotypical ones: she does flower arranging and she goes shopping.

completes her journey from childhood to adulthood waking up from her dreams and realizing that life is not all a bed of roses.

Another woman could match Jia Li's attitude: Tan Weiching. She becomes a world-wide famous pianist. However, for her own admission, is Jia Sen's abandonment that pushed her to concentrate on her career. She and Jia Li become two independent women, but the film does not show how they achieve this yearned for emancipation. However, we know that the price for their happiness is the renounce to live with a man besides them.

This conclusion has real implications on Taiwanese women living during the eighties. In fact, even after its revision in 1985 (two years after this film's release), the family law presents disparity in women's and men's conditions.

In fact, the right to manage the joint property, collect its fruits and dispose of it, including the wife's wages, rests with the husband.¹⁵

In particular the Article 1018 of the Civil Code, states: 'The husband manages the joint property. But when there is agreement for the wife to manage it, she manages the joint property'¹⁶

It is thus clear, how a woman that want to be independent has to renounce to her husband, in order to obtain complete economic freedom.

¹⁵ KU, Yenlin, "The changing status of women in Taiwan: A conscious and collective struggle toward equality", in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 11, no. 3, 1988, pp.184.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

1.2 Narrative structure's innovation of *That day, on the beach*.

Before New Taiwan Cinema's birth, there were three genres that mainly dominated the Taiwanese cinema panorama: escapist films (called *wenyi*, they were a kind of family melodrama often drawn from Chung Yao's novels¹⁷), propagandistic features and action movies such as kung-fu or *wuxia pian* (swordplay films). These films' narrative style and story type were generally conceived to comply with Hollywood's standards.¹⁸

Hollywood movies usually comply with precise rules. The narrative structure is closed and usually the story unfolds following a defined development: there is a beginning presenting an enigma or a problem that needs to be resolved. Then, a central part in which the story unfolds: characters should struggle through different vicissitudes before the film comes to a conclusion. With the end of the movie also the enigma is resolved fully or partly, and everything is explained. Nothing remains without conclusion. Transparency and invisibility are the formal paradigms of the classical Hollywood films: all formal manipulations are concealed in order to offer the illusion of daily experiences.

Editing and the *mise-en-scene* must concur to emphasize verisimilitude too. Temporal and spatial continuity are maintained during almost the totality of the narrative development, to assure realism.

In order to maintain this verisimilitude, camera angles remain at eye-level, light effects are natural, subjects are usually positioned in the center of the frame and in the foreground. Eyeline matches and shot-reverse-shot editing are used to maintain the continuity of action.

Moreover, the classical narrative encourages audience identification with the key protagonists. Consequently, characters are easy to individuate and usually are at the center of the narration. The narration is based on the chains of cause and effect: developing linearly step by step, Verisimilitude is

¹⁷ Chung Yao was one of the most popular writers in the Seventies. Films drawn from her novels dominated the entire Taiwanese film market at that time. Also called "three rooms" films because of their stories often take place only in living rooms, dinner rooms, and bedrooms. Although this kind of escapist film lost popularity at during the eighties its, some of Chiung Yao's novels were still adapted as soap operas and regain momentum at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. From LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang ...*, op. cit. p. 12.

¹⁸ LIN Ying-Chia, *A Descriptive Analysis of the Development and Decline of New Taiwan Cinema, 1982-1986*, PhD diss., Denton, University of North Texas, 1993, pp.71-72.

maintained thanks to spatial and temporal continuity and events' causality.¹⁹ Finally, omniscient point of view to describe the characters' actions is preferred.

New Taiwan Cinema dismantle these old conceptions suggesting new contents and new stylistic techniques. Exaggerated sentimentalism disappeared, and nonprofessional or semiprofessional actors were largely preferred. The use of Taiwanese native languages, including the Fujien and the Hakka dialect, were reintroduced. As a consequence, actors now could dub themselves in dialect or in other languages rendering the film more realistic. This was a huge change because in previous Taiwanese films, actors were usually dubbed by professionals in postproduction. This was due to the fact that, being the great majority of traditional movies dubbed in Mandarin and being actors often unable to speak adequately in Mandarin, a professional intervention was needed.²⁰

Of course, *That day, on the beach*, as the herald of this new cinematic trend, breaks every tie with the traditional narrative development and stylistic patterns.

1.2.1 Time composition.

Yang completely brings into question this traditional structure, choosing an experimental approach never seen before in Taiwanese films. He conceives the narration structure as 'a flashback within a flashback'.

Breaking the chronological order of the plot (syuzhet), Yang envisions a film which fabula (the set of events that compose the narration of the film) is arranged by crosscutting present and past. Chain of cause-and-effect are replaced by a narration whose temporal continuity is disrupted and replaced by continuous change in the time of the action. The audience is led backward and forward between a horizontal temporal line.

In fact, the elaborate plot of *That day, on the beach* is built like a 'Chinese box' in which the first level of narration contains a second level of narration. The present narration contains remembrances of the past that, in turn, contains memories of an even more ancient past.²¹ However, to fully understand the narrative structure of this movie we must fix some 'time benchmark' in order to avoid being overwhelmed by this enormous temporal flexibility.

¹⁹ LIN, Ying-Chia, *A Descriptive Analysis of...*, op. cit. pp. 70-71.

²⁰ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang ...*, op. cit. p.23.

²¹ Ibidem p. 57.

We can fix two reference points: the first is ‘the present time’ represented by the café and the theatre in which Tan Weching performs. The second reference point is ‘that day on the beach’ that could be considered as ‘the first level of memory’. The film follows this narrative structure approximately for its first third: present and past are interlaced together as the narration come back and forth from Jia Li and Tan Weiching’s flashbacks and their chat seated at the café. In this part we learn about Jia Li and Tan Weiching’s friendship and about the love story between Tan Weching and Jia Sen (Jia Li’s brother) love. Their love is destroyed by Jia Sen’s father who force him to marry another woman. We see how Tan Weching seeks refuge from her pain in music, going abroad to study and how Jia Li leaves her family to marry De Wei without her father’s permission.

In the remaining part of the film, temporal relationships as well as temporal references change, and the ‘first level of memory’ is interwoven with a ‘second level of memory’. Jia Li tells Tan Weiching that De Wei is thought to have drowned in the sea three years before.

Hence, the plot unfolds taking as the main time ‘that day on the beach’: from the beach Jia Li recalls all his life with De Wei creating the above-mentioned effect of flashback within flashback.

This part is dedicated entirely to Jia Li and to her life. Her married life is developed from the early years, through the discovery of her husband’s infidelity leading to the couple crisis. Her memories are divided into many pieces intercut with sequences showing Jia Li on the beach.²²

It becomes thus clear, how the plot is structured like a juxtaposition of memories: Jia Li's memory of that day on the beach is entwined with the memory's memory, that is to say the woman remembering the events that pushed her to grow up as the woman she is now.

Further complicated ‘triple flashbacks’²³ can be spotted here and there during the film. In the sequence in which Jia Li’s mother visit her daughter in her house, for example, two sequences are inserted during their conversation, both representing memories. The first one shows a little Jia Li, who wandering in her parent’s house, accidentally, surprises her father while approaching his assistant.²⁴ Then the scene returns to Jia Li and her mother’s conversation.²⁵ Soon after, the camera cut again to another memory. Now is Jia Li’s mother who recalls the night when her daughter ran away to reach her fiancé in Taipei.²⁶

²² LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. pp. 55-56.

²³ Ibidem p. 57.

²⁴ See Fig. 1.

²⁵ See Fig. 2

²⁶ See Fig.3.

Since these two memories are contained in Jia Li's recollections when she is 'on the beach', the narrative structure further deepens the complexity of the temporal juxtaposition by framing 'memory inside a 'memory's memory'.²⁷ This narrative device can be notice also in Ah Tsai's memories.

When he reaches Jia Li on the beach, he explains her what he discovers about De Wei. This explanation is conveyed not only by means of dialogues but also through images, thus creating another flashback. The flashback is, in the first place, introduced by Ah Tsai's voice-over, then the sequence unfolds independently, as we assist directly to the story development.

De Wei's flashback on the beach along with Jia Li's mother's memory, could also be interpreted as part of the conversation. A narrative technique that the director will use in his following works, consists in substitute images for words.

Instead of using dialogues to explain a situation or recall a fact, the director uses images.

Hence, in the light of that narrative device, Jia Li's mum' reminiscences could be considered the representation of the words she says to her daughter.

In my modest opinion, Ja Li's memory on the contrary, is just her personal recollection. This because we do not hear any sounds, but we just assist at the unfolding of the events. When we remember something in our mind we do not need to explain it by words. This is the precise reason why in some of Jia Li's flashbacks there are no sounds but just images. When she remembers something and explain it to someone else (Tan Weching, her mother, her schoolmate) the images representing the unfolding action are accompanied by her explanation. On the contrary, when she just remembers something in her mind the images are mute or accompanied by background music. In the case of Jia Li's childhood memory, the music starts as diegetic and then continue into the memory as extradiegetic.

²⁷ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. pp. 56-57.



Fig. 1 Jia Li's memory of when she was a little child.



Fig. 2 Jia Li's mother during the conversation with her daughter.



Fig. 3 Jia Li's mother memory.



Fig. 4 Back again at the conversation between the two women. (Note that in this shot, Jia Li's mother looks directly towards the camera).

Finally, the natural temporal line is reestablished and the camera, leaving the beach, returns to the café. Emblematically, the film starts from its end: this is the first great innovation. The audience, having no clues of the action's time, could be misled to think that the scene develops in the present.

Yang, by abandoning the traditional Hollywoodian narration based on problem- solution, renounces to build his film on causality. Moreover, time and space continuity are totally substituted by memories flowing.

The film's conclusion is another subversive choice: it is an open end and neither explanation nor solution are provided to the viewer. Quite the opposite, Jia Li herself refuses to know the truth.

Multiple and non-linear narration and the open-ending are two narrative features that will become recurrent in Yang's production. They underline the stylistic fracture with the previous cinematic tradition. They will acquire such an importance that could be considered among Yang's main characteristics.

1.2.2 Other techniques.

That day, on the beach's mise-en-scene could still be considered as leaning towards a realist style. Yang uses long takes,²⁸ long shots or extreme long shots,²⁹ prefers a steady camera approach and eye-level camera angles. The use of long takes allows the director to ease the rhythm of the movie but at the same time it expands the length of the film. With his two hours and forty-seven minutes, *That day, on the beach* has an impressive duration if we consider that, at that time, traditional Taiwanese films' duration do not exceed ninety minutes.

The use of long shots helps to increase characters detachment: emotions are never conveyed in a too dramatic way, and the sentimentality usually emphasized in previous films by using close ups, is limited. Characters' performance is conceived in order to reduce actors' exaggerated body language and facial expression. Sentiment are never pushed too much, and sequences that are supposed to convey outburst of passion or anger are often omitted. To reduce sentimentalism in this film, Yang uses ellipses: the sequence showing the argument between Jia Sen and his father, for example, is completely absent. We only see the start (Jia Sen who speaks about his real love, Tan Weiching)³⁰ and the end of their quarrel.³¹ In place of their altercation we see Jia Li strolling with her mother. When the women return home,³² Yang represents the quarrel by showing a broken cup on the floor and Jia Sen kneeling in front of his father. From Jia Sen's attitude, we understand what happened while we were outside taking a walk with Jia Li.

Jia Sen's rebellion towards his father's decision is an inappropriate transgression to Confucianist's ethic that gives to the head of the household (Jia Sen's father) the supreme authority. 'His will is a command with which every member [of the family] is under obligation to comply'.³³ Maybe omit such a scene could underline the rigidity of Jia Sen's father who prefer to forget his son's irreverence that is so serious

²⁸ 'A shot, either static or involving camera movement, of relatively lengthy duration.' (From Annette KUHN, Guy WESTWELL, *Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.250.)

²⁹ 'In the extreme long shot (ESL) (...) the frame is dominated by a landscape or a setting. The long shot (LS) shows the subject (usually a character in the film) in its entirety, along with the background.' (From Annette KUHN, Guy WESTWELL, *Dictionary of Film Studies*, op. cit. p.374.)

³⁰ See Fig. 5.

³¹ See Fig. 6.

³² See Fig.7.

³³ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity...*, op. cit. p. 179.

that couldn't even be mentioned. Additionally, Jia Sen's surrender to his father's will and his kneeling towards him, are signals of his submission.



Fig. 5 Jia Sen talks with his father about his love for Tan Weiching.



Fig. 6 Jia Li and her mother are going back home.



Fig. 7 A broken cups on the floor reveals the fight between Jia Sen and his father.

A big difference with the previous traditional production lies in the use of different languages. From the middle fifties, through all the sixties, Taiwanese-dialect movies were very popular. With the promotion of Healthy realism by the state owned CMCP (Central Motion Picture Company), however, Taiwanese -dialect movies were more and more replaced by Mandarin language films, until 1976 when Taiwanese-dialect film cease to be produced.³⁴ In *That day, on the beach*, on the contrary, actors dub in different languages, thus subverting the old rule by which Mandarin was the only language permitted in cinema.³⁵ In fact, Jia Li and Tan Weiching speak Mandarin, Jia Li's parents speak Taiwanese-dialect mixed with Japanese because they belong to the generation who experienced Japanese colonization. Moreover, Tan Weiching's German secretary speaks German as well as Jia Li' ikebana's teacher who speaks Japanese, being ikebana a Japanese tradition. This stylistic choice brings more realism to the feature.

Another crucial element in Yang's *That day, on the beach*, that is possible to find in his later production, is images' meaning manipulation. Yang's images are not purely representation of the events but acquire a deeper significance. Metaphors and messages embodied in images are more important than the images themselves. Yang uses images to convey Jia Li's thoughts, fears and dialogues. Jia Li's jealousy is conveyed by showing one of her dream in which she sees De Wei cheating on her with a young girl.

³⁴ ZHANG Yingjin, *Chinese National Cinema*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004, p.129 and p.133.

³⁵ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. pp. 59.

Images are useful to condense stories. Ah Tsai's wedding photographs are used to summarize his marriage, while Jia Li's voice-over explains the fact. Jia Li's father's death is also condensed into a shot in which the man's portrait is showed.

As discussed before, Yang uses images to condense dialogues, but also sounds manipulation is used. At a certain point in the film we hear a phone call between De Wei and Jia Li but what we see do not match what we heard. Instead of Jia Li or De Wei speaking at the telephone, the sequence portrays Jia Li lying in bed. The phone call we hear in the background could be Jia Li's memory of the conversation she had with her husband. Moreover, in *That day, on the beach*, music is almost absent but, when is used, it underlines specific moments of Jia Li's life. Usually are happy moments: memories of her and De Wei together on the beach when they were just married, of her childhood and of her father.

Yang avoids the use of shot reverse-shot. This stylistic choice further gives the sensation of characters' detachment. Moreover, during dialogues, sometimes characters watch directly towards the camera. This self-reflexive device will be broadly exploited by the director in his third movie: *Terrorizers*.

It could be interesting analyze some similarities which could be spotted between Yang's *That day, on the beach* and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (*The adventure*, 1960).

L'avventura tells about a group of friends going on a trip to one of the Aeolian islands off the coast of Sicily. Anna, one of the vacationers, vanishes and her disappearance brings together her fiancé Sandro and her best friend Claudia.

The first traceable similarity lies in the fact that in both films, one of the characters disappear on a beach. Despite the initial effort in order to find these missing people, soon, everything is forgot. Jia Li deliberately walks away from the beach in order to follow her personal fulfillment, while Claudia and Sandro gradually fall in love consigning Anna to oblivion.

Characters' social extraction is another parallelism: in both films are depicted middle class's weaknesses and bewilderments. Cinematic techniques show resemblances too: long shots, detached emotion, importance to the landscape that in both films interlaces relations with characters' presence.

By a narrative point of view *L'avventura* can be metaphorically divided in to two parts: the first is about Anna' disappearance and the second tells the process by which Claudia and Sandro forget about her. Similarly, *Haitan de yitian*, depicts the reasons why Jia Li decides to run away from that day on the beach forgetting De Wei.

CHAPTER 2 - Taipei Story

Released in 1985, *Taipei Story* did not receive the hoped and expected viewers' plaudit. Because of bad box-office's results the feature's screening was stopped after being run only for four days. Moreover, also the film production experienced some problems. It is not a secret that the director Hou Hsiao-Hsien¹, who also starred here as the main male character, mortgaged his house in order to help Yang produce this film.²

Critics described the film as a commercial failure, but Yang replied:

[...] a lot of people didn't understand the intention of the film. They wanted to see another Day on the beach, a love story whit all these romantic entanglements. So they were put out when they looked at this movie. [...] But's that's how I looked at the city at the time- we were breaking away with the past and our ties with the past are inevitably romantic ones. But realities set in, economic pressures, other kinds of hardships... [...] But looking back, what *Taipei Story* actually shows is my devotion to the place- how tied I feel to its past, but also how much I care about its future.³

Yang's film centers on the slow disintegration of a relationship, a tale of a star-crossed lovers that can't seem to get out of their own way, their love become more and more impossible. However, *Taipei Story* is more than this and, by manipulating different layers of meaning, the director offers a broader social critique of Taipei and of Taiwan at large showing the abrading effects of both tradition and modernization eroding every social and emotional bond.

¹ Also known as Hou Xiaoxian, is one of the most internationally renowned filmmakers associated with Taiwan's New Cinema movement. Born in Guangdong province (China) in 1947, he moved to Taiwan in 1948. He is particularly known for his film explorations of Taiwan's history and family life, which emphasized realism through their subject matter and measured pace. Among his substantial production, particularly famous are the features *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (1985) and *City of Sadness* (1989).

² Corrado NERI, *Il Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese: Breve storia del Nuovo Cinema Taiwanese 1982-1987*, in "AsiaMedia", 2016, https://www.unive.it/pag/15182/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1869&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=93d223081c8945a41c2132c43ea6c3d5, retrieved Sept 28, 2018.

³ John ANDERSON, *Edward Yang*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005, pp.34-35.

During an interview with the British film critic Tony Rayns, Yang gave his ‘definition’ of *Taipei Story*:
[...] my explicit aim was to use cinema to paint a portrait of the city. I wanted to explore the ways
in which Taipei has changed over the years, and how those changes have affected its inhabitants,
often unconsciously.⁴

The feature’s original title differs greatly from its English translation: in fact, ‘青梅竹馬’ (*Qingmei zhuma*) is an idiom literally meaning ‘green plum and hobby-horse’. Becoming popular thanks to a poem⁵ written by the famous poet Li Bai,⁶ and deriving its meaning from the poem itself, this *chengyu* is used in everyday language to identify ‘a couple who grew up as childhood friends’. And that’s exactly what happen to the main characters of the feature.

Chin and Long know each other since they were children and growing up, they become lovers as their innocent friendship turns into romance. However, as long as the first scene runs on the screen, it is clear to the audience that the protagonists’ relationship is nothing more than the echo of the idyllic love story suggested by the Chinese title. After all, the plot took place in the modernizing city of Taipei, as implied by the English translation. Thus the possibilities for any love to survive, not to mention an innocent one between children, are almost null.⁷

Just considering the title, is it possible to detect a sort of contrast, here embodied by the reference to a classical Chinese tradition overwhelmed by the modernization process. The couple, despite the effort to cling to their childhood memories for the sake of their love, is however destined to drift apart in the westernized city.

⁴ Tony RAYNS, “Taipei Story: an interview with Edward Yang”, in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Volume 56, no. 662, 1989, pp. 70.

⁵ 長干行 (一) (Chaggan xing), Ballad of a Merchant’s wife. XU Yuanchong (translated by), *Selected Poems of Li Bai (李白詩選)*, Changsha, Hunan People’s Publishing House, 2007, pp.22-23.

⁶ Li Bai (701-762 d.C), also known as Li Po or Li Tai-p’è, was one of the most famous Chinese poets during the Tang dynasty (618-910 d. C).

⁷ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of Taiwan and Mainland China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.120.

2.1 Chin and Long: personification and symbolism of two contrasting universes.

Taipei Story could appear to the viewer merely as a romantic tragedy depicting the difficulties and the struggles a couple can face. However, the audience must not be misled by this appearance because it is clear from the very first scene that behind *Taipei Story* there is more to discover.

The lovers' conflicting relationship is nothing but the opportunity to reveal and describe the crisis of values that Taiwanese society was experiencing by the time the feature was released. The end of a love story used as the pretest or, better, the metaphor to indicate that is money and not love the engine that moves Taipei. Two childhood lovers raised in accordance with traditional cultural ethics, now live their adulthood in a world where such standards no longer fit contemporary challenges. They require a steady handhold, that is more and more difficult to be found in the modernized and rapidly changing environment.

As progressively disclosing, we notice how the director uses a binary structure to hold together the different aspects of the feature. Starting from the display of the characters' inner thoughts and behaviors, until the representation of the city itself, everything is represented to convey the dichotomous thematic of the incessant struggle between old and new. The conflict that arises from these opposite sets of values and the consequent incommunicability, are the supporting structure and the leitmotif of the entire film. Every character is the personal embodiment of one or of the other aspect: Chin, her sister Ling, Chin sister's group of friends and Long's brother-in-law are all symbols of the rampant future. On the other hand, Long, Chin's parents, Mr. Lai and Long's friend, the taxi driver, symbolize the past.

Evidences of this metaphoric personification can be noticed in the typecasting of the characters and in the sketch of the relationships they share within each other.

2.1.1 Fathers' loss of power: how modernization dismantle the family.

Confucianist society is based upon the so-called Wu lun (五伦), that are five human relationships existing between the father and the son (fuzi, 父子), between the ruler and subordinates (junchen, 君臣), between husband and wife (fufu, 夫妇), between the elder and the younger (xingdi, 兄弟), and between friends (pengyou, 朋友).⁸

Long's loyalty to the traditional value system, is put into effect by this code of honor, which he preserves amid an indifferent, modern Taipei. This is particularly evident when he decides, despite Chin objections, to lend the money necessary to emigrate in America to Chin's father. In traditional Chinese society, personal honor is supposedly valued more than material gains, and Long's actions could be moved either by a face-saving (mianzi, 面子) effort⁹ or by filial piety(xiao, 孝).

Long's shares these traditional cultural values with the representants of the older generation, namely his childhood friend, Chin's father and Mr. Lai.

Chin's father is portrayed as the classical head of the family. His position inside his family is absolutely dominant.¹⁰ However, his fatherly image is clearly different from the one of Jia Li's father in *That day, on the beach*. Chin's father drinks a lot, gambles and has a lot of debts. Jia Li's father, who anyhow has his weaknesses, however preserves a more 'respectable' image.

What brought together these two fathers is their refusal to adapt their businesses to modern rules: Jia Li's father's clinic is suffering from modern hospital's competition, losing patients.

Problems in business management is also what unites Chin's father and Long. Both men are unable to keep their respective businesses up with the time.

Long by avoiding deliberately to upgrade his fabric shop, Chin's father consciously remaining unconcerned with quality control. However, in a progressively highly competitive economy with more accultured customers, quality is becoming extremely important.

In fact, the 'economic miracle' Taiwan was experiencing during the eighties, led its citizens to worry about how to dispose of their wealth in the most adequate way. Consequently, in 1980 Consumer Protection Foundation was established. It was one of the first consumer protection groups formed in

⁸ 'Between father and son, there should be affection, between sovereign and ministers, there should be righteousness, between husband and wife, attention to their separate functions; between old and young, a proper order; and between friends, good faith.' (Mencius)

⁹ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of ...*, op. cit. pp.121-122.

¹⁰ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity: a cultural-historical investigation of film experience in Taiwan in the 1980s*, PhD diss., University of Southern California, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1993, p.188.

Taiwan. The foundation proposed the drafting of a consumer protection law, but this provision was drafted and then approved only after 1987.¹¹

However, failing to adapt to the changing business environment, Chin's father proves to be anchored to an already ancient past.

Long's cabby friend (Aqing), besides being the epitome of the rising economic gap between rich and poor, is also another father who is losing his patriarchal power inside the family.

He has a wife who (like Chin's father) has gambling problems.¹² Despite his efforts to keep her away from her bad habit, she squanders every cent they have.

Long disapproves his friend's lack of patriarchal power upon his wife and, in order to defend his friend's honor, he publicly humiliates the woman by dragging her out of the gambling house. However, Long's actions lead to Aqing's wife's departure.

In the depiction of this troubled family, it is clear how mother's representation as negligent and careless, contrasts with the typical model of the caring mother we discussed in *That day, on the beach*. Father's portrayal also differs from the typical representation. If we compare Aqing with Jia Li's father in *That day, on the beach*, it is easy to understand how these two figures are opposite. The latter succeeds (at least partially) to maintain his leading position, while the first fails. Even worse her wife leaves him abandoning her children. He is the parent who looks after the kids, thus rendering a reverse situation as compared to the traditional parents' duties.

Long's attempt to maintain traditional patriarchal order in Aqing's family only breaks it apart because the patriarchal ground has been shaken and shrunken.¹³

¹¹ JUANG Carol T., "The Taiwan Consumer Protection Law: attempt to protect consumers proves ineffective", in *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal*, Volume 6, no.1, 1997, p. 224.

¹² Women and men are equal in their vices.

¹³ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of...*, op. cit. p.127.

2.1.2 Fathers who do not understand their daughters.

There is another character that by age and by beliefs belongs to Chin's parents' same 'universe': Long's ex-baseball-coach, Mr. Lai.

He and Long share the love for baseball and an affection for Gwan: the first one as her father, the latter as one of her ex-boyfriends.

Mr. Lai's bond with the past is underlined using a linguistic trick, namely Japanese language.¹⁴ Actually, during Japanese control over Taiwan, their native tongue was widely widespread and commonly used in the island.

Moreover, he explicitly states that he starts feeling old because he doesn't understand anymore what push young people to act in certain ways. He is disoriented, firstly by his daughter behavior: she is divorcing.

Of course, Mr. Lai's vision of the marriage is diametrically opposite from Gwan's. He trusts in the traditional concept of marriage that is eternal and for life, but most of all he believes in women's loyalty to only one husband. Mr. Lai does not comprehend the new values his daughter embraces because for him are totally incomprehensible.

Similarly, Chin's father does not understand his daughter's need to move out before marriage. He several times, states that he thinks it is morally incorrect for his daughter to move out alone. He demands Long to marry Chin as soon as possible

Since in traditional Confucianist ethic a woman is defined by her family status, Chin and Gwan fall off from this frame. The first is still a daughter but moving out without being married, to some extent, disqualified herself from her role. The latter's social position is even more absurd. She is neither a daughter because she was married nor a wife because now she is divorced.

¹⁴ It is important to underline that the use of different languages, as discussed in the chapter devoted to *That day, on the beach*, increases the realism of the depiction of Taiwanese society. Japanese was a common idiom in Taiwan ever since Taiwan's annexation to Japan's empire.

2.1.3 Long's nostalgia.

Long's profound bond with his past is remarked and made clear by his extremely nostalgic attitude. This nostalgia takes the aspect of a spasmodic, rather similar to an obsession, love for baseball, the sport he practiced when he was a younger player in the juvenile team.

Long's incapability to move forward in his future, is also described by his stagnation.¹⁵ His life is necessarily tragic since the only units of measurement he has to understand the world are his idiosyncratic and traditional values. This consequently, leads to a bewilderment due to the difficulty to understand how society is changing. Clinging on the same old things, he is nostalgic about a future that could have been achieved but which, turned out to be noticeably different from expectations.

Finally, Long is trapped and shaped by these ancient principles, that are also the trigger of clashes between Chin and him.

In this sense, his bedroom full of old trophies and the baseball game itself, become the representations of the past. It is not a coincidence if all the characters that for any reasons are linked with that specific sport, for example Mr. Lai and Long's childhood friend, are in different ways and with different importance part of Long himself.

2.1.4 Women's strive towards emancipation.

The relation between Chin and his father, is completely different and prove to be based on conflict, the same rival bond established between past and future. However, the struggle between Chin and her father is not only ideological but there is a strong physical component that pervade the scenes in which they are framed together. Suffice it to say that later in the movie, we discover that when Chin was young, in order to protect her mother, she used to bear her father's abuse.

Hence, it is impossible that these two characters could find a common ground: they are on diametrically opposites sides. Chin's attitude tends towards a more independent and self-made vision of the woman, whereas his father is still anchored to women's traditional roles. Chin's father's patriarchal attitude is blatantly represented when he asks Long if he is planning to marry¹⁶ or, again, in the sequences of the dinner where Chin and her mother are relegated in the kitchen, while the men are talking about business.

¹⁵ For example, this stagnation is clearly evident when the director depicts Long's house. His bedroom full of old trophies, looks more like a teenage bedroom rather than the room of an adult man.

¹⁶ This apparently simple question implies a broader meaning: complying with the traditional values, the girl's father is interested about marriage as a way to produce heirs. The family line continuity is then assured through family's name transmission.

Once more, the director deeply remarks the traditional vision of the woman, whose unique task is to take care of the housework, of her husband and of the aged components of the family.¹⁷ Throughout the film, Chin's mother is always seen inside the house and never depicted on the outside as if the house, suddenly become her prison.¹⁸ Several long shots show her cleaning the floor or doing other domestic works.

Chin's mother is the traditional woman par excellence, moreover, she is the second wife which further marginalizes her position in the family.

Chin's mindset is completely opposite, if compared with her mother's.

Her attitude and her struggles are all committed to embrace modernity: she is a professional woman trying to advance her career in a frenetic business world.

She embodies the change whose first sign is the rebellion towards her father: she resists paternal power's authority derived from the traditional agricultural society. She decides to move out alone before being married, showing her desire to subvert the traditional patriarchal value which does not allow an unmarried woman to move out.

Another, extremely modern attitude regards the scene in which she discovers her sister's pregnancy. When Chin finds out why her sister is asking her some money,¹⁹ Chin's concern is not focused on her sister's 'shameful' situation. She is not shocked because her sister has lost her virginity at a young age and without being in a stable relationship, but on the contrary she is worried about her health. This suggests that she has an extremely open-minded approach about sex and women sexuality in general.

Taipei Story release year was the 1985. Significantly, the same year abortion under certain circumstances was declared legal thanks to the coming into effect of the Genetic Health Act.²⁰ Of course, the right to an abortion wasn't automatic and the husband consent was necessary.

In this context, this above mentioned tiny little scene that might even easily pass unnoticed, acquires a huge meaning. Nearly a subtle director's statement, it is useful to stress once again Chin's modern, anti-patriarchal stance becoming a real declaration of the women's right to follow their self-determination.

¹⁷ Chin's mother is framed while she is cleaning the floor near the chair of an elderly woman, probably Chin's grandmother.

¹⁸ In *Terrorizer* this theme will become recurrent, in particular with references to female characters.

¹⁹ Chin's sister is asking her money because she is pregnant, and she wants to abort.

²⁰ *Taiwan abortion law*, in "Women on Waves", <https://www.womenonwaves.org/en/page/5544/taiwan-abortion-law>, retrieved 25 Jul, 2018.

Thus, it is clear how Chin tries to distance herself from her mother's stale world. Her modernity is showed also with her profession: she embodies a new model of women who wants to be independent through her work like her male counterpart. She is eager to live a westernized life-style as a financially successful yuppie, a woman that refuses any dependency on men.

Taiwan's economic development has counted also on women's participation. In fact:

[...] the proportion of Taiwan women in the paid labor force has increased from 33.31 percent in 1965 to 45.40 percent in 1994 (while male labor force participation has declined from 82.59 percent in 1965 to 72.44 percent in 1994).²¹

However, conditions between women and men were not equal. Men usually were more likely to hold financially rewarding positions. Women earned lower wages than men, a difference resulting in a 60 percent gap between men's and women's earnings. Equal pay for equal work was not practiced. Women were also subjected to the so called 'single-clause': this clause establishes that a woman has to quit her work if she marries. This 'rule' along with women resigning after pregnancy, has forced many women to leave or not enter the paid labor force.²²

Moreover, women were still required to raise children and to take care of the household. Companies did not provide adequate support thus, resulting in many married women quitting their jobs to take care of their families. Or on the contrary, renouncing to build a family.²³

In this respect, Mrs. Mei is a fitting example. We do not know if she has a family, but she represents a type of masculinized woman that is for Chin the model by which being inspired.

Interestingly, in Yang's films, fulfilled women who successfully functions in modern society as independent entities, are often represented as more "masculine" than men. To prevail in power struggles they have to sacrifice their feminine part to the point that they lose their gender identity.²⁴

This is because women have to choose between their independence and her family: if they aspire to reach men's conditions they have to behave like them.

²¹ WANG Tsai-Wei, *Feminism and the Formation of Collective Identity within the Women's Movement in Contemporary Taiwan*, PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1997, p.38.

²²Ibidem, pp.39-40.

²³Ibidem, pp.40-41.

²⁴ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of...*, op. cit. p. 123.

Ling (Chin's sister) is also important in the interest of the story itself. By means of her group of friends, Yang could portray the hedonistic and chaotic new generation composed by teenagers that, neglectful of every prohibition,²⁵ live on the fringe of the society.

In *Taipei Story* this generation is depicted as inherently nihilist. They feel bored with their lives and they dare to rebel against everything. Open-minded when it comes to talks about sex, they dream about going abroad. They are products of modern consumerism and as output of the modernizing society they are at ease in the urban environment.²⁶

²⁵ They used to gather inside an abandoned building where it should be forbidden to enter, moreover in a sequence they drive their motorbikes in front of the Presidential Palace. At the time when the film was shot, Martial Law was still effective and was prohibited for scooters and motorcycles to go past the Presidential Palace.

²⁶ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity...*, op. cit. p.174.

2.2 Geography as Destiny: geographical implications of a perpetual conflict.

Taipei does not only serve as backdrop and as the theater for the different events displayed in this feature, but often plays a central role in the developing of the plot. Quite as a *deus ex machina*, the city becomes herself part of the action. Behaving respectively as an omniscient character or as a kind of distant, divine spectator, it shapes and leads the chain of events heedless to its dwellers' struggles.

From the very beginning Taipei subtly insinuates in the background of the events becoming more and more perceptible until its emergence as the prevailing force.

Although, or maybe precisely because, the city itself is not immediately perceived and recognized, a sort of 'no outside'-effect pervades the feature. When finally, the city reveals itself, a sense of intrusiveness and omnipresence leave the spectator even more shocked.

Yang not only shapes his characters' thoughts and behaviors to contrast the thematic binary pair of new and old, but also uses locations, jobs, characters' outfit to concretize this contrast.

The conflict between old and new ceases to be merely a question of values: it becomes explicitly and physically described through the city itself. Each space and portion of Taipei is imbued with meaning sketching the map of a topographic description of this continuous struggle.

Taipei is a city of violent contrasts: Chin's modern apartment versus her parent's ancient house, Long's old fabric shop versus Chin's modern office, westernized pubs versus old Japanese style karaoke bars, high-rise buildings versus small oppressive houses in the city suburbs.

Thus, in *Taipei Story* the urban, particularly pronounced influence will shape, and at the same time will be shaped by its inhabitants having on the protagonists the same, unavoidable effect of the fate.

We can surely affirm that in *Taipei Story* 'Geography is destiny'²⁷ because the relations between the characters and the surrounding environment are deeply interconnected: characters are sketched and shaped by their interaction with the space and their presence (or absence) in determined places. In turn, every corner of the city acquires meaning thanks to the manner in which each character acts in it.

For Chin, her parent's house is a place of submission from whom run away, because it reminds her the past and her father's mistreatments. However, it implies a totally different meaning for Long who see it like a safe harbour where to meet with Mr. Lai and Chin's father and watch them play chess.

²⁷ SHEN Shiao-Ying, *Permutations of the foreigner: a study of the works of Edward Yang, Stan Lai, Chang Yi and Hou Hsiao-Hsien*, PhD diss., ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1995, p.36.

The use of the environment to display Chin's and Long's inner nature and natural inclinations, becomes an element of paramount importance in order to understand the antipodal destiny awaiting them.

Taipei is the symbol of the present time and down in its streets, future and past coexist together as east side and west side lie next to each other composing the city as a whole.

The heterogeneity of the city is mirrored in the lovers, that together are a couple but, as east and west side differ from one another, so they present different bents, they believe in different principles. They are the personification of Taipei itself with its contradictions.

Chin is the east side: she lives in a new and westernized-style apartment and works as special assistant in Taipei's east side, headquarters of big, multinational companies. Chin is the future: she has a modern conception of the life, new values, she dreams of emigrating to America (symbol of what is new and modern), lives constantly projected forward in the perpetual hope for a better future.

On the other hand, Long is the west side where he lives and carries on an out-of-date fabric business (he doesn't even have a business card!). He is the japan style karaoke or the baseball playground he frequents. The past he couldn't manage to leave behind is symbolized by his nostalgia for a promising future that has proved to be an unsatisfactory present.

Chin and Long live in two completely different worlds. But since both of them together are the embodiment of the urban spirit, their two cosmoses are contained together in that macrocosm that is Taipei. However, even if they are two parts of the same whole, venturing into the other's time and space is a painful experience that leaves them even more disoriented than before. This is because of a basic incommunicability that force one out of the universe of the other.

The only thing that pushes them to undertake this venture is their relationship. In fact, during the film, the sequences in which they are framed together are very limited. On the contrary, it seems that they tend to avoid each other's 'world' respectively, because of the inevitable aching results when they came into contact. For example, Long is not at ease when he meets Chin and her yuppie friends²⁸ in the western-style pub. On the contrary, he even starts a fight with one of them. He also does not like too much visit her in her new apartment: rarely, or almost never, we can see him seated while he is always standing as if he wants to be ready to run away as soon as possible. From the very first sequence throughout the rest of the film, they rarely stay in the same room. Even in the rare occasions in which

²⁸ Chin's friends belonging to her 'universe' inevitably conflict with Long that represents the opposite part of the city and thus opposite values. This conflict of believes is physically represented through the brawl between Long and the sarcastic friend.

we can see them together, they are often framed from behind²⁹ or divided by doors' or windows' frames, thus conveying a sort of reciprocal indifference.³⁰



Fig. 8 Long and Chin framed from behind inside Long's car.

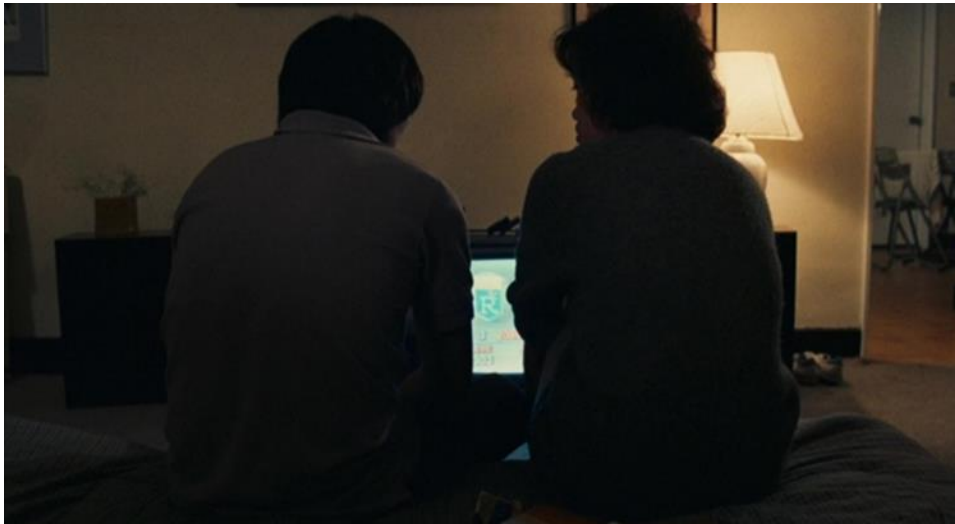


Fig. 9 Chin and Long sitting on Chin's bed, again framed from behind.

²⁹ See Fig, 8 and 9.

³⁰ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity...*, op. cit. pp.167-168.

2.2.1 Chin's Verticality and Long's Horizontality.

Yang's camera designs for the viewer some peculiar stylistic patterns in the representation of the city and of its contradictions. These patterns, namely vertical and horizontal drives, not only serve as a strong characterization of the different places but also affect characters' portrayal.

The co-existence of vertical and horizontal cityscape is of course the inevitable consequence of the intensive urbanization that Taipei was experiencing during the Eighties.

This wild, urban drift leads to a general disorientation: people lose the ability to recognize their native city because it is changing at a great pace. Moreover, they lose themselves in the attempt to recover some stability. They couldn't find a way in the changing metropolitan jungle, they mislay their values that are as variable as the city's landscape.

Taipei's architecture is seen as the evidence of its inhabitants' alienation.

Chin's architect colleague Ko, strolling down a corridor full of glass windows³¹ and looking down to the landscape bemoans:

Look at those buildings. It's getting harder for me to tell which ones I designed and which ones I didn't. They all look the same. Whether I'm involved or not seems less and less important.

If even the person who designed the city and, therefore, should be able to disentangle himself in the chaos of urban evolution, cannot disentangle it, then, the blatant disorientation is leading to an overwhelming disrepair of the values. The ancient dilemma about human being existence is promptly suggested by the city itself as the man could find traces of his own identity through the city's architectures.³²

³¹Reflective surfaces such as tv screens, windows glasses, building façades, cars' windshields and, of course, mirrors, are all devices used by Yang to distance the viewer from the action and from protagonists' feelings. By providing a distorted image and by putting physical barriers, the director further increases the sensation of estrangement and loneliness.

³² See Fig. 10.



Fig. 10 Taipei landscape visible by Chin and Ko through big windows.

As east and west side are symbols for future and past, also vertical and horizontal exert a similar meaning, representing more than just spatial references of the city development. Instead they become real exemplifications of the lovers' inner impulses.

The vertical spaces are Chin's domain: she works in a skyscraper and lives in a multistory building with a modern lift. Even when she visits her sister and her friends the action takes place on the top of a tall building.³³ The upright places in which she moves are also underlined by the representation of her point of view conveyed with framing from the top down.³⁴ She looks at the underlying street or at the distant horizon³⁵ by the rooftop. Even when she gathers with Mrs. Mei in the old-style teahouse to talk about her job, we can notice that the women are in a raised position as compared to the street. Chin herself is often framed from a higher position highlighting even more her verticality.

³³ See Fig. 11

³⁴ See Fig.12.

³⁵ Even if the horizon is by its definition horizontal, Yang is able to convey this vertical sensation because the shot is taken from a raised position, from the rooftop of the highest building of the city. Thus, the onlooker has the feeling of looking by a higher, isolated position overlooking the entire city.



Fig. 11 Chin and Ling are portrayed on the rooftop of an abandoned building where Ling lives with her friends.

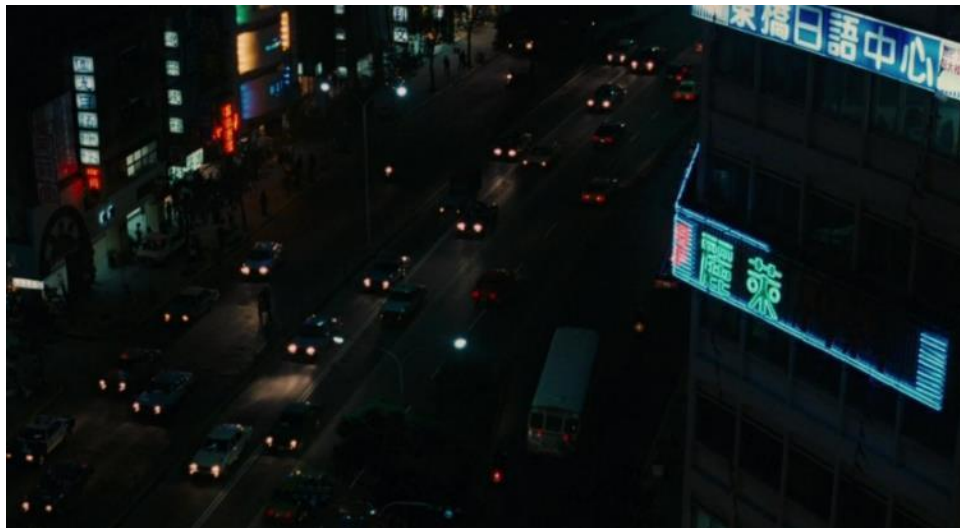


Fig. 12 Chin is looking down at the street from the previous mentioned rooftop. Only her p.o.v is conveyed.

Skyscrapers' verticality is linked with the future. Hence, the vertical impulse means Chin's future-oriented personality. Her tendency to follow the modern development of the city, benefiting from its economic growth, becomes a real effort when she tries to break off every tie with her past distancing herself from her family. She proves a modern and independent attitude moving out without being

married.³⁶ Her strive and anxiety for the future are also symbolized by her associating with her younger sister and her friends.

Long, on the contrary, is a byword for horizontal impulses: his ‘fabric’ business office, Chin’s old-style family house that he often frequents, the house of his impoverished friend, the baseball playground are all examples of his inner inclination towards his past. Interestingly, Long’s point of view is expressed using long shots,³⁷ often taken at Long’s same height.

If framing from above is what reveals Chin’s vertical propension, Long’s horizontality instead, is represented with wide shots took at the street level: he is never depicted on a high building and even when he drives his car, the camera is positioned at the same high of the onlooker’s eyes.³⁸



Fig. 13 Long inside his car. To be noticed the fact that the director inserts a screen, namely the car's windshield, between the character and the audience.

³⁶ Chin’s father will sarcastically comment her decision saying: ‘Times sure have changed. An unmarried daughter moving out?’ underlining even more the discrepancy between her desire of change and the traditional way of thinking.

³⁷ For example, when he observes the boys playing baseball or when he is framed inside his office.

³⁸ See Fig. 13.



Fig. 14 Long and his cabby friend are watching a baseball match.

If vertical impulse was a symbol for modernity, horizontality becomes the figuration of the past. Long is exactly the embodiment of that: the people he hangs out with³⁹ and his attitude towards life, make clear that he still lives in the past. This resignation and acceptance of a bright past that will never come back are emblematic in the recurring images of baseball games.

It is proper to render the correct importance to another group of characters that within the filmic topography exert a noticeable importance: Chin sister's friends.

In fact, if inserted in the dichotomic system of Chin and Long, they act as a disturbing element, subverting every equilibrium and repositioning the space-time position of the characters. In this new structure Chin becomes the representation of the present, constantly fighting between the past (Long) and the future, that here takes the image of her sister and of her rebellious friends (in particular the boy who became infatuated with Chin).

Chin is the crossroads 'where the past leaves its trace before its eradication, and where the future intimidates with its turbulent energy'.⁴⁰ Thus, in the contest of this renewed symbolic structure, Chin alone is Taipei.

³⁹ Long's old baseball player friend, his old lover Gwan, Chin's father and Mr. Lai (that other than being clearly old by age, they also show a conservative attitude), are people who belongs to Long's past.

⁴⁰ SHEN Shiao-Ying, *Permutations of the foreigner: a study ...*, op. cit. p.39.

2.2.2 A city that entrap.

Chin is the *trait d'union*, present is the time reference, and Taipei is the place in which the eternal fight for the supremacy between past and future takes place, masterfully represented by the fight between Long and the young boy.

As the future is destined to win over the past and to succumb to its vigor, likewise Long is killed by the young man.

The sequences that follow the stabbing are literally dominated by the city, 'accompanying' the man along the empty streets towards his final resting place. Significantly, Long expires near a heap of rubbish and old furniture waiting to be eliminated. Thus, his death acquires the meaning of the city cleaning itself out of every past impurity, Long included.

Among the trashes a television stands out as the herald of his destiny: by showing footage of the winning ceremony of the Taiwan's Baseball Junior League at the Little League World Championship in 1969, the city marks, once again, the man's definitive defeat.

By watching at the triumphant images, Long recognizes his failure and laughs at his life. His dreams are now vanishing in the night as the smoke of his cigarette.

Taipei swallowed him.



Fig. 15 Long, stabbed to death approaches the place of his death.



Fig. 16 Long's dead. He vanishes in the city as the smoke of a cigarette.

Chin meets Mrs. Mei: she found a new American company willing to invest opening a new branch office in Taipei. There is no longer the need to emigrate to U.S: *'Everyone is gone to Southern California, but it's actually nice here. Now we have a big American Company right in our hometown. Why go abroad?'* she says.

But actually, is Taipei itself that speaks to Chin.

While Mrs. Mei describes enthusiastically how her new office would be, Chin, looking out of the windows, has her epiphany. Contrary to Long who laughed understanding his destiny, Chin is motionless, emotionless in the realization that the city will never let her go.

Mrs. Mei/ Taipei asks if she is still planning to go to U.S whit Long: *'Probably not'* she replies wearing her sunglasses, *'He hasn't made a final decision'* she adds. But neither she did.

Is Taipei that finally makes all the decisions.



Fig. 17 Mrs. Mei and Chin strolling around the building where the company will open



Fig.18 Chin's epiphany: she understands she will never leave Taipei.

2.2.3 Tokyo, Taipei, Los Angeles.

Past, present and future are not only depicted through places of the city and through their relationship with the characters. Yang also uses three recurrent cities as epitomes of, once more, the conflict between modern and old. Tokyo, Taipei and Los Angeles.

During the unfolding of *Taipei Story*, in fact, is not uncommon to notice influences of Japanese and American cultures.

Each city has a tie with one of the lead characters. Japan is connected with Long not only because of the place that he frequents, but also by the people he knows.⁴¹ The Japanese language spoken by some characters and the advertisements of Japanese companies like Fuji and Sony, spread here and there in the feature, are other important details.

Chin lives dreaming a future in America. The major influence of America is rendered evident through the intention to emigrate, but also through baseball and the blurred image of Long's brother-in-law who lives in U.S.

Chin is connected to the future and to Los Angeles, Long to the past and to Tokyo, but both of them are in Taipei that is also their present, the here and now part of the story, the city in which they live and that they will never leave.

Tokyo, and Japan in general, is the past of Taipei not only following the feature symbolism, but exactly by an historic point of view. From 1895 until 1945 Taiwan was governed by the Japanese government that administrated it as one of its provinces. Direct consequences of this control over the entire region could be found, of course, in the numerous influences left behind, with regards to different fields: architectonic, linguistic, cultural. Proofs of these tangible traces are visible when Yang depicts the east side of Taipei. Here the buildings slightly recall the Europeans one but in reality, are the clear evidences of the Japanese presence. To reinforce even more this tie between past and Japan, the Nipponese city is the place in witch Gwan, Long's ex-girlfriend or maybe even his ex-wife, lives. The comparison is perfect: Gwan belongs to Long's past and what is more she used to live in a place that recalls the past of Taiwan itself. Anyway, Gwan is sketched as a modern woman since she is divorcing from her husband. This trait of her personality is used as a counterpoint to Long's stillness: even if she belongs to his past she has moved forward evolving with the time and adopting a new set of values. Long, on the contrary is still here where he was when they broke up.

⁴¹ The karaoke club which name is interestingly, Ginza, one of the Tokyo's districts, and Gwan who used to live in Japan.

Los Angeles is the future and America, in particular the U.S, are perceived as the promised land. A place in which Chin hopes to start anew, in which everything seems possible to achieve. Chin wants to experience the ‘American dream’.

Recurring references to America are evident in music (*‘Footloose’* danced by Ling’s friends), in sport (of course, tons of references about baseball) in fashion and in some objects of daily use such as Chin’s Marilyn Monroe calendar or the appearance of Pepsi cola.

If Taipei represents the present, consequently, Tokyo stands for the past and Los Angeles for the future. American pop culture provides an exotic background to U.S. This ideologized image of the West, caused by geographic distance, allows characters to project their fantasy on a relatively unknown land. However, the reality is different and even though Americanization (or simply westernization) is an important part of Taipei’s modernization, it brings some consequences.⁴²

Long’s brother-in-law is a perfect example of these consequences. He represents the ones who are emigrated to the United States forsaking their ties with tradition. The profit-driven pragmatism has replaced family bonds. Hence, he refuses to launch his copartnership deal with Long without the money he needs.

Japan itself couldn’t be considered just the colonial past of the island. Japan’s influence is still present and alive in Taiwanese society at the point that Chin’s sister (younger generations) look at Japan as a model. She wants to emigrate to Japan because down there everything is new and fresh.

It is thus, evident that when modernization process is generally widespread, it could no longer been considered as an exclusive Western influence. Debates about modernization and traditional values reposition the focus on Taiwan’s identity, not in term of Taiwan’s position between its western and its traditional impulses, rather on a broader notion of nation as such.⁴³

The present, the here and now, is Taipei with its contrasting and promising economic development. A place where future makes its presence increasingly prominent. Is Taipei that at the end of the movie reclaims its prevalent position taking the reins of its dwellers’ lives: Long is eliminated from the landscape as the past is gradually evolving becoming something different. Chin’s reveries about the

⁴² LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas...*, op. cit. p.128.

⁴³ JAMESON, Fredric, “Remapping Taipei”, in Fredric Jameson (edited by), *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, pp.116-117.

future are not achievable because the future is already arrived. It is no more necessary to escape to the U.S., quite the opposite, is the future that finally landed in Taiwan.

Taipei is painted using only black and white, there are no other colour shades neither other colours at all. It is this sharpened vision that leaves no space for characters to change, being entrapped in the city itself.

Taipei present is crystallized, but there is no escape: the progress couldn't be stopped.

2.3 Incommunicability as the emblem of social values' bewilderment.

Taipei Story takes place within a city, moreover within the capital of Taiwan. Consequently, the characters represented belong inevitably to that urbanized part of the population. Although, are present some underprivileged people such as Long's impoverished friend and his family, or borderline characters such as Ling's friends (considered as outsiders), the great majority of the personages, belong to the upper middle-class. The characters' social status and the place in which the film is settled of course, have enormous influences on the themes discussed and in the representation of this world.

As mentioned in the previous chapter about the city and how it is perceived, *Taipei Story* is shot using a strongly binary logic. Therefore, this logic is also used to describe the social implications derivate from the feature: all the society is experiencing a general bewilderment.

The older generations are disillusioned because they find out there is no more place for their fundamental values that now are more and more considered as outdated and without importance. Nevertheless, they strongly hang on to them. On the other hand, the younger generations struggle to identify themselves in their parent's ancient values, rejecting them in order to embrace modern and more globalized ideas. In between these two generations, Chin and Long live their personal drama.

The dichotomic atmosphere contrasting traditional with modern values, might best be summarized schematically as a series of opposites motifs that, basically, structure the bourgeoisie's difficulty in communicating.

By means of Long and Chin's story, Yang builds two parallel universes using as a foundation the recurring binary thematic of old and new. The director reveals their psyches, especially their frustrations, alienation, and uncertainty, caused by their inability to communicate with each other and their incapacity to adjust to the collision of new and old values in the rapidly changing society.

Chin's and Long's failure in communicating, emblem of the uncommunicative relationships between men and women, is shown using an interesting recurring 'stratagem': Yang inserts questions that do not receive any answer.

In one scene, Chin comes home later after having spent the night out having dinner with her colleague, Ko, who we know has a certain interest for her. Maybe pushed by a guilty feeling or just to put Long's love for her to test, Chin asks Long twice if he is interested to know why she came home late. He fails to respond continuing to watch a baseball match.

Maybe Long is torn between the prospect of being accused of intrusiveness if he insisted on knowing where Chin had been, or the eventuality of being blamed for his detached reaction.

However, his missing question shows an apathy and a careless attitude that can't be nothing but insulting to Chin. But Chin herself, doesn't know why it is so important to her that Long asks about her night out. Is it because she wants to tell him about Ko, is it because she wants to know if Long cares about her? And what if finally, he asked the fateful question? Would she answer truthfully?

Chin is confused as Long is, and their mutual bewilderment conforms to a template for social and love affairs.

Another example of 'missing answers' occurs when Long comes back at Chin's house after gathering with Gwan, his ex-girlfriend who has finally returned to Taiwan after her divorce in Japan. During his absence, Chin accidentally discovers that what Long told her to be just a brief layover in Tokyo, in reality was a real encounter with Gwan. Chin is furious but waits quietly for Long to return home. Entering the house, he spots that there's something wrong and asks several times '*what's wrong?*'. She replies slapping him in the face. She wonders why he lied to her about meeting his ex-girlfriend secretly. Of course, Long doesn't answer.

This continuing absence of explanations insinuates in the audience the feeling that, though Chin and Long could have acted in way to resolve the situation, they always preferred to stand still leaving things to be resolved by the fate.

People are caught up in tempestuous personal worlds that challenge the increasingly unstable structure of interpersonal loyalty and fidelity,⁴⁴ a kind of fatalistic vision of the life that Taipei itself help to strengthen. There is no in between, everything is divided between old and new, black and white, with a suffocating dichotomy that at the end stifle everything.

Uncertainty about the future and lack of direction are other backbones of the feature.

Chin and Long get caught in a limbo. Despite Chin's admiration for Mrs. Mei, she is unable to completely imitate her boss. She strives for her career but remains passive when she loses her job. Even

⁴⁴ CHEN Ru-shou Robert, *Dispersion, ambivalence and hybridity...*, op. cit. p.166.

if she tries in any way to hide her traditional side wearing dark glasses and fashionable dress, at the end she always cedes to her truly nature. She wants ardently to separate herself from her mother, but her attachment to Long is symptomatic of her failure to identify with her role model. Just as she prefers the safety of her long-term relationship, professionally, she always returns to the same boss.

Hence, Chin's relationships are still based on a sense of traditional loyalty.⁴⁵

Long, as far as he is concerned, couldn't dissociate from his inner soul represented by the baseball player, being doomed to never grow up. He, however, tries to modify his attitude towards the future by becoming partner with his brother-in-law, thus, implicitly expressing the desire to follow his footsteps. Anyhow, his traditional, family-oriented value system prevents him from successfully identify himself with the business man.⁴⁶ He attempts to help his cabby friend by dragging his gambler wife out of the gambling house. His heroic action to defend patriarchal honor only leads to the family demolition. In this changing world, Long's beliefs appear illusory and his attempt to conform with the traditional code, useless.⁴⁷

The meaning attached to money is strong. It becomes a sort of shelter from everything, being important more for the safety it could provide than because of what it can buy. Money is one of the things that prevent Chin and Long to emigrate to U.S.

Actually, all the events revolve around money and during the feature there are different scenes in which there is a money exchange: Chin lends money to her mother, then to her sister. Long, moved and worried about his friend's conditions, borrows him money. Long life savings, destined to his future with Chin, are all devolved to save her father from his creditors.

In the relationships with parents, money replaces feelings: in a growing consumeristic society money becomes more and more important to the detriment of family ties.

Moreover, Long loses his opportunity to emigrate because his brother-in-law rejects the traditional family-oriented Chinese code of honor, not trusting in his promises. He instead, adopts the impersonal code of profit.⁴⁸ Two characters of the movie are gambler. Cash is cherished as a god, but nothing but a lot of problems can derive from this worship: this is what happen when money become the only stable thing while values are vanishing in the haze.

⁴⁵ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas...*, op. cit. p.124.

⁴⁶ Ibidem p.125.

⁴⁷ Ibidem p.127.

⁴⁸ Ibidem pp.125-128.

Conversely to others Yang's heroines, such as Jia Li, the female protagonist in *That day, on the beach* who is economically dependent on his husband, Chin, to some extent, tries to detach her personal development from everything else. She attempts to achieve her financial and 'social' independence by stepping out of the domestic sphere striving to reach the highest echelons in her company. However, Chin is not totally independent, notwithstanding her struggle to become any such, and she still relies on Long, at least emotionally. She suffers in her relationships with men whether they are her boyfriend, her father or her aspiring lovers (Ko and the young boy from Chin's sister gang). Finally, with the death of the male character, the only thing she could do is to rely on her career.

2.3.1 Stylistic techniques as bewilderment representation.

Characters are often framed in doorways, windows and mirrors. These elements, creating perpendicular lines, contribute to form visual composition whose purpose is to divide in opposite frames people presented in the same scene. By means of this framing technique, Yang's aim is to convey personages' alienated relationships and, to create a sort of distance between the audience and the narrative action increasing the sensation of estrangement.

In the very first shot, for example, Chin and Long stand in front of a French window. The window's structure creates a frame in which the straight lines separate the lovers, foreshadowing their inability to communicate. Moreover, the shot is taken from behind, a directorial choice that strengthens the sense of emotional detachment.

Throughout the sequence, the couple is never portrayed together, Chin and Long seem hardly to be in the same space.

Both visual and audio effects are employed to separate them as much as possible. In fact, their physical and emotional separation is further intensified by off-screen voices and by the echoes they raise in the empty apartment.



Fig. 19 Long and Chin stand in front of the window in the movie's opening scene.

A similar pattern of composition is also used to describe the relationship existing between Chin and her colleague, Ko. He is married, and she of course is engaged with Long. Implying the impossible development of a love affair, the sequence is composed by dividing them into two frames: on the right-side Chin framed by a door and Ko on the left side framed by a window.⁴⁹



Fig. 20 Ko and Chin. The composition of the scene suggests that their love story is nothing but impossible.

⁴⁹ See Fig.20.

The tormented search for identity, is described using reflective surfaces. As the images given back by mirrors and glasses are distorted, likewise, the characters suffer the lack of defined values and beliefs, inevitably leading to a deep bewilderment.

Each identity is less and less defined. Already torn apart by strong moral upheavals, they no longer recognize themselves in the images projected by the city.⁵⁰



Fig. 21 Chin's image reflected in a mirror while she is assessing her new apartment.

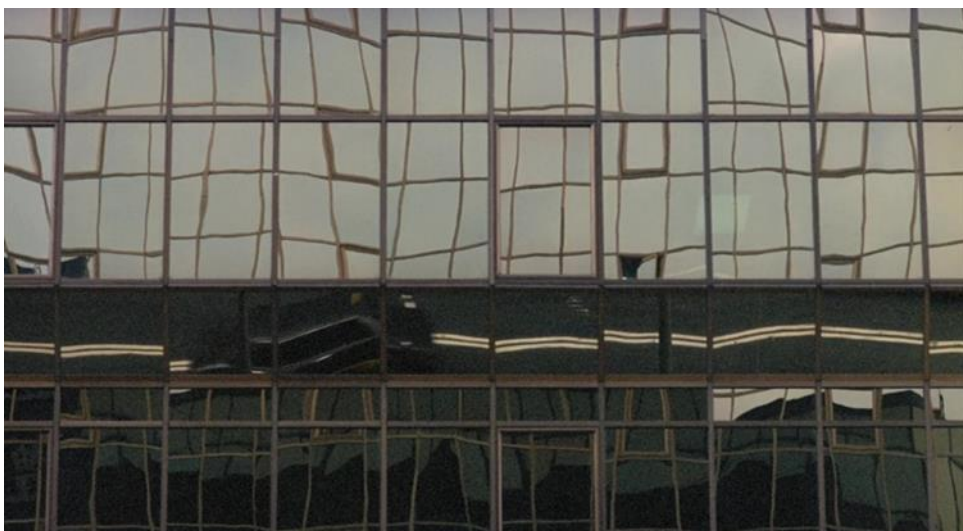


Fig. 22. The city mirror itself on the reflective surface of a skyscraper.

⁵⁰ See Fig 21 and 22.

The framing device also evokes entrapment, a product derived from the experience of the modern life. Characters are isolated by putting them behind a concrete obstacle, for example a net or a window. This feature is evident in the sequence in which Chin and Ko are depicted peeping out from behind Venetian blinds. The horizontal lines designed by the blinds, creating a visual pattern, surge as a sort of shield that protect them against other people's glance. At the same time, they block them outside of the action, relegating the couple merely to be in a passive position. Like voyeurs, too tired and apathetic to resist and to react, Chin and Ko are fated to succumb to their destinies.



Fig. 23 Ko and Chin peeping out from behind blinds.

Another similar example can be spotted when Long and Mr. Lai stand behind a safety net near a baseball court. The image is covered by diagonal lines from the net. The men are talking about the past reminiscing about when Long was young. The net here acts as blocking agent preventing them to venture into the future by trapping both men in their past.



Fig. 24 Long is talking with Mr. Lai near a baseball field.

Finally, the windows by which the characters often look outside are also the pretext to represent the landscape of a modern Taipei in rapid change. These spots become a sort of point of view by which characters can watch the city. At the same time the city partakes in the lives of its dwellers entering overwhelmingly inside their lives.

CHAPTER 3 - Terrorizers

*Terrorizers*¹ (English translation of *Kongbu Fenzi*, 恐怖分子) was released in 1986, just a year before the abrogation of the martial law in 1987.

Considered by several critics (Jameson and Flannery among others), as a feature with both modernist and postmodernist leanings, *Terrorizers*' plot is created by the apparent juxtaposition of different stories and characters who interact among themselves incidentally, because of seemingly purely irrelevant coincidence.

Likewise, is by a fortuitous event that Yang bumped into this story. He recalls during an interview:

The original spark [for the evolution of the film's story] came from the Eurasian girl in the story, who at the time was just a drifter in Taipei. [...] she came from a single-parent family. Her father was a Vietnam serviceman and her mother a bar hostess, so she comes from a very unique cultural background. In the film, I snuck in clues about her identity, [...].

[...] the Eurasian girl had a friend who told me about her interest in acting in films, so I met with her. She told me all kinds of stories about her life, like how her mother used to lock her up at home and, unable to go anywhere, she'd just stay in her room making prank phone calls. She told me that she had once called some woman and told her that she was her husband's mistress.²

Yang is seduced by the thought of how such random and irrelative actions could conceivably be the starting point for a real, terrible tragedy.

In the debates over nativism versus westernization, countries versus cities and traditional values versus new beliefs, *Terrorizers* stands as a movie of far-reaching globality.

It is built by intertwining three main plot strands whose protagonists greatly differs in social status. The upper-middle-class is represented by a rich boy, who is also an amateur photographer, and his girlfriend. The writer Chou Yufen, her husband Li Lichung and her lover Hsiao Shen, all belongs to

¹ Some translations prefer the singular translation referring to the original title as *Terrorizer*.

² Michael BERRY, Edward YANG, "Luckily Unlucky", in Michael Berry (edited by), *Speaking in Images: interviews with contemporary Chinese filmmakers*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005, p.282.

middle-aged professionals. The Eurasian girl, instead, belongs to the milieu of underground criminals. These three groups, apparently very dissimilar to each other, are loosely connected by the Eurasian girl's actions.

3.1 Who's not a Terrorizer?

Starting from the translation of the title, it is possible to open a hermeneutical debate about the single or plural adaptation of the Chinese original title, *Kongbu Fenzi*, since mandarin language do not consider orthographical distinction between the single and the plural form of the noun.

If we tend to prefer the singular translation, a reflection is due upon to whom or what it refers the Terrorizer mentioned in the title. Is 'it' a person, a place, a particular attitude or even the melting of these elements put together? It can refer to more than one person, thus being intended as Terrorizers?

Interestingly, these questions concerning the singularity or plurality of the title are as essential as redundant, given that each character of the feature has the potential to become a terrorizer, if triggered by the happening of certain events.

They come to be at the same time terrorizers for other people and terrorizer for themselves, destroying or irreversibly changing others and their lives, thus ending to the embodiment of both aspects.

Their condition could be better represented by two recurring images that, along with their hidden meaning, have also a 'technical' purpose, serving as junctions for different layers of narration.

The first is the gas tank. The recurrent image of this huge construction become the symbolic representation of the city and of its intrinsic destructive power. Taipei could then be perceived as a 'threatening terrorizer'³, a strange entity who casts its chilling shadows over its inhabitants, who are tragically caught in the grip of a dramatic existence. Despite differences in social status, profession, and age, each character seems to find ways to fight loneliness and boredom. Photography, writing, anonymous phone calls, lies, adultery, prostitution, and murder: each of these activities are, directly or indirectly, potentially harmful to other people. In this sense, almost every character in the film can be considered as a terrorizer and their actions as the trigger, sparking off destructive destinies.

³ SHEN Shiao-Ying, *Permutations of the foreigner: a study of the works of Edward Yang, Stan Lai, Chang Yi and Hou Hsiao-Hsien*, PhD diss., ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1995, p.44.

3.1.1 Sins and entrapment: the city of dim lights.

The second, important, recurrent image is the barking dog.

In a city like Taipei dogs are kept in cages. Similarly, Taipei's inhabitants are confined in their apartment, representing metaphorically prison cells.

Like an 'anthology of enclosed apartments or even individual rooms'⁴ the city is sketched thanks to its dwellers' homes 'in which the characters are all in one way confined'.⁵

This is particularly true if we consider the 'spatial confinement' suffered by the female characters. While the doctor, the photographer and the policeman are fundamentally able to move freely in public spaces, the women must cope with a reality that for most of the times is developed within private spaces.

Hence, female characters surge as heralds of gender disparity, dramatizing 'the maiming of the subject in late capitalism [...] and the failure of the subject under the new system to constitute itself in the first place'.⁶

The Eurasian girl confinement is blatantly conveyed using subsequent shots of her mother's apartment, full of windows and doors with iron gratings and lockers. Moreover, her injured leg is nothing but another limit imposed to her freedom. To make matters worse, the apartment remembers her mother's entrapment: the woman is stuck in her past embodied by the memory of her American lover. Subjected to her parent's personal imprisonment, the girl could alleviate her condition only by pulling prank phone calls. However, while allowing her to evade from a claustrophobic reality, these phone calls are as dangerous as the image of the gas tank.

The writer's condition is not dissimilar. She is equally locked up in her own apartment, a kind of dead space she and her husband managed to divide equally. She lives confined in her study continuously focused on the incessant, disconnected writing of the novel she can't complete.

Her writer's block and her continuous rewrite of the book are mirrored in her actual need for 'new starts'. When Chou Yufen married Li Lichung, that was the start of their new life together. Then they vainly tried to have a baby, symbol of a fresh beginning par excellence. So, she decides to start again leaving

⁴ Fredric JAMESON, "Remapping Taipei", in Fredric Jameson (edited by), *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 153.

⁵ Ibidem, p.154.

⁶ Ibidem, p.131.

her job to write fiction. Her adultery with her former lover, is nothing more than another ‘clean start.’⁷ ‘The urge for constant renewal can be perceived as symptomatic of modernity’.⁸ She is waiting the right moment to escape, but the only way she finds to break free from her reclusion is by using her writing as a pretext to desert her family. Her alienated relationship with Li is suggested by their actions: while she is searching for new beginnings, Li is strictly anchored to his methodical life, amazingly represented by his spasmodic hands washing, repeated every evening. Moreover, the fact that Li has never read Chou’s novels⁹ or never asked about her previous relationships¹⁰ are evident symptoms of their deteriorating marriage.¹¹

Significantly, the only public space left for her is the television, but clearly this isn’t a place where she can truthfully be herself. Even considering the fact that she is separated from the viewer by a screen, her communication is not freely conveyed but remains mediated by the camera and the editing of the tv program.

The photographer’s girlfriend is also caged, and the apartment where she lives resemble more a spatial extension of the photographer, rather than a real place. Likewise, she is imprisoned in a love story that verge on real dependence. The only time we can see her in spaces other than her house, is when she tries to commit suicide. As she could not live without her lover, the only way to escape her confinement is by dying.

To further enhance these claustrophobic feelings, all private spaces are almost always represented using low-key lighting. From a pure and simple device by which making things visible, the illumination is raised to a definite stylistic and aesthetic medium, skillfully used to provide characters’ feelings.

Taiwanese dwellers’ houses are set applying this feature. Therefore, lighting effects, in particular dim-lights, are used to prefigure insecurity, uncertainty, loneliness, and sins.

⁷ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of Taiwan and Mainland China*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.137.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ When Li’s boss asks him about the kind of novel his wife is writing, he replies: ‘I’m not sure, I never read novels’.

¹⁰ In Chou’s opinion, Li has never asked her about her previous relationship not because he trusts in her but because ‘he never seems to have cared’.

¹¹ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang: the first decade of his film career (1982-1991)*, PhD diss., University of Southern California, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1995, p.104.

The soft light that scarcely light up Chou's office is certainly not suitable for writing but become the representation of her depression and frustration for not being able to finish the novel. Her dark study is where she picks up again the inappropriate habit of smoking.¹²

Similarly, the yellow light of the bathroom in which the doctor every evening washes away the stains of his shameful conduct, together with the dirt of his hands, assumes specific connotations.

Accordingly, the Eurasian girl isolation and sins and her mother's nostalgia and grudge are conveyed by always representing their house as invaded by the darkness. Often, the women are scarcely visible being hidden in the gloomy light.

Moreover, the hotel rooms in which the young girl works as a prostitute are often rendered using low-key lighting to imply sin and sexual reprobation.

Finally, the photographer's dark room is the quintessential dusky place. It is used by the boy as a refuge from real life and represent his emptiness and superficiality. Supported by a rich family, he has no definite plans for the future. His photography is meaningless because he transforms it merely into an expensive habit, instead of using it as a way to capture people innermost reality. Photography and love affairs are just means by which he escapes the boredom of his empty days. When he finds out the Eurasian girl left him, stealing his photography gear, obscured lighting is used to underline the young man's suffering from loneliness, uncertainty and betrayal.¹³

3.1.2 Li Lichung and the White Chick: characters as Taipei's national allegory.

While in *Taipei Story* and in *That day, on the beach* were spotted, here and there, physical traces of the past (ancient building, billboard, cultural heritages etc.). In Yang's third film these references are subtler and are often offered directly by the characters themselves and by their actions.

Thus, the Eurasian girl's prank phone calls become the herald of a kind of 'national resentment', certainly fueled by her social marginal status, in turn caused by her mixed-race nature. Then, the girl's situation could be metaphorically compared to Taiwan's. In fact, the island has been subjected to various waves of colonization during the years, including a profound influence of the American culture, that has stripped the island of its 'national identity'. The Eurasian girl 'embodies the residual history of the

¹² Since he is a doctor, in Li Lichung's eyes, this habit assumes the connotation of a real threat.

¹³ LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. p.99.

American military presence',¹⁴ and as she struggles to position her individuality inside society, Taiwan strives for redefine its cultural outline worldwide. She is the emblem of 'otherness' in Taiwanese society, and as such she pays the piper of a nation that needs to redefine itself.

In this context, the pictures of the girl, shot by the photographer, and in particular the big composition he realizes using the blow-up technique (here a clear citation of Antonioni's *Blow-up*), assume a particular meaning. Because of her being 'half-American', the collage could imply the fragmentation and illusoriness of the American dream.¹⁵ Moreover, the rectangular shapes of the photographs that forms the larger image, terribly resemble 'the highly compartmentalized urban structures that all the characters inhabit'.¹⁶

However, unlike the cage in which the Taipei inhabitants are entrapped, the photos of the Eurasian girl are only pinned to the wall free to flutter in the wind.



Fig. 25 *The puzzle of the Eurasian girls' image made with photographs.*

In *A Brighter summer day* (released in 1991), the director will face a similar struggle representing American residual effects on Taiwanese society.

¹⁴ HONG Guo-Juin, *Taiwan Cinema: a contested Nation on screen*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p.130.

¹⁵ KAI-MAN Chang, "Filming Critical Female Perspectives: Edward Yang's the Terrorizers", in *The ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, Volume 24, no.1, 2017, p.123-124. (<http://doi.org/10.16995/ane.157>)

¹⁶ *Ibidem* p.123.

In my opinion, the Eurasian girl could also be considered as the director's representation. Actually, Yang lived in U.S for a long time, and certainly has been subjected to western culture. As the girl inherited both American and Taiwanese genes, Yang has been influenced by both westernized and traditional civilization. Hence, the Eurasian girl could be the director's declaration of his struggles to recognize himself in a modernizing city that preserves profound ties with the past but is neither modern nor ancient.

Li Lichung could bear a similar metaphorical meaning. Jameson identifies in the character of the doctor an 'allegorical investment'.¹⁷ He believes the doctor, better than other characters who could be found easily in every other city, can introduce the meditation on the position of Taiwan as 'national entity within the new world system of the late capitalism'.¹⁸ In fact, as a bureaucratized professional, he can 'offer figuration to 'national allegory' of a post-Third world country that can never join the First World'.¹⁹ Always considered as a satellite nation, Taiwan's detachment from Japan's or U.S's spheres of influence is doomed. Likewise, even if Li had obtained his promotion, his marriage would have ended anyway, and his inept life wouldn't have changed too much. Thus, the doctor become the allegory of a petty bourgeoisie, whose fate is the emblem of the fate of the nation itself.

3.1.3 A distorted, deadly communication.

As in *Taipei Story* money replaces human relationship, similarly, in *Terrorizers* relationships among things replaces relationships among people.

Technological development is emphasized to such an extent that, in the end, human beings model their behaviors toward their peers, on the same mold they use with technological devices. As a result, technology becomes the power that governs the city, and people are its slaves.

Life is reduced into nothing more than a dependence on technological media, such as telephones, cameras, television, cars, and guns.²⁰ Even books, which are definitely not technological products (at least during the eighties), hide an alarming alienating effect.

This overwhelming sense of dependence on technology, hide a deep crisis of any interpersonal relationship. To this extent, technology could be perceived as a surrogate of human bonds.²¹ In fact,

¹⁷ JAMESON, "Remapping Taipei", op. cit. p. 145.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of...*, op. cit. pp.134-135.

²¹ Ibidem.

telephone is the means by which the Eurasian girl can ‘escape’ from her confinement despite her physical imprisonment. Chou Yufen’s novel and rich boy’s photographs, have the same liberating effect. Correspondingly, Li Lichung murder/suicide is the ‘liberation’ par excellence.

Thus, technological products, whether are telephones as means of communication, cameras as means of visual recording, or police guns as means of law enforcement, acquire the opposite of their intended effect of making life easier for people. Sometimes, in turn they destroy human beings instead of serving and protecting them.²² And so, a phone call can destroy a marriage, a photography can destroy a couple, love for romantic book-style ending quite destroys a life, a novel pushes a man to his limits.

Edward Yang, uses *Terrorizers*’ character to depict a pitiless, dangerous city (obviously Taipei) that is as cynical as its inhabitants could be, trapped in an emotionless struggle in order to reach a mythological well-being that is never achieved. A dehumanized and dehumanizing society.

The society depicted in this film assume, more than ever, an upsetting modernity. Our society does not differ so much from the one described in the film. Today *vis à vis* relationships has been replaced by medias. The irrefutable proof lies in social networks’ great diffusion.

I would consider one example above all, not because of its particular characteristics, but just because was born as a platform for photographic dissemination. Like the photographer of the film who rushes out to capture the shooting with his camera in the movie’s initial sequence, today’s people put a lot of effort into take pictures of their own lives and of others’. There are even guides that suggest which place to visit in order to catch the most ‘instagrammable’²³ landscapes or places. From a despicable habit, voyeurism has turned into custom. Today, everybody feels the duty to describe in detail their lives. But contrarily to Chou Yufen’s book, whose events were just realistic, on social network everything is real²⁴. Nothing is private anymore.

Social networks are dangerous too, as the Eurasian girl's prank phone calls are. Much more, they have a real alienating action and like Li Lichung, the weakest often pays the consequences. Cases of suicide due to cyberbullies are already tragically common²⁵. Even more common are suicides cases in which

²² LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas of...*, op. cit. pp.134-135.

²³ A photo that is worth posting on Instagram. LJM1213, *Instagrammable*, in “The urban dictionary”, 2016, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=instagrammable>, retrieved Sept 19, 2018.

²⁴ It could be interesting to reflect upon how much of what is shown on social medias is reality and to what extent, the contents are something prepared specially to be uploaded. However, here what is intended is that often people share part of their life not taking into consideration the latent, intrinsic danger of this habit.

²⁵ CHAO, Cheng-Min, YU, Tai-Kuei, “Associations among Different Internet Access Time, Gender and Cyberbullying Behaviors in Taiwan’s Adolescents.”, in *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, article 1104.. 2017, p. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01104

the main causes are problems in dealing with love or interpersonal relationships.²⁶ And here the parallel with the photographer's girlfriend's suicidal attempt do not need any explanations.

Taipei's middle class' portrayal is rendered honestly, devoid from any exaggerations or embroidery: any harmony and ideal happy endings of traditional escapist films are eliminated, *Terrorizers* is as similar to real life as an artefact could be.

People are in search of personal fulfillment, meaning, and transcendence but almost the totality of them are unable to deal with their careers and their marriages, which in Yang's films, are the two crucial providers of meaning for Taipei's bourgeoisie²⁷. These unsuccessful careers and uncommunicative marriages lead to a continuous struggle that, since it has no positive consequences, forces Yang's characters to suffer mental and emotional frustration, to bear anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity.

In *Terrorizers* each character is blocked and suspended in what seems to be, borrowing Jameson words, 'a time of dead transition, a temporality, not so much of waiting as of sitting it out dully'²⁸. And in fact, Li Lichung is waiting for a promotion now that his boss is dead, her wife is waiting for the inspiration that will help her get over her writer's block (even if what she is really waiting for is to find the courage to leave her husband, or at least the courage to start anew). The Eurasian girl is waiting for her broken leg to recover in order to be free and able to bring back together the old gang.

Interestingly, every personage is waiting for something that if achieved, inevitably will cause some sort of pain for other people: the doctor is willing to lie, getting his colleague into trouble, the writer is willing to leave her husband destroying their marriage, albeit not one of the most successful union. The Eurasian girl will continue to make a living by luring people in louche hotels. Nonetheless each of them thinks that once achieved his or her long-awaited purpose, the achieving itself will freed them from their unhappiness.

The photographer, as far as he is concerned, is merely waiting to be enlisted to do the military service, thus giving to his wandering from house to house and from girl to girl the taste of a 'furlough from life'²⁹. A sort of late rebellion which aim is to escape simultaneously from the rich and glossy world

²⁶ CHIU Yi-Chun, LIN Rachel, PAN Jason, *Suicide rate among teens cause for concern: center*, in "Taiwan Times", 2014, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2014/06/28/2003593868>, retrieved Sept 19, 2018.

²⁷ 'For a man, a successful career is the most important thing. 'The rest is meaningless', says Li at his cop friend, talking about his awaited promotion.

²⁸ JAMESON, "Remapping Taipei", op. cit. p.137.

²⁹ Ibidem.

made by big villas and swimming pool and from the much more crude and dangerous reality of the military life.

Crystallized in their perpetual waiting, the characters that animated Taipei's streets are nothing more than mediocre representation of their 'category': neither is possible for the watcher to prove any kind of sympathy or empathy for them, nor they can be totally disregarded as evil entities.

3.2 Narrative structure and stylistic choices.

Terrorizers has a ‘providential plot’³⁰ created by using a ‘narrative of synchronous monadic simultaneity’³¹, that is to say, the story is created by intercutting different lines of action that occur in different places simultaneously and seem to have a minimal relationship with each other.

Following the development of the plot, the different stories intertwine creating the film’s narrative structure. Non-linear narration and synchronous monadic simultaneity plot are usually considered as ‘modernist attributes divorced from traditional linear narration depicting a story by one chain of cause and effect [...], following spatial and temporal continuity’.³²

Traditional movies’ linear narration leads to a certain homogeneity and continuity in terms of plot’s structure. Films built with this ‘simple’ composition imply that every fact is almost presented in chronological order and with less unstated elements. This obviously, makes the fruition of the movie more accessible because events are easily understandable, and the unfolding story can be easily followed by the audience with a minimum effort.

Terrorizers’ narration is quite the opposite and is composed by a highly fragmented representation of the story, thus conveying a ‘disturbing’, rather engaging, discontinuity. The plot needs to be reconstructed by the audience. Each occurrence is selected and then virtually repositioned in a different, chronological order so to recreate a logical connection.

Evidently, the choice of a fragmented narration imply that the spectator participates in the unfolding process of the story, abandoning its passive role and embracing a more challenging position. This, however, require a sort of active effort in order to find out the movie’s key of interpretation. Therefore, such a desultory narration undoubtedly makes the film comprehension more difficult, compromising, in certain cases, the final result. If the audience fail in the interpretation of the plot, the film’s inner meaning cannot be completely understood leading to the audience’s dissatisfaction, in turn produced by disregarded expectations.

³⁰ JAMESON, “Remapping Taipei”, op. cit. p.116.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op.cit. p.90.

3.2.1 Images manipulation.

Terrorizers can ‘boast’ this peculiarity, masterfully enhanced by Yang’s capability to manipulate images. They cease to be the sole means by which the course of the events is built and, stripped of their prosaic meaning, they become bearers of more pregnant implications. In that regard, the technical choices made during production and post-production acquire a huge importance: the selection of shots and sequences that are to be included and the choice of the order in which they will be shown, become of paramount significance to give a determined meaning to the images themselves. Hence, the sequence editing is conceived to convey, depending on the situation, specific effects.

An emblematic example of this is the use that Yang makes of images, often used instead of dialogues. Let’s consider the montage sequence³³ in which the young photographer meets with Li Lichung in order to inform him of the phone prank call that ushered all his misfortunes.

Rather than let the boy report again all the story verbally, a choice that would have made the scene monotonous and redundant³⁴, he decides to condense the young man's words converting them into images. The shots show a series of picture taken by the photographer, depicting the salient elements of the narration: the police arresting the criminals, various pictures of the Eurasian girl, and then the images of Chou visiting the photographer in the apartment he rented after having left his girlfriend.³⁵ Finally, we see Chou's novel published on the newspaper. The images, of course, are not edited randomly, but their purpose is to explain that the photographer has understood how the events happened and decided to tell everything to Li.

Furthermore, another example of ‘images in place of dialogues’ that deserves to be mentioned, is the argument between the young photographer and his girlfriend.

The ‘brief shots’ come rapidly in succession. The Eurasian girl is the *trait d’union* that connect the previous sequence with the one of the quarrel itself. In fact, several extreme close ups of pictures of the girl are framed suggesting that the photographer is harboring some type of interest for her.³⁶ These

³³ With montage sequence I intend ‘a passage in a film with many brief shots which are edited together in quick succession (...)’ (From Annette KUHN, Guy WESTWELL, *Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.269.)

³⁴ Since the audience knows all the story having an omniscient point-of view, the verbal repetition of all the story would have been excessive.

³⁵ These images are directly deduced by the film itself and repeated in this context to represent boy’s report.

³⁶ See Fig. 26.

photos arouse the jealousy of his girlfriend, who in subsequent shots is framed while angrily tearing them off. Pile of books are thrown around the room. At this point her anger overflow: in the following shot she is hurling a camera, presumably breaking it.³⁷ She is caught while destroying the photographer's dark room. Negatives are ripped up, a box of film negative is overturned.³⁸ Finally, the red bulb swinging points out the peak of the argument: the girl, once satisfied her fury, turn around. No one is standing near the window; the photographer left her.³⁹

Instead of representing a fight by literally following the characters arguing between each other, Yang, juxtaposing shots in rapid succession, is able to convey the tension of the conflict that acquire even more gravity eliminating dialogues and the ambient sound. The song 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes',⁴⁰ played in the background, build up the scene: the images follow the music and, as the dispute carry on reaching its culmination, similarly the song grows more agitated and louder reaching its climax.

This stylistic feature can be spotted also in other films of the director but is in *Terrorizers* that these narrative devices are more widely and effectively used.

Considering the film languages employed in Taiwan cinema until then, this kind of visual narration can be considered a real innovation. Yang avoids the realism and objectivity of long takes and long shots, rather preferring a more subjective way to direct the viewer's attention. Exploiting an anti-traditional and manipulative editing of a series of shots, the director creates a non-verbal means by which to tell a story and to convey metaphors.⁴¹

³⁷ See Fig. 27, Fig. 28 and Fig.29.

³⁸ See Fig. 30.

³⁹ See Fig.31.

⁴⁰ Originally written by the American composer Jerome Kern and the lyricist Otto Harbach for a Broadway musical, 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' was sung by different singers during the years. Probably, the most popular version, as well as the one used in *Terrorizers*, is that performed by *The Platters* in 1958.

⁴¹LEE Chu-Chun, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang...*, op. cit. p.97.



Fig. 26 Eurasian girl's pictures, symbol of photographer interest towards her.



Fig. 27 The jealous girlfriend ripping apart pictures of the Eurasian girl.



Fig. 28 Books thrown around the room during the quarrel.



Fig. 29 The girl is angrily hurling her boyfriend's camera.



Fig. 30 A box of film negative is overturned during the quarrel.



Fig. 31 Once satisfied her fury the girl turns around, but her boyfriend has already left.

3.2.2 Sounds manipulation.

Besides, the skillful approach adopted for the narration Yang chooses to implement another experimental tactic by manipulating the sound. Matching it with images manipulation, the director often 'reinterprets' the common use of the shot-reverse shot⁴² during characters' conversations.

During the break up scene between Li and his wife Chou in their apartment, for example, the sequence starts with a medium close up of Li sitting at their dining table, he is ranting about some unimportant things. The watcher supposes that he is talking to Chou, but she couldn't be seen because is positioned off-screen. The confirmation comes right away when the camera, cutting to a long shot of the dining room, frames the couple seated facing each other. Then woman walks into the kitchen and Li is left alone in the room. The conversation turns into a monologue since while he continues to talk, Chou is always framed from behind. Again, the frame changes into a medium close up of the wife seated again at the dining table.

Now is her turn to talk and even though her husband is never framed, her speech is clearly addressed to him. Then, she suddenly looks directly into the camera causing a dazing sensation in the watchers. The scene is not taken from the front (the groom point of view if he is seated facing her), but on the contrary the camera is positioned slightly aside.

Hence, further strengthening the audience impression of being watched.

This expedient allows Chou to break the fourth wall: this is one of the different self-reflexive hints included in the feature.⁴³

By completely avoiding the use of shot-reverse shot and by excluding from the frame the recipient of the speech, the director succeeds in the challenge to convey a deep sensation of detachment and incommunicability between the couple. Moreover, the continue questions remained sorrowfully unanswered (recalling Chin's and Lung's) further underline their lack of communication. Also, framing Chou from her back while Li is speaking, suggests that she is not really interested in what he is saying, but she is just letting him vents his dissatisfaction.

Similarly, when Li dishonestly report one of his colleagues accusing him of having cheated on the hospital bidding, his dialogue with the director of the hospital is built exactly excluding from the view alternately, him or the other man. The sound manipulation lies in the fact that the dialogues do not follow

⁴² Also called shot-countershot: an editing technique widely used in dialogue sentences and sequences in which characters exchange looks [...]. From Annette KUHN, Guy WESTWELL, *Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.373.

⁴³ A further explanation of this phenomenon and its implication will be rendered later in the following chapter

the shot sequence, framing who is speaking, but contrarily, often who is framed is the one that is listening. It is consequently clear how the man off-screen could be perceived only through his own voice.

Lastly, even the film-opening sequence is not showed blatantly on the screen, but the only thing that could be heard distinctly, is the sound of the shooting. The images running on the screen (a woman washing clothes, a man seeking a place to hide, Taipei's landscape), apparently have nothing to do with the sounds we are hearing but are used as substitute for the gunfight and contemporaneously they add important details to the narration. However, by using such off-screen sound effects the fruition of the movie inevitably become more demanding because the audience is invited to imagine what is missing, rather than finding it simply shown on the screen.

Sound effects are efficaciously used to create links between scenes in order to generate a sort of logical continuum. The above-mentioned song 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes', for example, start to be played by the White Chick's mum. Then the song continues as an extradiegetic⁴⁴ music in the following sequence, serving as background music for the quarrel between the photographer and his girlfriend.

The choice of the song isn't clearly left to chance, but the lyrics 'seem to comment on the female characters' shared pain over the loss of love'⁴⁵. Telling the sorrow and the disappointment of a lover abandoned by who he considered his true love, the song matches perfectly with the inner turmoil of the two women. On one hand, the regrets and the nostalgia for a past relationship with an American soldier, father of the Eurasian Girl (references to USA could build a parallel with Chin's American broken dreams in *Taipei Story*). On the other hand, the anger for the discovery of having been 'cheated', even if just platonically.

Later in the film, when the photographer and his girlfriend reconcile, we can see the boy recognizing Chou thanks to a picture of her in the newspaper. Her girlfriend has read her book and describes Chou's awarded novel to him. While she is reporting the murderous plot, the image cuts to the next scene showing Chou meeting Li in a café.

⁴⁴ The term diegetic sound is in common use [...] referencing any voice, music, or sound effect presented as having its source within the film's fictional world. This is in contradistinction from nondiegetic or extradiegetic sound [Follow from the previous footnote] (such as background music, or underscoring, or voice over) that is represented as coming from a source outside the story world. From Annette KUHNS, Guy WESTWELL, *Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.117.

⁴⁵ KAI-MAN Chang, "Filming Critical Female Perspectives: Edward Yang's the Terrorizers", in *The ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, Vol.24(1), 2017, p.126. (<http://doi.org/10.16995/ane.157>)

This particular sounds management, is used both to express the simultaneity of the events connected by the sound effect, and to meld different lines of narration.

Another, different example, is the sequence concerning the photographer's girlfriend abandoned by her boyfriend. The director conceives the scene by using subsequent 'short shots', extreme close ups of pictures of the girl took by his, at this point, ex-boyfriend⁴⁶ while in the background we hear a female voice saying:

It's too late, you're the only one that cared. I'm so hurt, it really hurts. I don't want to live anymore!

Then the scene cuts to the inside of an ambulance of which we hear the siren, we see the intravenous drip rocking from the ambulance roof.⁴⁷ Then the camera moves to the girl lying unconscious, and again on the background the same voice:

I've already taken a bottle of sleeping pills. I am not joking, I don't want to live.

The dialogue paired with the images seems to suggest that, overwhelmed by the sorrow, the girl committed suicide. Thus, the words reported by the monologue are nothing but the message she left to her beloved boyfriend. However, while the female-voice continues to express her last will, the scene rapidly changes again. The Eurasian girl appears on the screen. Now it is clear that the voice-over heard throughout the sequence is nothing but the voice of the Eurasian girl pulling another one of her prank phone calls.⁴⁸

Contrary to the other discussed sound manipulations, based upon the incoherence of images and sounds, in this example, these two elements appear to be consistent to each other. Nevertheless, the subsequent revealing of their meaning discrepancy unveils how the 'filmic syntax' is used to narrate two different events presumably happening at the same time.

⁴⁶ See Fig. 32 and Fig. 33.

⁴⁷ See Fig. 34.

⁴⁸ See Fig.35.



Fig. 32 Extreme close up of a picture of the photographer's girlfriend.



Fig. 33 The girl lying unconscious inside the ambulance.



Fig. 34 Extreme close up of a picture of the photographer's girlfriend.



Fig. 35 The Eurasian girl pulling another one of her prank phone calls.

Is interesting to notice how throughout the movie the telephone assumes a specific task becoming a sort of preferred medium by which the plot develops and is articulated.

The telephone serves as a *trait d'union* that

[...] links all three female characters and functions as a cinematic device that facilitates the film's fragmented and circulatory narration, which works against the established chronological pattern of traditional Hollywood narratives.⁴⁹

3.3 Art versus life, fiction versus reality: Self-reflexivity, open end and Antonioni's Blow-up influences.

Events in films are presented in ways that mimic how they really happen in real life. The classic cinema tries to maintain an analogical relationship with the real world, simultaneously revealing to the viewer its deepest meaning. The narrative artifice is hidden as much as possible to the full advantage of the viewer who, through his omniscient point of view, perceives the story as perfectly natural.

However, there are films that attempt to establish a dialogue with their watchers instead of simply bewitching them through its mimesis of the reality.⁵⁰

Following Gloria Withalm definition:

A self-reflexive film is a film which focuses or reflects on *itself*, that is, on the specific film that is being watched. Various cinematic devices are used to draw the spectators' attention to the film itself in this sense: lines of the dialog, the "materialization" of filmic means, and in some less frequent cases, to the showing of the *dispositif*, the technical device of film production and film showing.⁵¹

This self-reflexive attribute can be spotted in *Terrorizers* in various moments of the narration and in different shapes. It is used to inform and to remind the audience that what is watching is nothing more

⁴⁹ KAI-MAN Chang, "Filming Critical Female Perspectives: Edward Yang's the Terrorizers", in *The ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, Vol.24(1), 2017, p.125, (<http://doi.org/10.16995/ane.157>).

⁵⁰ Pietro PIEMONTESE, *Cinema nel Cinema*, in "Enciclopedia del Cinema Treccani", 2003, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cinema-nel-cinema_%28Enciclopedia-del-Cinema%29/, retrieved Sept 24, 2018.

⁵¹ Gloria WITHALM, "The self-reflexive screen: Outlines of a comprehensive model.", in Winfried Nöth and Nina Bishara (edited by), *Self-Reference in the Media*, Berlin and New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 2007, p. 130.

than just a film: foregrounding the process of filmmaking, this device should encourage to reflect upon the feature creation itself.

The clearer indication of self-reflexivity lies in the revealing of the creative process of Chou's novel. Writing a book becomes the metaphor for shooting a film. Chou is the filmic embodiment of the director himself: both Chou and Yang create their works being inspired by daily life events,⁵² but the reality they display is filtered by the writer's pen or by the director's camera. Thus, can we consider what is written or what is recorded reality?

There are some sequences in which cinema is clearly mentioned: the scene showing a landlord complaining about someone delivering fifty lunch-boxes to the apartment for the film crew is one of them, along with the sequence in which Li Lichung is framed while walking down a pedestrian bridge in a street full of movie theaters. Huge movie billboards stand out behind him.⁵³ Moreover, during the quarrel between Li and Chou there are self-reflexive sequences. Both the doctor and the writer look directly in the camera giving to the audience the feeling of being observed.

Complying with Withalm definition of self-reflexive film, *Terrorizers* stresses this obsession for what is real and what is not, also through characters' dialogues. The photographer's girlfriend says to her boyfriend: *Novels are fiction, they aren't real!* Similarly, Chou reminds her husband that novels are nothing more than fiction, saying: *A novel is a novel! Do not take it too seriously.*



Fig. 36 A self-reflexive scene. Movies billboards stands out behind Li.

⁵² Curiously, the trigger for their creative production is in both cases the Eurasian girl.

⁵³ LEE, *A Modernist auteur, Edward Yang ...*, op. cit. p.101-102.

Jameson also points out that *Terrorizers* is confronted with the 'old-fashioned reflexivity of [...] the mystery of the imitation of art by life and the correspondence of the novel to the aleatory realities of the world outside'.⁵⁴ That is to say, that the feature pushes the audience to reflect upon the creation of the film itself, suggesting to differentiate reality and fiction. Therefore, the movie also plays with the concept of art versus life, raising questions about to what extent art that imitates life could be defined fictional and vice versa.

Yang's movie conclusion is, in more than one way, similar to Chou's award-winning novel that tells about a husband murdering his wife after receiving a prank call.

Both Li's killing spree and Chou's book are fiction, but Li's death seems to be real.

Finally, what is real and what is not?

3.3.1 An unforeseeable, open end.

Terrorizers' stories eventually come to a conclusion, but obviously it is anything but a narrative, self-explanatory one, leaving doubts behind and opening again the way to different interpretations.

The open-ending style is definitely not an unusual choice for Yang, that indeed uses it both in *That day, on the beach* and in *Taipei Story*.

However, what makes *Terrorizers'* ending so interesting and terribly mesmerizing, is that the watcher participates in Li Lichung's drama, witnessing his separation from reality that culminates in unforeseeably lethal actions.

Li finds out that he has not received the promotion he yearned for and, despite his effort to win her back, his wife is not willing to salvage their marriage.

He decides to revisit his policeman friend but, instead of seeking comfort from him, Li unexpectedly lies candidly and with a 'radiant false happiness'⁵⁵ starts to explain to his friend how he has conquered the director's trust, finally winning his long-awaited promotion. Moreover, he has come to terms with his wife's infidelity, coping with her separation by actually realizing that his life could be better without her. All things considered, what really makes a man fulfilled is a successful career, 'all the rest is meaningless'⁵⁶, and Li is now at peace because he has obtained the career he has always deserved.

⁵⁴ Fredric JAMESON, "Remapping Taipei", op. cit. p. 121.

⁵⁵ Ibidem p.147.

⁵⁶ These are the exact words that Li says to his friend during dinner talking about his life and Chou.

Li's attitude clashes with the gravity of his situation and his appalling smile is even more frightening, giving that is the first time we see him grin and, what is more, in a situation in which grinning is not the most natural reaction.

Li Lichung's behavior could be considered the consequences of the fact that 'under certain circumstances the acting out of alternative, unrealized possibilities [...] might be as satisfying, perhaps more fully satisfying, than the reality'.⁵⁷ However, we can also discuss upon the fact that Li Lichung's 'fictional or unreal alternate life can also be seen and read in [...] a remarkable series of multiple and mutually exclusive *dénouements*'.⁵⁸ That is to say that, determining life as an opposition between reality and appearance is no more sufficient to describe its complexity. It could rather be better to conceive it as 'a succession of various surfaces'⁵⁹, each of which has its own ontological importance.

After having celebrated his achievements the night before, the doctor wakes up in the policemen house. After stealing his friend's revolver, he shoots the hospital director on the street and barges into his wife's lover's apartment, killing him to death too.⁶⁰ Unable to do the same with his wife, he spares her life. Then, we see him wandering in downtown where, the Eurasian girl usually picks up her clients. Probably he decides to hold her responsible for all his misfortunes. He spots White Chick and takes her to a hotel room. The doctor starts his usual hand washing. The moment in which the policemen break the hotel-room coincide with the sound of shooting. However, the blood splattering happens in a different place as Li Lichung shoots himself in the traditional-style bathroom of his policeman friend. The scene cuts to Chou Yufen waking up in her own bed besides her lover.

This open ending leaves place to interpretations. The killing spree could have actually happened or could be Li Lichung vengeful fantasy before committing suicide. The whole terrible revenge may be only Chou's dream or even, a representation of her novel by means of images.

However, it could be useless trying to decide whether this sequence is supposed to be real or fictional. Instead of adopting a modernist attitude trying 'to tie up the threads by locking it all back into identifiable subjectivities and points of view'⁶¹, it could be interesting to consider the 'postmodern alternative'.⁶²

⁵⁷ JAMESON, "Remapping Taipei", op. cit. p.148.

⁵⁸ Ibidem

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⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ In *Confucian Confusion (Duli shidai, 獨立時代)*, Yang Dechang, 1994) there is a murder scene that, to some extent, recalls this one.

⁶¹ Fredric JAMESON, "Remapping Taipei", op. cit. p.151.

⁶² Ibidem.

accepting that the sequence is nothing but a whole composed by segments, all of them belonging to the same narrative *ensemble*.

Moreover this ‘multiple ending’ is more terrifying than a single conclusion, because it precludes any way of escape: fantasy and reality are both realizable and realistic, but most of all, equally ghastly.⁶³

3.3.2 What’s between Yang and Antonioni?

Wilson Flannery spots similarities between Yang’s *Terrorizers* and Antonioni’s *Blow-up* arguing that these two features are built using ‘overlapping themes and plot devices.’⁶⁴

Though, these two movies tell two different stories, it is true that they do share some kind of thematic parallelism.

In both films, in fact, the figure of a photographer (the protagonist, Thomas, in the case of *Blow-up*, and an unnamed rich boy in *Terrorizers*) witness a crime. However, while Thomas become embroiled in the murder by chance, the rich photographer rushes to reach the place in which he heard the shots.

Frustration associated with ‘not being able to finish something’ is a recurrent feeling in both movies and in each film, the protagonists are obsessed with the idea that this lack of artistic production can lead to a sort of deadly limbo of unproductiveness.

What is more interesting to underline is the fact that ‘both films problematise the “veracity of representation”’⁶⁵: how can a picture grasp reality’s real meaning? On the contrary, could the reality, been warped by a picture to the point that people no longer can distinguish what is real from what is not? Both *Blow-Up* and *Terrorizers* argue on the idea that photography, the act of writing and more generally art, can be deceptive.

However, it is also discussed the way in which art and reality can be mirrored and distorted by one another.

⁶³ LU Tonglin, *Confronting Modernity in the Cinemas...*, op. cit. p.141.

⁶⁴Flannery WILSON, *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving Within and Beyond the Frame*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p. 47.

⁶⁵ Ibidem p.58.

Directors give different ends to their movies. Antonioni underlines the inability of men and, most of all, artists (photographers, directors, reporters, writers) to understand the world. Thomas must surrender to the fallacy of his gaze towards an unknowable reality. His struggle to reach the reality is represented by the subsequent enlargement of the photographs (this technique is also called blow-up, from which the name of the movie). These blow-ups reveal new details, yet useless, given that a real explanation is never obtained. The final scene in which Thomas ends up mimicking a tennis game, is the ultimate symptom of the substitution of reality by the representation.⁶⁶ Photographic objectivity is no more able to guarantee a real look into life understanding, and the protagonist's surrender is almost complete.

Yang, on the contrary, as we discussed earlier, refuses to give definite answers rejecting viewer's inclination to 'connect the dots'. Sequences are connected through juxtaposition of images or by overlapping sounds and images. Often this technique does not follow causality, but rather time simultaneity.

However, a similar message could be decodified: when an author writes books, takes pictures or maybe even shots films, he or she thinks to be able to discover some sort of truth. What happens, instead, is that the author becomes stuck in the telling of the story or, in Thomas's case, in the frame of the picture itself, unable to disentangle what is real and what is fictional.

A subtle criticism towards art corruption is embedded in both Antonioni's *Blow-up* and Yang's *Terrorizers*. Characters involved in artistic production are moved not by the need of artistic expression but merely by prosaic and pragmatic reasons. Thomas and Chou try to make a living out of their 'artistic products', while the young unnamed photographer is nothing more than an amateur, and it would be really an exaggeration to call him 'artist'. In these works, art is reduced to means of subsistence, losing its intrinsic cultural meaning for the sake of market satisfaction and earnings. This process is clearly expressed by Chou Yufen, who specifically left her previous job to devote herself to write novels for the *fukan* (副刊)⁶⁷ contest. Also, Thomas is obliged to bend under market rules: he must shoot with fashion models, but the glossy fashion world clashes with the subjects of his photo-book that contains pictures of real social outcast and poor people.

⁶⁶ MENARINI, Roy, *Blow-up*, in "Enciclopedia del Cinema Treccani", 2004, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/blow-up_%28Enciclopedia-del-Cinema%29/ retrieved Sept 24, 2018.

⁶⁷ *Fukan* is a Chinese journalistic tradition who used to combine leisure reading and serious cultural dialogue. Particularly popular between the mid-1970s and late 1980s, *fukan* assumed a leading role in literary publications at the point that they replaced elitist magazines.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in Shanghai in November 6th1947, Edward Yang grew up in Taiwan, precisely in Taipei, as his family leave the Mainland in 1949 and move to the Island during the Chinese Civil War (1946-49).

Ever since he was young, Yang was interested in drawing, comic books, cinema and music. Despite his interests, he attended the National Chiao-Tung University in Hsinchu, where he received his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1969. Just a year after, he left Taiwan and flew to Florida where he continued his study in computer science earning a master's degree at the University of Florida in 1974.

After his master's degree, Yang decides to move to Los Angeles to attend the film school of the University of South California, However, he dropped after one year because, as he said during an interview, '*I realized I didn't have talent at all*'.¹ Then he moves to Seattle where he get employed in a research laboratory as designer for microprocessor until 1980, when he returned to Taiwan.

The same year, he got the chance to work as a screenwriter for the Hong Kong's cinema movie, *Winter of 1905 (Yijiulingwu nian de dongtian)*.² Then in 1982, he directed *Duckweed*³ (*Fuping*) an episode of the famous television drama *Eleven Women*, a show produced by Silvia Chang (Zhang Aijia).

1982 was a turning point year. Edward Yang directed *Expectations*⁴ (*Zhiwang*, 指望), the second of the four episodes of the portmanteau film *In Our Time (Guangyin de gushi*, 光陰的故事) a risky project sponsored by the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMCP), the state-owned film production company. He also took care of the music and wrote the screenplay of his 'short film'.

Featuring four unknown directors (besides Yang, Tao Dechen, Ke Yizheng and Zhang Yi), *In Our Time* was a remarkable success and became a sort of divide with the previous cinematic tradition. Each segment of the feature, is set in a different decade, moving forward chronologically (the first episode is

¹ Robert SKLAR, Edward YANG, "*The Engineer of Modern Perplexity: An Interview with Edward Yang*", *Cinéaste*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2000, pp. 6-8

² Michael BERRY, YANG, Edward, "Luckily Unlucky", in Michael Berry (edited by), *Speaking in Images: interviews with contemporary Chinese filmmakers*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 276.

³ also known as *Floating Weeds*.

⁴ also translated as *Desires*.

set during the 1950s, the second during the '60s, the third during the '70s and the fourth during the '80s) and the age of the protagonists increase as the time goes on. Although spanning from childhood to adulthood and thus touching different topics and different problems, they maintain a reciprocal homogeneity and relation having the common purpose to display the social values change through every day life's events

Marking Yang's debut in the Taiwanese cinema's panorama, this film has a particular importance not only for Yang's production but also for the Taiwanese Cinema as a whole. In fact, the release year of *In Our Time* is considered by cinematic historian as the year of birth of the Taiwan New Wave also called New Taiwan Cinema (*Taiwan xin dianying*).

Just one year after his cinematographic debut, in 1983, Yang releases his first full-length film called *That day, on the beach* (*Haitan de yi tian*, 海灘的一天) starring Sylvia Chang and Terry Hu (Hu Yinmeng). The frequent use of flashback and the unusual construction of the plot through protagonists' memories, make this movie a real cinematographic change. These stylistic patterns will become a sort of director's signature in the following production.

In 1983 and 1984, he wrote the music for two films directed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien: *The Boys from Fengkuei*, also known as *Youthful days* (*Fenggui lai de ren*, 風櫃來的人) and *Summer at Grandpa's* (*Dongdong de jiaqi*, 冬冬的假期), film in which Yang starred.

Taipei story (*Qingmei Zhuma*, 青梅竹馬), hit the cinemas in 1985: leading characters of this drama were the already mentioned famous director Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Tsai Chin (Cai Qin), a really popular Taiwanese singer which will become Yang's wife the same year. *Taipei story* represents a young couple dealing with everyday difficulties. The everchanging reality and the social volatility challenge their relationships and their values.

Terrorizers (*Kongbu fenzi*, 恐怖分子), Yang's third full-length film, comes out exactly a year later in 1986. This film was very well acclaimed by both the public and critics. In fact, not only earned Yang a certain success in Taiwan,⁵ but also was awarded in 1987 with the Silver Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival, contributing to earn him an international recognition.

⁵ Winning the Golden Horse Award at the 23rd Golden Horse Film Festival in the category best feature film in 1986.

Sung by Tsai Chin is the famous song ‘Please pretend you would not let me go’⁶ (*Qing jiazhuang ni hui shebude wo*, 請假装你會捨不得我) at the end of the film.

In 1989 Yang establishes his own, independent film production company, *Yang and His Gang Filmmakers*, with Chan Hung-chic (Zhang Hongzhi) and Yu Wei-Yan (Yu Weiyan) with whom at the beginning of his career he collaborated as a screenwriter.⁷

1991 is the year of the film *A brighter summer day* (*Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian*, 牯嶺街少年殺人事件) for which Yang curates also the art direction. Nearly four hours long, this film is considered Edward Yang’s masterpiece. Based on a real-life story, the feature is settled back in time between the late 1950’s and the early 1960’s, in Taipei, and portrays the life of a group of teenage boys growing up in the world of young street gangs. Meticulously recreating the atmosphere of that epoch, Yang represents a period of strong political and social contradictions, which he chooses to describe privileging the adolescents’ point of view.

From 1992 his film production company is renamed Atom Films and Theater and, as the name itself suggest, beside the latest three films directed by Yang, its scope has also been expanded to theatrical productions.

A Confucian Confusion (*Duli shidai*, 獨立時代), for which Yang is also art director and costume designer, and *Mahjong* (*Majiang*, 麻將), released respectively in 1994 and 1996, are rather comedies than dramas even if, they convey a dark and cynical perspective.

During an interview⁸ the director affirmed that with these two comedies he was trying to establish a connection with its younger audience. Addressing atwart people from fifteen to thirty years, *Confucian confusion* and *Mahjong* are conceived to become companion films.

⁶ This song is part of the music album ‘Life is a show’ (*Rensheng jiushi xi*, 人生就是戲) released in 1986 with the label UFO Group (*Feidie Changpian*, 飛碟唱片).

⁷GARIAZZO, Giuseppe, PAGANELLI, Grazia, YANG, Edward, in “Enciclopedia del Cinema Treccani”, 2004, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/edward-yang_%28Enciclopedia-del-Cinema%29/, retrieved Jul 20,2018.

⁸ BERRY, Michael, YANG, Edward, “Luckily Unlucky”, in Michael Berry (edited by), *Speaking in Images: interviews with contemporary Chinese filmmakers*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 272-295

In 1997, Yang starred in the Hong Kong's film *First Love Unlimited* (*Chulian wuxian*, 初恋无限), directed by Joe Ma (*Ma Weihao*, 馬偉豪).

Yi yi (a One and a Two) (*Yi yi*, 一一), 2000, is Yang's last feature-length. *Yi yi*, is the portrait of a family, a sensitive, choral film in which each character represents metaphorically a phase of the human life, from birth to death. Critically acclaimed both at home and abroad, the film was awarded with several prizes including the best director award (Prix de la mise en scène) at the Cannes film festival.

Peng Kaili (彭鎧立), Yang's second wife⁹ collaborates with her husband in the realization of *Yi yi*, taking care of its set's decoration and of the soundtrack of which she is the performer. She also appears in a cameo playing the role of a concert cellist with Yang impersonating a pianist.

Before being able to release another film and complete the collaboration with the Chinese actor Jackie Chan (they were working together on a film directed by Yang starring Chan and on an animation project about martial arts), Edward Yang died in 2007 in his Beverly Hills house because of a colon cancer.

⁹ Yang marriage with Tsai Chin lasted ten years, then in 1995 they divorced.

FILMOGRAPHY

In our time

Original title: *Guangyin de gushi* (光陰的故事).

Direction: Tao Dechen (陶的辰), Edward Yang (楊德昌), Ko Yi-cheng (柯一正), Chang Yi (張毅).

Country: Taiwan.

Release date: 1982.

Genres: drama, comedy.

Running time: 106 minutes.

Language: Mandarin, Min Nan¹.

Screenplay: Tao Dechen (陶的辰), Edward Yang (楊德昌), Ke Yizheng (柯一正), Zhang Yi (張毅).

Music/Sound: Tao Dechen (陶的辰), Edward Yang (楊德昌), Ke Yizheng (柯一正), Zhang Yi (張毅).



Production: Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), Taiwan.

Cast: Shi Anni (石安妮), Zhang Yingzhen, Sun Yadong, Li Guoxiu (李國修), Sylvia Chang (張艾嘉), Li Lichun (李立群).

This film is divided into four different episodes taking place in different time spanning from 1950s till 1980s. The age of each episode's protagonist increase as time goes on: in the first episode the protagonist is a little boy, then a teenage girl, a college student and finally in the last episode, an adult couple.

The opening episode is called *Dinosaurs* or *Little dragon head* (*Xiao longtou*, 小龍頭) and is directed by Tao Decheng. The protagonist is an introverted little boy whose name is Mao. Mao is often scolded by his parents that apparently prefer his little brother. At school his schoolmates make fun of him. He

¹ Also known as Southern Min or *Minnanhua* (閩南話), is a local language spoken in southern Fujian (also called Minnan Region) and in the surrounding areas such as Taiwan.

could only find refuge in his own imagination populated by dinosaurs and in Fen's friendship, the daughter of some Mao's parents' friends.

Expectations (Zhiwang 指望), is the second episode directed by Edward Yang. Fen is a young girl hitting the puberty period entering her teenage. Her mother and her big sister, are both too careless and concentrate on their own business to pay attention to Fen's change. She is left alone facing the big inner turmoils and the great change that growing up inevitably carry along.

Leapfrog (Tiaowa, 跳蛙), is the title of Ke Yizheng's third episode. Fatty is an ambitious and resolute college student who is undergoing a period in his life in which he feels he has not clear who he is and what goals in life he wants to achieve. He has to decide whether to follow his dreams without any guarantee of success or follow the path his father has designed for him inside the family company. The only way to prove his value and to exorcise the fear of a future failure is by winning a swimming competition against the foreigner student delegation.

Finally, the forth episode is named *Show your ID* or *Say your name (Baoshang ming lai, 報上名來)*. It is a comedy and talks about the misadventure of a man and a woman, husband and wife, taking place during the first day they moved into their new apartment. The woman find herself locked out of her new office because she forgot her ID and the man accidentally lock himself out of home.

That day, on the beach

Original title: *Haitan de yi tian* (海灘的一天).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan/ Hong Kong.

Release date: 1983.

Genres: drama.

Running time: 166 minutes.

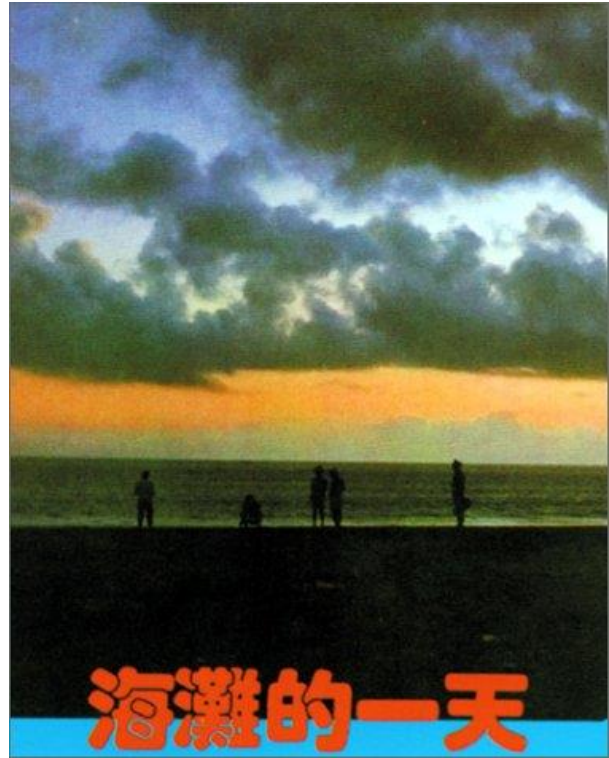
Language: Mandarin, German, Japanese.

Screenplay: Edward Yang, and Wu Nien-jen²(吳念真).

Music/sound: Lin Min-yi (林民怡).

Production: CMCP, Taiwan;

Cast: Sylvia Chang (張艾嘉), Terry Hu (胡茵夢), Gao Hui-hong (高鳴鴻), Xu Ming (徐明), Li Lie (李烈), David Mao(毛學維).



That day, on the beach recounts the story of Jia Li, told by Jia Li herself during a chat with her old friend and her brother's lover, Tan Weiching. Tan Weiching is an internationally famous pianist, who's back to Taipei to hold a concert. Jia Li becoming aware that Weiching is back in town, try to arrange a meeting with her. The two women meet each other again after thirteen years.

The story gradually unfolds by means of subsequent flashbacks, following Jia Li's life's story: after college graduation, she went back home. In order to escape from an arranged marriage, she eloped with her boyfriend, De Wei. Initially the couple is happy but as soon as they become wealthier thanks to De Wei's job as general manager in a big company, their marriage began to experience some difficulties. De Wei is stressed and always at work, Jia Li suffers of loneliness and boredom and she has some suspects about De Wei's infidelity. Their marriage reach a crisis point but then Jia Li decides to start a new life, having trust in De Wei.

Exactly when everything seems to be solved he disappears: his things are found on a beach.

² Wu Nien-jen is also frequently written as Wu Nien-chen.

This is a coming-of-age film that tells about the pursuit of happiness and self-determination of a woman.

Taipei Story

Original title: *Qingmei zhuma*, (青梅竹馬).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan.

Release date: 1985.

Genres: drama.

Running time: 120 minutes.

Language: Mandarin, Min Nan.

Screenplay: Edward Yang, Chu Tien-wen (朱天文) and Hou Hsiao-Hsien (侯孝賢).

Music/Sound: Du Duzhi (杜篤之).

Production: Evergreen Films Production Company.

Cast: Tsai Chin (Cai Qin, 蔡琴), Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Wu Nien-jen.



Taipei story talks about a couple's life expectations and desires. Chin and Long struggle in the increasing muddled value crisis in order to reorient their life.

Chin represents a modern, independent girl. She decides to move out alone in order to escape from her family (especially her father) that is still anchored to ancient values, that she do not recognizes anymore

Long, in turn, lives in the past, always remembering the good times when he played baseball with his friends. He is very close to Chin's father, who treat him almost like a son. He works in the textile market and has a sister that lives in U.S.A with a wealthy husband who manage a flourishing business. Lung has also some type of relationship with Gwan, a divorced woman who is also his ex-schoolmate.

Chin wants to have a good career, but her company get acquired and she resigns. She hopes her boss, Mrs. Mei could hire her. She also hopes, her boyfriend Long will find the courage to enter into his brother-in-law's American business, in order to leave Taiwan and start a new life together in the U.S.

When finally, Long finds the courage and the money to ask her brother-in-law to start a partnership with him, everything suddenly change. Long uses the money he withdrawn for the fulfillment of his (or rather Chin's) American dream, to repay Chin's father debts.

Like a terrible turning point, this is the moment in which every hope is lost, the moment in which everything changes simply because everything is left as it was previously. The moment in which Chin and Long lost themselves and their dreams.

Chin has tied too strictly her dreams to Long's willingness to live with her and to build a life together. Long on the contrary, has continued to live in the past, incapable to appreciate what life was offering him and so losing everything.

Terrorizers

Original title: *Kongbu fenzi* (恐怖份子).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan/Hong Kong.

Release date: 1986.

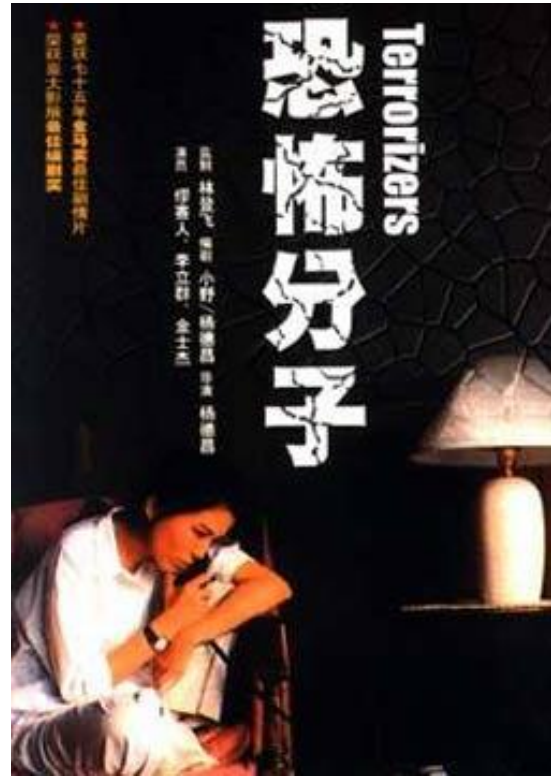
Genres: drama.

Running time: 110 minutes.

Language: Mandarin, Min nan.

Screenplay: Hsiao Yeh (小野), Edward Yang.

Music/Sound: Weng Xiaoliang (翁孝良).



Production: Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), Taipei; Golden Harvest, Hong Kong.

Cast: Cora Miao (繆騫人), Lee Lichun (李立群), Jin Shi-jie (金士傑), Wang An (王安), Gu Bao-ming (顧寶明), Ma Shao-jun (馬邵君).

The story revolves around the coincidental relationships between the characters and the consequences these accidental encounters will give rise to.

A couple stucked in an unhappy marriage, a young, wealthy boy, with a passion for photography and a Eurasian girl involved in some shady business, are the protagonists of this real-life portrait.

The wife is unsatisfied with her marriage and her career and is looking for a way to leave her husband, whose is too busy chasing his dreams of glory to realize his wife is becoming more and more like a stranger to him.

Although he is wealthy, the young photographer pretends to live like a bohemian in a small apartment with his girlfriend, a bookaholic student. He is waiting for the draft notice announcing his enlistment,

but he seems to hide from that letter. He leaves his girlfriend just because he hopes to meet again the Eurasian girl, whose he did a photography.

The so-called *fil rouge* of this film, as well as the one who throw everything into disorder, is the Eurasian girl. She, whit some prank phone calls, give rise to a series of events. This phone call by one hand becomes the trigger (or the excuse) for the characters to change their life, but from the other it brutally reveals the reality of their conditions.

The end of this story is ambiguous and appalling but fascinating at the same time, like only the life could be.

A brighter summer day

Original title: *Guling Jie Shaonian Sha Ren Shijian*, (牯嶺街少年殺人事件).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan.

Release date: 1991.

Genres: drama.

Running time: 237 minutes.

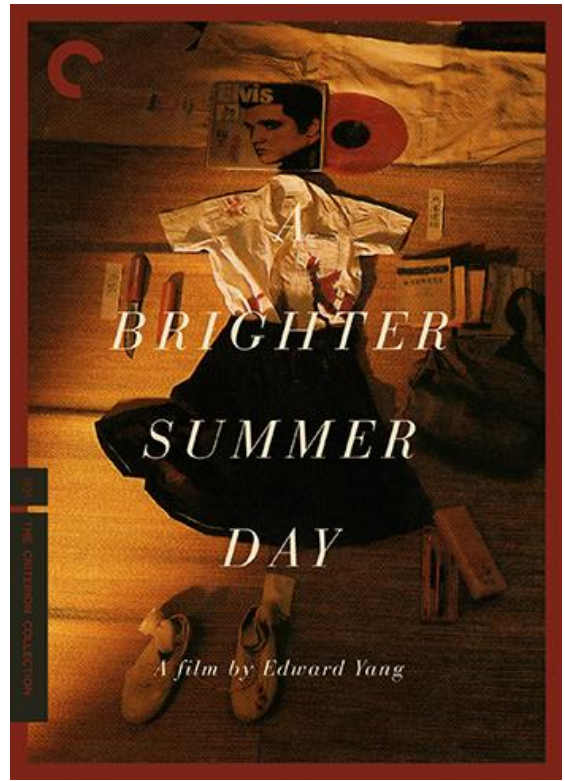
Language: Chinese, Taiwanese.

Screenplay: Edward Yang.

Music/sound: Du Duzhi.

Cast: Lisa Yang, Zhang Zhen, Zhang Guozhu, Elaine Jin.

Production: Yang and his Gang Filmmakers.



‘Millions of Mainland Chinese fled to Taiwan with the National Government after its civil war defeat by the Chinese Communist in 1949. Their children were brought up in an uneasy atmosphere created by the parents’ own uncertainty about the future. Many formed street gangs to search for identity and to strengthen their sense of security’, state the introduction to the nearly four hours long feature.

Based on a real-life story of a murder case happened right at Yang’s school when he was a student, *A Brighter Summer Day* is an autopsy of generational conflict³: from one hand the parents, Shanghai intellectuals who lost almost everything leaving the Mainland. Now they are facing the disillusionment due to the militarization of the politics and to the subtle, but always present, ‘White terror’. From the

³ John ANDERSON, *Edward Yang*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005, p.57.

other hand, the children who, struggling to find their own identity as people and also as citizen are inevitably on the edge of two culture: neither Chinese nor Taiwanese.

Xiao Si'r (the young protagonist) is drawn into the gangs' conflict between Honey's Little Park Gang and the indigenous 217 gang, not only because of his fascination with Ming (theoretically Honey's girlfriend) but also because of the pressure of academic failure which has condemned him to a less prestigious night school and to the disdain of his father.

At home, the situation has not significant improvement because of a restless family atmosphere: his father sees his ambitions vanishing day by day; his mother lives in anticipation of a recommendation for a professional qualification for teaching that never arrives but which she badly needs to overcome a situation of economic hardship. The older brother is often swamped by gambling debts.

Xiao Si'r finds a way to compensate for the fragility of his family through the exploration of violence: we see him involved in several fights between rival youth gangs, in punitive expeditions and power struggles for the control of the territory.

After having met Ming, who is struggling with family problems too, a feeling of love blossoms in the boy's heart. This feeling drives him to recalibrate his teenage life to build a solid bond with her. While a kind of union begins to settle between the two, Xiao Si'r discovers that Ming has betrayed his love.

The boy's reaction will take the form of tragedy.

A Confucian confusion

Original title: *Duli shidai* (獨立時代).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan

Release date: 1994.

Genres: comedy.

Running time: 125 minutes.

Language: Mandarin.

Screenplay: Edward Yang.

Music/Sound: Du Duzhi.

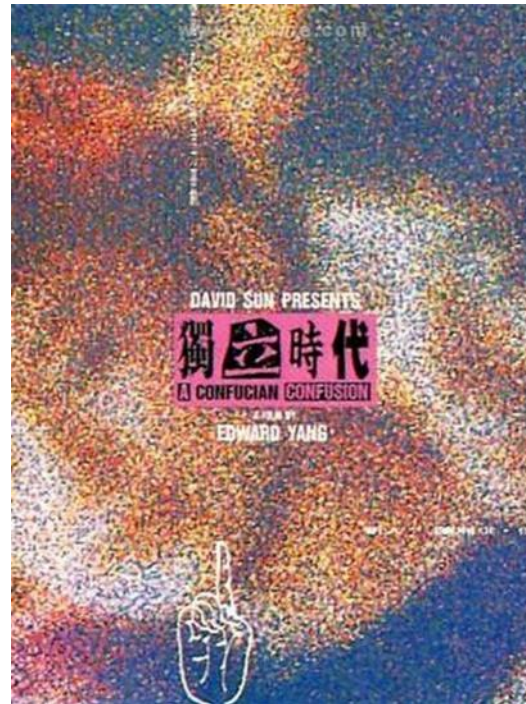
Production: AtomFilms and Theater.

Cast: Chen Xiangqi (陳湘琪), Ni Shujun (倪淑君), Wang Weiming (王維明), Danny Deng (鄧安寧), Wang Bosen (王柏森), Richie Li (李芹), Chen Yiwen (陳以文), Wang Yemin (王也民).

Confucian Confusion talks about various kinds of confusions among which towers the continuous confusion between appearance and reality.

The movie is, only apparently, a cheerful critic of the glossy Taipei yuppies and artists' world and of its inhabitants, who are volatile, self-absorbed and ridiculously hypocritical. At the center of the social circle under examination there is Molly, a rich young woman who runs a failing public-relations business, financed by her wealthy boyfriend, Akeem, originally betrothed to her elder sister.

Molly's loyal assistant, Qiqi, is probably the most honest and naïve of all the characters, but these qualities are misunderstood and evaluated as false modesty. Qiqi's fiancée, Ming, comes from a working-class background.



Among the other characters who animates the feature there is Birdy, an avant-garde director who has become famous stealing plots for his films from others' books; Larry, Akeem's troublemaking sycophantic assistant and Feng. Schemer and cunning, she aspires to be an actress and would do everything to reach her goal.

Molly's elder sister is a successful anchorwoman who has just been separated from her writer husband, who is the author of 'A Confucian Confusion', the book from which Birdy, stealing the idea, is basing his latest feature.

All the problems that the characters are facing, in some ways concern whit the universal themes of loyalty, sincerity, and honesty⁴; traits not so 'in vogue' since every character in this film is lying hypocritically hiding something and recriminating others not being honest.

⁴ ZHANG Yingjin, XIAO Zhiwei, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*, New York and London, Routledge, 1998, p. 128.

Mahjong

Original title: *Majiang*, (麻將).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan.

Release date: 1996

Genres: comedy, drama.

Running time: 121 minutes.

Language: English, Mandarin, French.

Screenplay: Edward Yang.

Music/Sound: Du Duzhi.

Production: AtomFilms and Theater.



Cast: Virginie Ledoyen, Tang Congsheng, Ke Yuluen, Zhang Zhen, Wang Qizan, Diana Dupuis, Nick Erickson.

The European social climbers and Taiwan Underworld are mixed together in this black and disenchanted comic/action movie.

Winston Cheng is a prominent businessman who owe an exorbitant sum of money to some ruthless criminal, who has managed to find him through his son. Cheng's son, called Red Fish, is the leader of a street gang, in some way the distorted, coarsened echo of the gangs portrayed in *A Brighter summer day*.

Little Buddha, Hong Kong and Luen are the other three components of the gang whose motto is: 'Nobody knows what they want, people want to be told what to do'. And the four boys try to abide by that rule always catching the opportunity to take advantage of every situation as much as possible.

John Anderson says about the inner ‘rotteness’ of this movie:

‘The amount of human exploitation – or, rather, the casual manner in which humans are exploited or set up to be - in the film gives *Mahjong* an underlying tone of desperate sadness, despite the slapstick and baggy-pants sensibility. The way Yang presents it all, by making brutal violence a counterpoint to laughs, or by making ignorance or guile a part of what initially seems like an attempt at humor, renders *Mahjong* a far more disturbing film than its mere storyline or actions would suggest on their own.’⁵

⁵ John ANDERSON, *Edward Yang*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005, p. 79.

Yi yi: a One and a Two.

Original title: *Yi yi* (一一).

Direction: Edward Yang.

Country: Taiwan, Japan.

Release date: 2000

Genres: drama.

Running time: 173 minutes.

Language: Mandarin, English,

Screenplay: Edward Yang.

Music/Sound: Du Duzhi.

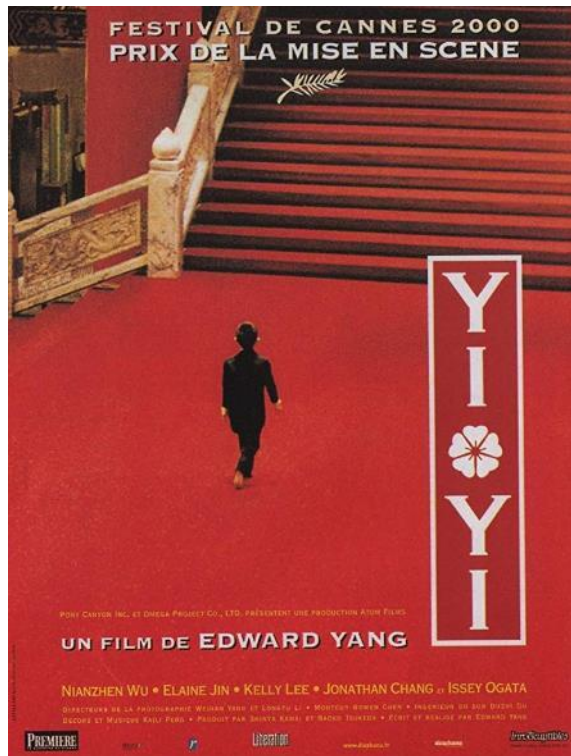
Production: AtomFilms and Theater.

Cast: Wu Nien-jen, Elaine Jin (金燕玲), Kelly Lee (李凱利), Jonathan Chang (張洋洋), Issey Ogata (一成尾形).

Presented at the 53rd Cannes Film Festival and nominee for the Palme d'Or, *Yi yi* earned Edward Yang the Best Director Award in 2000 at the same Festival. This film also turned out to be director's last movie.

Yi yi is a delicate fresco of a family. The story unfolds in a period spanning between a wedding and a funeral. In the middle of the representation, emerges an urban middle-class family, whose components are fragile and unable to find a role in the noisy and inert Taipei.

NJ, the father and one of the members of a computer company in crisis, is overwhelmed by difficulties at work. When he rediscovers an old lover, he is unable to come to terms with the past. His wife, Min-min, retires to a convent, fleeing the complexity of family pain when, after an accidental fall, her mother (so the Grandmother) slips into a coma.



Left alone by their two parents busy to cope with their anxieties and past desires, Ting -ting (the teenage daughter) and Yang- yang (her eight-years-old younger brother) are facing private and painful initiation rites: Ting- ting discovers that love is not easy since its first appearance, while his brother is looking for ways to understand people.

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