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The portrayal of the relationship between the public and private spaces on screen within the works of Hou Hsiao Hsien.

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Abstract

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The objective of this dissertation aims to investigate the portrayal of the relationship between the public and private spaces represented on screen within the works of Hou Hsiao Hsien, a New Taiwanese Cinema film director.

Taiwan's colonial history has played a prominent role in shaping its national cinema, which burgeoned from the contention between the government and its people. The influence of Healthy Realism in the 1960s is then explored to justify the emergence of New Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s, which is central to the discussion of the dissidence present between the political sector and domestic households. The interaction between the two is further analysed as political affairs intrude individual lifestyles, and the personal realm transcending the condemnation of governance through Hou Hsiao Hsien's films *A Time to Live, A Time to Die (1985), A City of Sadness (1989)* and *The Puppetmaster (1993)*.

This paper thus strives to situate the public-private dynamic on screen under a seismically politically shifting climate, which remains rooted within cinematic narratives that foreground the everyday lives of people in Taiwan.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Cinema is often a reflection, rejection or reinvention of reality from a certain perspective. It is a tool for cultural stimulus that potentially influences and modifies attitudes as well as the behaviour of audiences and society itself (Haas & Christensen 2015, p4). Similarly, cinema is often majorly affected by the social, cultural, economic, technological and political landscapes of an environment. This nuanced relationship between society and cinema is complicated and much more calibrated than the simplified social science model of clearly defined independent and dependent variables (Haas & Christensen 2015, p4). In other words, the two subjects have a cyclical correlation with each other and are mutually influenced, instead of possessing a relationship with a unidirectional flow of causality. This conveniently corroborates with what Phillip Gianos asserts, that "politics and movies inform each other [and] both tell about the society from which they come." (Haas & Christensen 2015, p4).

With the above-illustrated dynamics between society and cinema, streamlining the focus to the impacts a political climate has on film is key for this dissertation as the research premise revolves around the tension between the public and private spaces, where politics as a representative of the public, play a burgeoning role in the representation of the private space on screen. Moreover, the additional perspective of the connection between politics and film is to regard the latter as a potential vehicle for political theory (Haas & Christensen 2015, p9), where the nature of film to create and modify reality acts as an analogy to the machinations of politics. This accentuates the polygamous relationship between the public and private spaces, politics, as well as their representations on screen.

The concept of space has witnessed a methodological resurgence from a static geographical term to a multi-dimensional idea that also consists of the social and temporal aspects of the environment (Erken 2016, p8). As such, the notion of space has transcended from its conventional definition relating to physicality into non-concrete boundaries set by common beliefs and a distinct rule of system developed over a period of time. This metamorphosis then categorises space into its public and private spheres, where different ideals agreed by a group of people cultivate and govern each sector in the personal and extra-personal. In other words, space not only refers to the actual area of a location physically, but also the dimension which further splits into the public and private built based on common beliefs and objectives.

The public space comes about as a specific expression of civil society where members of a community are linked by collective interest and activities, but does not remain contained within, unlike the private space. It transpires from the differentiation between a nominally representative state on one side and a civil society on the other (Low & Smith 2006, p4). The convergence of individuals

to a single cause, activity or purpose which results in a concerted effort forms the idea of the public. This, however, implies the pupation of the household as a privatised sphere of social reproduction (Low & Smith 2006, p4). As a result, the private space often refers to domestication where individuality and singular beliefs stay within a physical space of a house, but also within the dimensions of privacy and the personal, uninterrupting the consensus of public affairs. Tension between the public and private spaces then exists due to their intrinsic polar natures that potentially oppose one another.

Attributing to the tangential relationship between the public and private spaces and their inherent conflict, cinema has managed to explore and portray this relationship on screen through the use of political backdrops that affect people's individual way of life. Similarly, this portrayal of the relationship brings to light political truths in reality and problematises political machinations by revealing the perspective against it. New Taiwanese Cinema has evidently demonstrated the affected private space due to the happenings in the public sphere, and will be a convincing and cohesive point of research.

New Taiwanese Cinema emerged from the 1980s as a result of the attempts by the first wave filmmakers to distance themselves from commercial and propagandic genres circulated in the public region, generating material that more accurately portrayed Taiwan under a politically turbulent climate (Wilson 2014, p21). Having been under an array of political governance by Japan, the Kuomintang (KMT), Americans, mainland communists from China, as well as the locals fighting for independence, Taiwan is a nation struggling for its identity and unity. It is an island of collective ambivalence always subjected to historical prejudice and used as a strategic, geopolitical tool (Udden 2009, p14). Hence, this movement of the New Taiwanese Cinema aims to deviate from the patronising painted image made on the country, and refocus to what is representative of the truth, setting a precedent of films that incorporate a shifting political landscape as a backdrop to the social and cultural narratives of the Taiwanese (Wilson 2014, p22). These first wave films thus concoct the screen representation of the relationship between the public and private regions of families living in the era of politics, and one of the acclaimed directors is Hou Hsiao Hsien.

Hou Hsiao Hsien was born in Guangdong province of China but had a deep association with Taiwan as his family moved to the island at an early stage, and was thus aware of the socio-political events of the nation. He portrayed his autobiographical experiences of Taiwan through his films such as in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die (1985)*, *A City of Sadness (1989)* and *The Puppetmaster (1993)*, making political references that lurked in the background of daily life (Udden 2009, p19). His films addressed

the history, geography and culture of the country, and were down-to-earth in demonstrating the emotional suffering and revelations of the truth and people of Taiwan, yet without narcissism and biased sentiments, gazing objectively at the traumatic history with honesty yet ease (Dai 2008, p239).

Consequently, Hou Hsiao Hsien's films provide insights into the mechanics of the public and private spaces, examining their relationship in the context of Taiwan's political landscape. Hence, in the following chapters of this dissertation, analysis and reviews mainly from the following literature: *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus: Moving Within and Beyond the Frame* by Flannery Wilson, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen* by Guo-Juin Hong, as well as *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien* by James N. Udden, will seek to discuss and prove how the films *A Time to Live, A Time to Die (1985), A City of Sadness (1989)* and *The Puppetmaster (1993)* directed by Hou Hsiao Hsien exhibit the representation of the public and private spaces on screen.

Tying this premise to the graduation film project - *Stork*, where it tells the story of a little girl keeping the news of a 2-child policy from her parents who are awaiting the 3rd child, this field of research is highly relevant because the film is set in 1970s Singapore against the backdrop of a public policy that influences and seeks to indirectly control the state of a family and an individual's life. As the writer of this film, it is pertinent to understand the dynamics of the public and private in order to portray their relationship and the flow of events, tracking the character's state of mind in this character-driven plot.

Therefore, this dissertation seeks to examine the portrayal of the relationship between the public and private spaces on screen in the context of a seismically political shifting climate, which remains rooted within Taiwanese cinematic narratives as exemplified in the films *A Time to Live, A Time to Die (1985), A City of Sadness (1989)* and *The Puppetmaster (1993)*, where such socio-political backdrops induce narratives that foreground the everyday lives of people in Taiwan within the works of Hou Hsiao Hsien, a first wave New Taiwanese Cinema film director.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In an article written by Douglas Kellner regarding the exploration of Taiwanese history and its society within the context of New Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s, Kellner asserts that as opposed to looking at Taiwanese films produced back then as a 'new wave' that revolutionised and redefined the nation's film industry, audiences should perceive these artworks as cultural and political interventions (Wilson 2014, p5). Instead of desensitising these cinematic crafts into mere artefacts of film history, New Taiwanese Cinema should be viewed as more than screen material as it probed into the sociological and historical content that projected a voice about the nation's culture and politics, creating a form of national cinema that represented the people.

Taiwan is a nation with an identity crisis and it is largely due to the vacillating political powers that colonised the country over decades (Wilson 2014, p1). Its colonisation history has thus influenced its cinematic styles and genres which shaped its own national cinema (Hong 2011, p6). Thus, this chapter aims to delve into the political history of Taiwan up to the 1980s to justify the emergence of New Taiwanese Cinema. However, as the history and colonisation records date back hundreds of years ago, it is essential to identify relevant time periods of key players that amount to the national crisis Taiwan fell into. Hence, streamlining these periods to when Japan and mainland China were involved will substantially provide context to Taiwan's political and social frontier, eventually justifying the emergence of this cinematic new wave.

Understanding Taiwan's Colonial History

Taiwan's national cinema was undoubtedly convoluted with governmental ideologies propagated during the Japanese Occupation and under the Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist government (Wilson 2014, p21), but the contested nation also faced tumultuous political hurdles that affected its nation building prior to these two significant time periods of Taiwanese colonial history.

It was a childish ploy between countries as governments treated Taiwan like a geopolitical pawn and objectified to be up for claims, but not as a nation to be recognised and whose people are to be nurtured. When the Dutch wanted to set up a colony in Taiwan during the late seventeenth century, the Mainland Chinese, who had always paid little attention to Taiwan, suddenly expressed interest and drove out the Dutch colonists to conquer the island as a potential political warfare tool and safety base (Udden 2009, p15).

This shift in governance was led by a Ming dynasty Chinese general, Zheng Chengguang, who later set up a civil administration system to expand and solidify his control over the land (Croizier 2019, p1). However, when Zheng passed away, incomplete with his plans for Taiwan, the latter became formally annexed by the Chinese government of the Qing dynasty in 1684 (Udden 2009, p15).

It first appeared beneficial to the people of Taiwan to have a new ruling party, but the Qing rulers treated Taiwan with reluctance and made no efforts to progress the nation. The governing body was ruling Taiwan out of political obligation who not only neglected the tensions rising in its cultural, social, economic and political developments, but incompetently widening this gap as its policies backfired (Udden 2009, p15). Considerations to return the colony to the Dutch were even made, but was turned down. This widespread societal unruliness and governmental misrule continued on for the next two centuries and it was only till the nineteenth century when foreign parties set their eyes on Taiwan as a potential territory did the Qing rulers pay greater attention to the asset they had in hand.

The above-mentioned recount of history has unequivocally entrenched Taiwan as nothing more than a chess piece being played back and forth in accordance with the possible advantages it could bring to respective countries. The value and relevance of Taiwan were only seen when foreign parties hinted at competition and disputed for, and were not treasured for its own worth. This system caused repercussions onto generations of Taiwanese as they were unable to live in peace and whose lives were inevitably affected by its constantly changing government, unsettling into a single source of dominance.

Nevertheless, the Qing government eventually pronounced Taiwan as more than a part of Fujian and a full-fledged province in 1885. Taiwan was then ruled by a leader with foresight, Liu Mingchuan, who established a solid administration system and invested infrastructure in the transportation and the electric power industries. However, Taiwan soon fell into gross neglect once more in 1891 when Liu left and his plans for modernisation were forsaken (Udden 2019, p15).

The perpetual switches in political powers continued on when China renounced Taiwan to the Japanese in 1895. The former had lost a war over Korea due to its technologically inferior army as compared to the Japanese (Wilson 2014, p15). The Treaty of Shimonoseki was then signed and Western powers legally recognised Taiwan as part of the rising sun (Udden 2019, p15).

After a century, Taiwan fell into the hands of a new nationality and like what James Udden asserts, the fact that China could easily part with Taiwan to the Japanese was indicative of how China did not

acknowledge Taiwan as native soil and the signing of the treaty was so much a declaration of a burdensome appendage best segregated from the mainland body. Looking from another point-of-view, the Taiwanese may also not have cultivated a sense of belonging and national identity. The years of supposed attachment culminated into eventual vanity of building a nation with its people, and this is noteworthy of how a country's governance plays a germinating role in the social landscape of individual lives; how the public political sphere drives the private circle's scope and cultural attachment.

After the treaty, Japan ruled Taiwan for the following fifty years from 1895 to 1945 with a more productive legislation (Hong 2011, p14). There was an amorphous identity on who Taiwan truly belonged to despite a legal representation of ownership because an established culture is hard to eradicate or modify within the timespan of a change in governance. However, apart from the socio-cultural repercussions of the Japanese Occupation, this political historical disruption was also reflected in cinema and affected the film industry. Film was exploited as an "enslavement" tool to portray the Taiwanese people as meek and willing parties of the change in regime (Hong 2011, p16). Censorship was also highly monitored that domestic productions had to adhere and imbue to colonial policies (Hong 2011, p20). The colonisation suffocated the arts and cultural sector of Taiwan, evoking dissatisfied responses from the natives as these enforcement of regulations encouraged oppression.

Feelings of resentment were channelled through cinematic means that utilised the language barrier between the locals and the Japanese to the former's advantage. For instance, one characteristic of entertainment back then included the presence of *benzi* people, who translated and narrated imported films that were brought to local audiences. Under such oppressive colonial circumstances, the Taiwanese *benzi* showed audiences, through their omniscience, the lives of political victims entwined in the complexities of the Japanese Occupation (Hong 2011, p21). In addition, the *benzi* made use of the language barrier to mock the Japanese with linguistic and rhetorical play within the narratives, even using their knowledge to politicise and embed current affairs to dictate the angle and perspective of which these stories were being told (Hong 2011, p21). This small yet witty act of defiance was a form of resistance and coping mechanism for the locals to find their freedom, as well as a justification of how the privatised performing groups empowered themselves to rebel against their colonisers and prevail spiritually.

With such harsh conditions imposed on Taiwan's film industry, it problematised locals identifying with their national cinema, which may not even be called Taiwanese if content was so massively Japanese-produced. The controlled film industry thus hinted at the identity struggle the Taiwanese

faced as their cinema was unable to project their personal voice and local flavour. Screen material would then evolve into nothing more than propaganda used to imbue political ideologies.

The social, cultural and political sectors of a community weaved into one another seamlessly and relentlessly, even prolonging Taiwan's unfortunate predicament despite the end of World War II in 1945. The identity struggle faced by Taiwanese persisted as the people continued to recognise China as its motherland and Japan as its fatherland during the process of decolonisation (Wilson 2014, p1). Taiwan was returning to its roots under the Chinese rule, but the long term Japanese Occupation had significantly altered a certain way of life that the Taiwanese, whether willing or reluctant, grew accustomed to. There was an unspoken battle between the people's sense of belonging irregardless of the initial relief to the end of war and reclamation under China. Perhaps the only unifying identity the people had was their status of uncertainty and dilemma.

It was known that the Taiwanese then lived in an era known as the "White Terror" under KMT rule, which was controlled by leader Chiang Kai-shek, due to the imposition of martial law, whereby direct military control by the government was encroached onto civilians. There were growing civil assaults along with brutal state violence, a wildfire fueled by grudges with the Nationalist government since the handover (Hong 2011, p39). This continuous battle between the state and the individual created plenty of unrest in Taiwan and is axiomatic of the interrelationship between the public and private spheres, where the latter attempted to seek restoration from the war through the former, but to little avail.

From these several decades of colonisation history, it is undeniable that Taiwan's political landscape had seen turbulence and seismic pressures with the constant shifting of governance, each progressing no better than its predecessor. Not only was Taiwan physically governed by parties of different nationalities, the belief system and culture that spreaded across Taiwan kept alternating and this created a longer term impact on the natives as intangible matters like the sense of belonging and a value system needed time to be cultivated and not simply changed according to political weather. Consequently, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, Taiwan's national cinema burgeoned along the happenings in the public sphere of politics, and this significantly shaped the screen and media culture in Taiwan, forming their own national cinema or the lack of it.

However, prior to delving into Taiwan's national cinema that developed into the post-war era, understanding the concept of the national cinema is key because the country was under strong colonial

influences, and that changes the universal consensus of the national representing only what the geographical boundaries of the country marks out.

Defining National Cinema

In Andrew Higson's writings of "The Concept of National Cinema", he theorised that national cinema is a dialectic between nationalism and transnationalism, as well as a polemic between cultural diversity and national specificity (Hong 2011, p3). In other words, the idea of national cinema is less of what its name suggests but rather, its definition extends beyond the spatial boundaries of a country into the amalgamation of international diversities that converge to rest in Taiwan: the interwoven histories of the colonial and postcolonial that make up this matrix and social fabric of the nation. Consequently, Taiwan faced a different interpretation of what "nation" means to them at different points in chronology. Thus, Higson's theory suitably fits the context for the discussion of Taiwan's national cinema because the island does not stand independently and its colonial history is its national story itself.

Henceforth, the rest of the chapter will focus on the emergence of New Taiwanese Cinema, whereby the diversities set in the country has probed into a breakthrough to recognising a national identity and a national cinema that truly represents the Taiwanese. However, prior to this, a brief study of New Cinema's former mode of cinematic representation in the 1960s - Healthy Realism, should be examined as its development justifies the foundation of New Taiwanese Cinema's existence.

Healthy Realism in the 1960s

The cinema in Taiwan during the 1960s and 1970s is to be interpreted as an active agent that took part in the representation and building of the nation in an increasingly transnational context whereby it reflected the evolving politics of the Nationalists, the struggles with its colonial history, as well as the mounting competition internationally (Hong 2011, p66). However, this reflection was not synonymous but rather, its paradigm became an aesthetic of politics; a beautifier for the ugly truths. Taiwan's national cinema thus became a tool for the government to proliferate state propaganda and Nationalist ideologies as a method of governance, otherwise known as Healthy Realism.

Healthy Realism was a cinematic movement that inherited elaborate mise-en-scene in terms of its casting, colour scheme, set building and lighting arrangements that ultimately landed the film piece in artificial and unrealistic portrayals (Hong 2011, p74). While Healthy Realist films had genre diversity, the eventual purpose of the film served to the dominant nationalist ideology and its aesthetics no longer functioned as a service to the content (Hong 2011, p69). In other words, screen material

produced was subjected to promoting nationalist ideas and eradicated the narrative storytelling aspect of cinema; propaganda was under the guise of fiction.

Quoting a screenwriter of several Healthy Realist films, Zhang Yong Xiang claimed that to tell stories filled with hope and life signified the possibility that 'healthy' subject matters could become part of reality too (Hong 2011, p74). Despite the tone full of optimism and focus on idealistic subject matters, this claim is actually problematic as it reflects that this cinematic movement was highly sanitised and filtered. This false illusion presented on screen during the colonisation especially suggests an intention to mislead and thwart the socio-cultural situation into artificial and elusive representations of reality. The creative prowess of cinema was thus undermined and Healthy Realism willingly transformed itself into a public tool.

Growing inherently political, Healthy Realist films were likened to an assemblage whose discourse catered to the socio-political situation of which it operated within (Hong 2011, p75). In other words, these films had been particularly decorated for politically-influenced agendas and strongly indicate the contradictions brewing from within. The political stance this cinematic movement inherited turned more toxic when the realist techniques used were a ploy to cleanse all portrayals or hints of misery and suffering, constructing an image of Taiwan as awashed in brightness (Hong 2011, p80). Ultimately, the idealistic filter of Healthy Realist films warranted the guarded and defensive nature it was putting against the grittiness of real life (Hong 2011, p74), exposing itself for artifice and a method for propaganda.

It is also contradictory how Taiwan's national cinema in the 1960s had been historically recorded as a representation of its colonial governance over its locals through Healthy Realism that was operating on a superficial and idealistic level; the outsiders dictating what is "national" as compared to the natives. More so, the manipulative strategy, whether intended or not, to mask the entire cinematic transition as a ray of hope for Taiwan was quite a feat.

Consequently, Healthy Realist films encouraged the notion of stasis, whether it was in terms of family bonds, ethics and culture, but could not address how rapid modernisation would inevitably impose changes on these supposedly immutable values. This was also the fundamental complication that lied within Healthy Realist films as portrayal of the utopia could easily fall through the line into the dystopian. Furthermore, despite the site of stagnation that Healthy Realism had industriously constituted, change would still remain as an insurmountable force that acted against their favour (Hong 2011, p81).

In response to the existence of Healthy Realist Cinema, criticisms against the government arose and targeted the policies that were set for filmmaking. These policies imposed content and genre restrictions, and were likened to political propaganda and commercialism instead of the advocacy of culture and national identity, resulting in its condemnation (Emerson 2019, p1). This cultural imposition underwent a transformation due to the imbrication between the Nationalist cultural policy and film production (Hong 2011, p66), otherwise termed as radicalisation-cum-nationalisation. It refers to the process of redefining a nation in accordance with the country's value system and tradition that dictate its cultural landscape. As a result, Taiwan's cinemascape was affected and hence sprouted a contested national cinema as the film industry did not have the luxury of autonomy and freedom.

Taiwanese filmmakers who were not in favour of Healthy Realism or its cultural policies faced challenges to thrive as film production was pressured by political milieu and surveillance was rife (Hong 2011, p74). Consequently, the environment in which Taiwan cinema was compelled to evolve rigidified its creative prowess, as well as thwarted one's hold of actual reality (Hong 2011, p86). Reinforced and perpetual emphasis of fictitious displays of life on screen eventually imposed and manipulated an individual's perception of reality, warping the private opinion to be in tandem with the public's ideology; the advocative nature of cinema thus turning into propagandist manipulation.

On a separate note, film critics had voiced their assertions on this cinematic movement stating that it was a paradox. "Healthy" cinema referred to the harmony within social circles where individuals embody virtues of selflessness and compassion (Chiang 2013, p23), but were often expressed with melodramatic methods that resembled nothing like its intended role model of postwar Italian Neorealism (Chiang 2013, p26). Placing the two cinematic movements for comparison, Italian Neorealism emphasised on revealing the dark side of society and threatened the governing bodies through their reflection of realism (Hong 2011, p73). On the contrary, Healthy Realism thwarted this definition of realism and focused on its aesthetics to aid political motives, resembling nothing like the "realism" Italian Neorealist films empathised with. Therefore, the contradiction heavily lies in the fact that this form of cinema echoed the opposition of realism, as well as overstepped the fine line of what "healthy" means into delusion and misinformation instead.

Whether Healthy Realism was a national spirit or propaganda, the bottomline was it caused more disunity than unity because of the lies that existed within its films. It was the result of such propagandist and illusional screen material that New Taiwanese Cinema emerged in the early 1980s as an act of re-politicising realism through the reinvention of film aesthetics that Healthy Realist films had established.

Emergence of New Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s

The year 1982 was a defining mark in Taiwan's cinematic history as the nation entwined with changing cultural policies and social forces (Hong 2011, p89), and yet the emergence of a new wave was seen through. The transition from Healthy Realism was actually less clear-cut but more contentious as there was resistance to previously established paradigmatic structures against a novel aesthetic sensitivity under historical transformations and wavering socio-political realities (Hong 2011, p88).

The New Taiwanese Cinema movement not only differed from its predecessor in its representation and use of film aesthetics, but more significantly with its "point-of-view". This notion of perspective was not attached to a particular character or, so to speak, a biased narrator. In fact, it collectively presents an objective angle in looking at Taiwan's past and present, encompassing both the historical and historiographical narratives (Hong 2011, p103). This also meant that the representation of Taiwan was relatively more truthful and authentic because of the nondiscriminatory voice it adopted in the films that portrayed reality as it is and actively bringing to light the deep-seated problems hiding in that society.

Due to the non-partisan point-of-view, Taiwan finally had some form of national cinema whose identity and culture resonated widely with its natives, and were comparatively more honestly portrayed. New Taiwanese Cinema not only aided in the development and re-examination of Taiwan's culture, but also transcended diplomatic barriers due to its accomplishments at several international film festivals. This inescapably rebuilt confidence in Taiwan's local market for film and spread awareness about its artistic, historical and cultural significance (Hong 2011, p110).

From a macroscopic view, New Taiwanese Cinema had indeed brought light to its nation even though its national cinema reflected the people's sufferings, but at least the Taiwanese could feel a sense of ownership to their lives with honesty. Externally, this new wave claimed the role of a cultural ambassador, putting Taiwan out there on the international stage, while internally, this cinematic breakthrough was the factory in which a cultural identity was made, forging ownership and resisting foreign dominance (Hong 2011, p110).

Apart from its realist narratives and point-of-view authenticity coupled with the liberation of national identity, New Taiwanese Cinema was also inherently economic and political in which its emergence was a result of evolving policies. The decline of local cinema audiences had resulted in a recession in the film industry, and one measure to combat this was to loosen state censorship to invite more free

artistic creations (Hong 2011, p113). Subtly, these new wave films embedded discreet political statements to express the dissent harboured against the government through indirect and grounded narratives as a way of hoping for reforms. The growing discontentment from local audiences with regards to their increased awareness of the lack of representation they have for their culture and national solidarity also urged New Taiwanese Cinema to emerge (Hong 2011, p113).

The emergence of this cinematic wave has proven how politics and cinema are mutually inclusive as the latter is a very effective tool in engaging propaganda or social realist issues through influencing the country's national cinema. This relationship works also because cinema is instrumental and a subset of individual families. In other words, the political sphere has a way to penetrate the private households and affect the way of lives, as justified by this chapter of how seismically shifting political landscapes not only diminishes the people's sense of belonging and national identity to a country, but also stir resistance through the form of cinema.

This cinematic resistance was encouraged by directors such as Hou Hsiao Hsien, who contributed to the internationally recognised status of New Taiwanese Cinema because of his films that reflected his autobiographical perspective and Taiwan's realism.

Hou Hsiao Hsien's filmmaking career was diversely influenced by the existence of Healthy Realism as his films were foils and juxtapositions to the previous cinema movement. His works exhibited intentions to re-politicise Healthy Realism by addressing the tensions and observations between past colonisers of Taiwan, expressing the complicated bonds in an attempt to resolve and offer closure in his narratives (Hong 2011, p121). As such, his films provided a relevant foundation to base this dissertation topic of the relationship between the public and private spaces because they inhibit the political weather that rained onto the privatised sphere of individuals, and aimed to tackle the repercussions with very objective sentiments. Moreover, Hou Hsiao Hsien's film language reflected more than a recognition with the national landscape, but also included an individualised gesture when addressing historical consequences (Dai 2008, p245).

To accentuate how this relationship between the public and private spaces interact, the next chapter will discuss in detail, with reference to films, the disagreement and annihilation that arose as the two spheres reluctantly intertwine.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

With a more informed understanding of Taiwan's political and colonial history which led up to its identity crisis, now placing this vault of knowledge into the context of Hou Hsiao Hsien's selected films will add value to the analysis and versatility of the research premise this dissertation is going for. This will aid the interpretation and comprehension of the relationship between the public and private spheres as their dynamics are represented on screen. The investigation mainly revolves around the extent of inclusivity and exclusivity the two spaces have on each other, as well as their inherent causality affiliations which are demonstrated in the following three films *A Time to Live, A Time to Die (1985)*, *A City of Sadness (1989)* and *The Puppetmaster (1993)* to various degrees.

The common denominator among these case studies is the fact that politics have been utilised as a setting for the various narratives, whether prominently as a source of chaos or obscurely as a backdrop. They tell stories about the everyday lives of ordinary people living in Taiwan, irregardless of their identities as early immigrants from Mainland China or local Taiwanese. These social realist contexts are mostly told from an autobiographical point-of-view and elevate their authenticity as references to this paper's topic; the personal weaving into national history and vice versa, politics bleed into the private way of life. *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and A *City of Sadness* address the family units living under political turbulence and instability, while *The Puppetmaster* falls within the period of the Japanese Occupation and the implications on theatre forms. As such, the convoluted web of screen representation between the public and private spaces offers insights into their intrusive natures and the transcendence of the personal realm in isolation of politics.

Intrusion of the Public onto the Private

Despite the cinematic focus on the private family unit on screen, public affairs and politics still intrude and penetrate this personal space because of its governing nature of responsibility and enforcement. In *A City of Sadness*, the film chronicles the lives of four brothers in a Taiwanese household that takes center stage in this family-centric fiction. Even though neither of them assumed direct involvement with any political movements or affiliated organisations, the brothers were persecuted for their indirect associations and paid their respective prices (Rawnsley 2011, p201). Whether it was regarding business matters, the deployment as part of one's occupational job scope, or even engaging in a completely unrelated field of expertise from public affairs such as photography, the government was nevertheless ever-present with its overbearing presence and implications of the political landscape. The pervasiveness of governance is understandable as they are a ruling body with an obligation to build the nation through law and order, however, there is a fine line between assuming responsibility

and abusing authority, which consequently subject individuals to political repercussions in any form of decision making.

For example, the youngest brother in the family, Wen-ching, befriended an intellectual and socialist associate and offered assistance for the latter's missions, but ended up getting himself arrested by the police (Rawnsley 2011, p202). His kindness begets trouble simply for being an acquainted party of a socialist group despite harbouring no political opinion nor contention. The character of Wen-ching exhibits an innocent observer and occasional participant compelled to witness but not condemn (Rawnsley 2011, p202), and yet he suffered a verdict he does not deserve to have experienced. The reason for Wen-ching's arrest is single-minded as crimes were indicted by involvement irregardless the intention and extent they were carried through. While this nature of law enforcement is efficient in its way, it is merciless and narrow-minded as the severity and harshness of the crime were not evaluated in accordance with the acts committed.

Consequently, despite Wen-ching's jail release in the middle of the film, this subject matter arose once again at the end when Wen-ching's second arrest warranted a permanent disappearance for the same reason - being associated with the socialists but also for reasons as primal as sending money for survival. The public arrest implicated Wen-ching's family invariably and was no different from widowing his wife and orphaning his child, leaving a young family unit incomplete. Furthermore, it was ruthless for Wen-ching to be taken away in the name of an interrogation, only to never be seen again (Rawnsley 2011, p203). It is unjust for a political landscape to create a perimeter that forces its citizens to adopt their own coping mechanism to self-sustain, only to fall into their own demise because it sits far in line with the federal's ideology.

Almost comically, physical boundaries do not hinder nor limit the pervasiveness of brutality for even as Wen-ching's young family, who lived in the mountains away from the city, was still subjugated. Even in the midst of attempting to run away where Wen-ching brought his family to a train station, they resigned to their fate as they had nowhere else to go and were under the impression that soldiers would get to them eventually. Ironically, Wen-ching was not spared from these political punishments despite being the discerning deaf-mute witness of his environment and era (Rawnsley 2011, p202).

A family story of getting by life turns political because of the national landscape that imposes social impacts and breeds considerations for the political even in the domestic. The ending of the film is illustrative of this as politics annihilated and left indelible scars on this particular family, as demonstrated through camera work. The last shot of the family having dinner is similarly framed to

one of the earlier shots in the beginning of the film which was also over a meal. However, despite the visual resemblance, its meaning contradicts: while one is set in the context of Wen-ching not showing up out of choice for his work, the other rejects such a chance as Wen-ching had been captured and was unable to turn up even if he wanted to. The only constant is Grandfather eating but now with one out of four sons left as the other brothers were persecuted by the effects of war. Even so, his remaining son had gone lunatic and this parallelism is a summation of political history sabotaging domesticated lives (Udden 2009, p106).

Similarly, in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, the autobiographical recount of Hou Hsiao Hsien's childhood and coming of age story submits people to its natural cycle of life and death, painting the reality and unpredictabilities of growing up in post-war Taiwan. Relating this narrative to the intrusion of the political into the domestic, the protagonist's grandmother serves as a filmic function through her character to justify this assertion.

The protagonist, Ah-ha, and his family moved to Taiwan from Canton Province (aka "Guangdong") in Mainland China because of fundamental and simple reasons like better job prospects and tap water. However, throughout the film, Ah-ha's grandmother mainly does only two things to get by in her life: make silver money for herself when she passes on - a needed currency in the afterlife, and attempt to walk back to the Mainland to pay respects to her ancestors. Grandmother has become an allegory to the notion of returning home (Dai 2008, p244); a representation of the loss of belonging for immigrants to Taiwan as demonstrated through her relentless yet non-resistant attempts to return to China. Each time, she brings Ah-ha along to not only fulfill her desire for the familiarity of home, but also to bring her descendants back to their roots.

Recurring from her little sense of belonging, the struggle for identity is also hinted at by Grandmother's restlessness which symbolises the constant and repetitive spatial movements yet temporal suspensions throughout the film (Dai 2008, p244). Grandmother never sits still at home despite having age catch up with her. She often goes out to find Ah-ha and calls him back for meal times, who wandered far out in the neighbourhood. Through the act of getting her grandson home, it is translative how Grandmother was in search of her own place of familiarity as well. The feelings of being lost are evoked in Grandmother's character as she wanders around, not knowing where she might find Ah-ha other than having only a general sense of direction.

In addition, the physical act may be sitting, but the emotional hints of making silver money for her afterlife is indicative of her quiet restlessness in the current Taiwanese house that she is even

anticipating, though not with enthusiasm but with contented acceptance, her death and the necessities she needs to 'survive' there. Through this character, the spatial mode has been challenged in the attempts of Grandmother wanting to travel back to Mainland China, yet was suspended as she never reached her destination and rode home in a trishaw every single time. The intention of movement exists but is problematised due to the happenings in the larger national scope.

Putting Grandmother's identity struggle and loss of belonging in context, the political landscape despite being at a distance and almost non-affective in this community, nevertheless is metaphorically represented as a nation without an identity. Grandmother is a character that reflects Taiwan as a microcosm of the larger picture, displaced and lost. Grandmother never found her way back to the Mainland and neither did anybody know where Mekong bridge was because the natives were unable to comprehend her language and what she was saying. Despite Grandmother's reason for frustration, she still maintained quietude and little resistance to her life that her feelings of displacement could be easily overlooked. The intrusion of the political into the domestic is subtle but equally destructive as its impacts are less physical but more emotional and long term. It is thus justified how the public sphere easily intrudes the domestic through intangible forms, and it does not need to have a present presence, as the residual consequences of political history are hardly eradicated but equivalently relentless. The fact that Taiwan is in an identity crisis politically does not mean that its people are able to ward off the effects and that domestic life is mutually exclusive.

Lastly, *The Puppetmaster* has displayed the resignation brewing from the interference of public affairs into personal lives. This film with its half-documentary and half-fictional approach presents history with a very objective and factual attitude, making a profound and philosophical statement about the life of an artist back in the days (Udden 2009, p130). Li Tienlu, the protagonist, claimed that he often attempted to free himself from the clutches of fate, but only found himself more wound up instead. Quoting Li, the last century of Taiwan's destiny had been his fate, and the decline of puppetry as an art form was his decline as he aged over the years (Udden 2009, p117).

Likening himself to the state is evident that Li found it unwise to reject and resist what the nation had become and its changes imposed into their livelihoods. Instead, he embraced his circumstances that when his puppet troupe was forced to disband because of the novel policies implemented by the Japanese, he moved to propagandist puppetry for the government as offered in order to keep his life moving. Despite the resignation and bitterness, Li dealt with matters from a collected position and ultimately enslaved his life to the nation with little resistance.

The intrusion of politics into the personal domestic space has undoubtedly proven itself to be harsh and demeaning to the latter, provoking both tangible and intangible impairment to families and leaving them resigned and enslaved to public schemes. However, this discussion can be further expanded and augmented into how the personal space then transcends the public despite its invasion.

Transcendence of the Personal

The privatised sphere of the personal often transcends the nation and politics because of the human intimacy the personal possesses that politics cannot comprehend due to its objective-oriented nature (Rawnsley 2011, p205), dwarfing the latter and reducing its power and abuse to insignificance as emotional relationships prevail.

A City of Sadness is told from the perspective of Wen-ching and his romantic partner, Hinomi, of which this choice to have a deaf-mute and female of the past point-of-view is intentional as Hou Hsiao Hsien wanted to create ambiguity in the narrative and present an objective, as well as subjective witnesses of history (Rawnsley 2011, p205). Wen-ching and Hinomi were naturally removed from political talks and involvement as the former faced communication obstacles while the latter was expected to stay out of such matters due to her gender. With the distanced viewing of political happenings, the couple provides an objective angle to history, yet balanced with subjectivity as the story stays consistent with them throughout the film. Hence, the combined narration from the couple filters most of the politics in the film, and even though their lives were still affected, they were more concentrated on their personal romance and how they could get by life (Lu 2002, p106). In view of this, the personal connection sustains and prevails through tumultuous times not only because of the film's chosen point-of-view, but because this choice represents the little moments that exist in between the chaos of life.

This is further accentuated through cinematography and editing of the scene when Wen-ching and Hinomi were with a group of friends speaking about the current political situation over a meal. However, as Wen-ching was deaf, he remains a passive participant, and Hinomi a distant observer. The change from a long and still take of the group to a punch in of the couple sitting at a corner through its seamless edit encloses the audience away from the political discussions and into the world of the romantic couple as they striked an intimate conversation, shifting the grave tone away and counterbalancing it with the dreamy and idealistic atmosphere between them (Udden 2009, p109). This visual representation portrays the intertwined political and personal realms yet the latter's isolation and survival amidst.

In addition, the narration of the film is also brought through Hinomi's diary entries, encapsulating the time period entirely from her viewpoint as a victim and an omniscient third party. Hinomi's writings that convey her thoughts, aspirations and memories eliminate verbal communication barriers between characters (Rawnsley 2011, p205), and this immortalises the individual experience and human relationships. In other words, the bonds forged between people are eternalised and triumphs the overbearing but temporary political weather. This immortality given to the characters despite their screen absence also propels the other characters who are still making an appearance. The women at the end of the film continued preparing food and looking after the children even though their husbands or brothers were subjugated to their political fates and deaths (Rawnsley 2011, p204). Lives were gravely interrupted but the daily still goes on, and this display of courage by the women in the film manifests into a form of quiet resistance and resilience to the oppression they face (Rawnsley 2011, p207). Therefore, the personal transcends the political sphere with camaraderie within the family, prevailing in spirit.

Likewise for *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, the transcendence of the personal life evolves more into tangential interactions with state affairs, of which were represented in the form of radio broadcasts. Each time the audience knows of a political manifesto occurring, it is the same time the characters in the film gained knowledge of it too, and these messages were often through the announcements or declarations by the governor in an intangible form nothing more than static and voice. The mode of representing the government as a distant presence without shape or form is suggestive of the role it plays in this household - trivial and unimportant.

When the radio broadcasted the air battles, the family was ignorantly eating sugar cane and only briefly mentioned how the occurrence might affect them as a single family unit but nothing beyond that (Udden 2009, p75). In addition, another occurrence of the radio announced the death of a national hero, but the family spoke about internal affairs of a relative instead (Lu 2002, p97). The seemingly nonchalant yet naive family behaviour in response to public matters trivialises state importance and the gravity of its events. In other words, the domestic space is more of concern and the interactions with the nation is tangential.

However, this naivety turned into arrogance when Ah-ha and his group of friends played pool on the day the funeral of the Vice President was held. Ah-ha and his gang showed no respect to the nation and even resorted to fighting the soldiers who were outraged by their indifference (Udden 2009, p75). Perhaps not so much of transcendence at this stage, but the prevalence of individualistic opinions surfacing in opposition to public ideology and beliefs still dwarfs the larger state.

For *The Puppetmaster*, the transcendence of the personal space over the public is displayed through the neutral and almost harmonious attitude as the two spaces weld into one another, and this is expressed through filmic aesthetics as employed by Hou Hsiao Hsien.

The Japanese were portrayed as neither generous colonisers nor malicious tyrants, but simply a call of fate (Udden 2009, p118). The neutral representation of the public sector does not singly implies the lack of resentment for it, but rather the acceptance and magnanimity bestowed upon by the individual. This claim is emphasised through the partial documentary and partial fiction approach Hou Hsiao Hsien implemented. Visually on screen, audiences see the seamless edit merge two different modes together, blurring their dichotomy by always positioning Li's frontal recount in the similar camera setup or along a twinning axis as penultimate shots in the fictional realm. This approach aids the fluent transition from the fictional world to the documentary as it authenticates Li's storytelling as the truth when he appears at the respective locales as the tales, much alike the way the film blends the ideas of life, performance and aspirations (Udden 2009, p121). Fusing the two modes likens the sectors to each other as well and the entire film aesthetic supports this pattern.

As such, the personal realm is empowered to transcend the public sector because of its ability to connect with the human condition and its emotions, eventually finding a point of equilibrium in which both sectors are able to coexist seamlessly.

In conclusion, the public and private spaces share a convoluted relationship that either interacts or excludes one another. The harmful repercussions caused by politics intrude the domestic setting, yet the personal prevails in such turbulence. Just like what Rawnsley asserts, "When there is the national and the political, there is also the intimate and the personal." (Rawnsley 2011, p204)

Chapter 4: Theory and Practice

Stork is the thesis film that I have pitched and am writing for my final year production. Set in Singapore 1970s, it tells the story of a 9-year-old girl, Qingqing, keeping the news of a 2-child-only policy from her parents who are awaiting the 3rd child, because she fears that either her 5-year-old brother or herself might be abandoned to make way for the unborn sibling. The film mainly explores the overarching themes of childhood naivety and familial bonds within the family unit, with a public policy set as a backdrop and acting as the film's inciting incident.

To briefly provide an understanding of Singapore's political climate back then, the 2-child policy was part of the National Family Planning Campaign that emerged during the 1960s as a measure to combat the shortage of food, water and housing. After which, the government encouraged families to have no more than 2 children and propelled the country towards zero population growth in the 1970s. While this manifesto was on the account of the government, its implications were on the citizens and the campaign affected the people as much as it was an economic remedy.

In the screenplay for *Stork*, I would like to focus on justifying the protagonist's character development as well as her dilemmas, as there are conflicting interests between the public and private spaces in the premise of the film: the public policy propagating each family to have 2 children only, while the young girl's household is already waiting on their 3rd child. Hence, the study of the dynamics between the political and personal sectors is germane to my writing of the screenplay as this contentious relationship governs Qingqing's motivations within the coming-of-age plot.

In addition, the story condition for *Stork* requests regard for a subjective character point-of-view as it determines the extent of political content embedded in the film. Thus, I aim to find that balance between recognising the campaign as a prominent plot beat, yet minimising it to a backdrop and landscape in which a character-driven slice of life thrives.

After which, I will also seek to situate *Stork* in its Singapore context of which it so closely relies upon the 1970s socio-economic landscape. The idea of national cinema will also be addressed as the narrative contains both historical and political elements that emerge from that landscape.

Character Development

In designing the character for Qingqing as the protagonist, considerations of how her personality and lifestyle foreground against a public policy are essential as they would determine whether she prevails

or fails under the implementation of political agenda. The intention is to make Qingqing a representative character of the victimised of politic's absurdity, but one who first falters because of the comfort and familiarity she is accustomed to within the household; the trust and belief she places in her own domesticated imagination of fictional literature, in which this public intrusion uproots her. This encounter is meant to witness growth in her character as she comes of age and steps out of her comfort zone.

As such, the review of research materials from the previous chapter serves as an effective guide to draw the arc of Qingqing's journey as she ploughs through the political landscape while clutching on to her desires of keeping her family together. The implementation of the 2-child policy emerges as the inciting incident and intrudes into Qingqing's normal life. This induces her to deem the coming third child in the family as a threat to her younger brother's and her place in the household. Thus, Qingqing is motivated to act on this interference and pursue her main goal - to not let her parents find out about this policy by hiding the campaign flyers that are delivered to the mailbox. This externality of the public policy has disrupted and caused chaos in the family from Qingqing's perspective because it places her family's unity and togetherness at stake with just a headcount.

Despite the justification of Qingqing's fears, her response calls for attention because she has been too absorbed in her fairytales of an idealistic world that she loses sight of rationality. The confrontation that arises from her foiled plans then presents an opportunity for Qingqing's personal feelings to transcend her irrational thoughts as evoked from the policy's campaign, accepting her newborn sibling and leading to a conclusion where familial bonds prevail over public enforcements.

In two of the case study films, the protagonists Hinomi and Li Tienlu may not have exhibited loud defiance towards the politics that victimised their fates, but in their own ways, still maintained quiet resilience and acceptance in order to carry on with their lives. In *A City of Sadness*, when the Nationalist government took over the ruling of Taiwan and drove out the Japanese, this public transition is represented by a personal farewell between Hinomi and her Japanese friend - Shisuko. Despite the Japanese becoming a political enemy, the two ladies maintained their friendship and coped with sadness as they bid each other farewell, justifying personal connections transcending national disputes (Rawnsley 2011, p205). Not only does this friendship transcends, it also shows the subtle resistance Hinomi demonstrated to the nation and her resilience in preserving her familial relationships.

Likewise for *The Puppetmaster*, Li is upfront and unapologetic for his involvement in propagandist puppetry and willingly performed for the Japanese police force despite being Taiwanese because he gave face and respect to one officer who vice versa treated Li as a friend (Udden 2009, p117). The regard he held for his friendship was more important than the impression he gave others of himself, and exhibits personal relationships prevailing over disputes of a nationwide scale.

Hinomi and Li have validated their personal faiths in familial bonds as they persisted through the oppression of politics over resignation. This internal strength and resilience demonstrated are inspirations for Qingqing and a compelling reason for me to craft her personality along the lines of these ordinary silent hero and heroine, as she faces a similar fate with them - victims of public affairs.

Thus, I made Qingqing an active character who perseveres through the implementation of the policy by acting against it and using her own child-like means of resistance to protect her need for family togetherness. In addition, she comes to realise how maintaining good relations with her family members is something within her control and should be acted upon for its worth, instead of trying to prevent externalities from penetrating her household in which will only come to futility. Eventually, Qingqing will learn to place her faith in her family that they will prevail through tough and threatening times when she expresses acceptance to her newborn sibling and dismisses the policy's threatening presence.

Notion of Reality

Alongside her protectiveness over her family, I also crafted Qingqing to be someone highly imaginative due to her ardent hobby of reading fairytale storybooks, but this tendency often leaves her overthinking. Relating the study of Healthy Realism in Taiwan's national cinema history during the 1960s to Qingqing's way of life, I wanted to use her hobby as an allusion to brainwashing, which will build up to her coming-of-age moment under the politically active landscape.

Healthy Realism was propaganda disguised as hope and ideals; a cinematic aesthetic accomplished through artifice and elusive realism (Hong 2011, p75). With Qingqing so absorbed in her own version of realism in the storybooks, it naively distorts her own perception of what is material: an innocent newborn can be deemed as a family wrecker, her child-loving father transforming into a boogeyman who snatches children at night, and her brother who yearns for an elder sister's care becomes an antagonist who ruins her life. Her fictitious literature has incidentally become a form of brainwash definitive of reality and an indoctrination of beliefs in life.

Writing for Qingqing's state of mind and what she thinks required the distortion of rationality because she is obsessed with her fantasies, and the study on Healthy Realism has aided me to situate the power of influence of fiction even in their different forms of literature, cinema and verbal storytelling. The use of tales and superstitions in *Stork* to propagate ideology and beliefs highlights the artificiality existing in everyday lives, and prompts my protagonist to consider what to believe and what not to by the end of the film, which was one of the greatest takeaway during the transition from Healthy Realism into the emerging New Taiwanese Cinema. Even in *The Puppetmaster*, a puppet show was performed during the funeral of a Japanese soldier who had displayed the national spirit and willingly sacrificed for the country during a war mission. The puppetry re-enacted the soldier's heroic sacrifice for the public to honour him, however, this scene presents the choice for individuals to consider to what extent commemoration is actually disinformation. This challenges the notion of storytelling and how it treads on a thin line between authenticity and falsification.

Exploring the entire notion of reality for Qingqing assisted her growth into maturity as she understands the artifice residing within her fiction, and this empowers her to come of age gracefully when she opens her heart for her newborn sibling as part of the family she so adamantly protects.

Self-Identity

In order to write an impactful ending for *Stork*'s screenplay, I considered likening Qingqing's coming-of-age moment to the emergence of New Taiwanese Cinema metaphorically and representationally as the idea of self-discovery of identity coincides individually and nationally.

Qingqing's uncertainty on her sense of belonging in the family surfaces due to the policy's existence, and is thus testament to her lack of confidence in identifying herself integral to the family unit. This self-identity concern is but a microcosm of New Taiwanese Cinema being the country's cultural identity in the making as Taiwan transitioned from its highly controlled screen content (Hong 2011, p110). The coinciding theme of the formation of identity provides me with ideas to transition Qingqing from her childhood naivety into maturity, endearing her to accept the reality that so greatly differs from her utopia yet reassures her place. I see potential in utilising the fact that New Taiwanese Cinema employed a revelation approach to portray the underrepresented lives, to transform Qingqing through disillusionment of her fairytales. One such example includes the last scene of the film where the baby is born and Qingqing's younger brother asks her where the stork from the picture book is since it is supposed to deliver babies. The bursting of Qingqing's fantasy bubbles is a merciless yet potent method to bring her into reality where her identity as the eldest daughter in the house is affirmed and guarded.

Point-of-View as Extent of Political Content

Back tracking a little, selecting the point-of-view in which *Stork* is to be told was one of my dilemmas as the subjective perspective will explore the psyche of an individual under political pressure that transgresses into the personal, and it is important to ensure this notion carries though.

Initially, I situated the story from Qingqing's father's point-of-view where he struggles to make a choice between the state and his family; abiding by the policy or keeping his family intact. While this expands the theme of parental love and more importantly, putting Father in a spot under mounting pressure to make a decision that affects the fates of his loved ones, the implications are probably too complicated for a short film.

Father's character arc will be less steep and he will face a limited amount of transition and character growth from a negligent figure to a loving one. This particular emotional journey is challenging for a short film because emotional attachment cannot be achieved overnight or within the time span of the occurrence of an event. Gradual shifts are still expected when dealing with matters of the heart. This speculation is justified when stepping back to look at the larger picture *Stork* is but a mini representation of. The reason why Taiwanese faced a huge dilemma between recognising who they were was because their colonising government was constantly oscillating throughout the decades and this affected the locals' attachment to either culture.

In addition, adults naturally pay more attention to politics whether or not they are affected by it because of their sense of spatial awareness within the community and nation. With a protagonist dealing with his family's fears in a public policy backdrop, it inevitably calls for public attention and *Stork* may have become too political for its own good. Therefore, the decision to change the film's perspective to a child can help to refocus *Stork* to be about the implications the public imposes on families instead of the way of governance and the politics behind the policy itself. While a child's perspective is also inherently political, the shift in focus is more effective in bringing out a story and letting audiences concentrate not on political criticisms, but the understanding of its coexistence with domestication.

Lastly, modern-day folks like ourselves often access history through school textbooks, museums and exhibitions which are ultimately filtered and vetted through government bodies or an affiliated ministry for education and national development. The amount of censorship would thus be unknown to the recipient of such resources. Hence, having *Stork* look through the eyes of a child is a statement

to revisit the past from a novel perspective that is not from officials but from innocent and naive locals living in the heart of history themselves.

An example of the novelty children bring to cinematic representations can be seen in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* when Ah-ha did not actually collectively believe in what his family stood for. The act of him making the perimeter wall around his house as his 'private gateway' where he climbed over instead of accessing the main door symbolises Ah-ha's transgression of his family boundaries (Lu 2002, p100). Moreover, the time jump between Ah-ha as a young boy watching his father lying dead, to him sitting at the top of a tree eating sugar cane and watching business deals in the market signifies his transcendence from a confined space to a broader landscape; from the interior household to the outdoor neighbourhood; from his family's traditional way of life into his exploration and free will. The editing choice also enhances Ah-ha's sentiments of liberation as he moves from childhood to adolescence within seconds (Lu 2002, p100).

This comparison is meant to justify the novelty of the perspective a child can offer as they elude the standard traditional ideals of conformity and expectations, but rather live out their own personalities. Hence, *Stork* explores the "what-if" situation of a helpless child in Singapore 1972, bringing to light the fear that might have been covered up or trivialised in the documentation of public history.

Situating *Stork* in its Singapore Context

Despite the universality of the narrative through the character developments and thematic journeys, *Stork* is still very much positioned in a specific context as the inciting incident was directly inspired by Singapore's National Family Planning Campaign in the formative years after its independence. Moreover, as much as the point-of-view shift highlighted above has helped to reduce the emphasis of the political connotations to an examination of its implications, the story still depends on the Singapore landscape in the 1970s to justify the emergence of the story of *Stork*. Thus, situating this narrative in that decade and what it means or stands for is pertinent.

Stork is a speck in the cosmos of Singapore during the early 1970s, and the notion of what is reality or the search for self-identity was very much relatable. The island-state was going through a transitional period of modernisation where families were being evacuated from the kampong villages to Housing Development Board (HDB) flats, the nature of jobs changing to adapt to the developing technology, and the education and healthcare systems undergoing improvisations to raise the standard of living and quality of life. Inevitably, the transformation would be deemed jarring to the people and evoked a mixture of feelings of uncertainty, anticipation and displacement. In addition, the separation from

Malaysia to an independent state had destabilised the nation in its social, economic, political and psychological sectors, and the decade was a period of rebuilding the nation on its own.

As such, revisiting the past in this premise is a humble attempt to recognise the emotional turbulence of the people against the national turmoil, humanising political events as more than policies and rules but rather, sentiments and intentions to improve people's lives. Instead of representing this collective experience at a national scale, subsidising the landscape to that of a household makes it more relatable to audiences and dilutes any potential feelings of public resentment.

Similar to how Hou Hsiao Hsien's films were positioned to be part of Taiwan's national cinema in the 1980s that took the approach of realism and authenticity, *Stork* aims to represent the national of Singapore 1970s in the privatised sphere of individual households cinematically, as it takes a neutral stance with regards to the antagonism of politics. The emphasis on this domesticated space on screen will then drive its significance as compared to the now trivialised political domain. The idea of national cinema that *Stork* attempts to achieve is then situated in the individualised space, subverting the definitive equation of the national to the public through unconventional screen representations. Whilst the public and historical elements of the story politicise the narrative, this intention ultimately falters because the private and personal have been transformed into the national itself (Rawnsley 2011, p201), and are empowered to take ownership as a form of national cinema.

Chapter 5: Postscript

The completion of my thesis film *Stork* has given me several points of discussion I would like to express my reflections on, and they center around two evolutions of my writing process: the development from the ideation stage to writing the finalised script, as well as the transformation from words on paper into visuals on screen.

Ideation to Scripting

Initially, when I pitched the story for *Stork*, it was very much a comedy about a fictional remote village in Singapore 1970s encountering their very first interaction with politics. It was focused on the notion of the public sphere entering private homes through the 2-child policy implementation, and the emphasis on the village's isolation harvested a community of illiterate yet self-sustainable people. Despite the weight of politics brewing throughout the pitch, the story proclaimed no antagonist but rather, simply spelling out an unfortunate circumstance that has presented itself onto a family with 3 children. This misfortune reflected the uncertain social climate in Singapore during the 1970s as the locals adapted to the rapid changes implemented by the government which harboured little antagonism as the nation's politics back then were simply a call for modernisation and the betterment of lives.

An absurdist approach was then employed to create a light-hearted tone yet not diminishing its underlying message of the ways that were used to propagate the enforcement of the policy. As a whole, this idea was a commentary on the absurdity of politics as witnessed in the history of Singapore where families were asked to stop at 2 children in the 1970s, but the moment the policy was too successful, its results backfired by the 1980s and the government changed the campaign to "Have 3 or More If You Can Afford It". Even in the 21st century today, Singapore is suffering the effects of the 2-child policy with a low birth rate, whether directly or indirectly from the past.

Throughout the writing process with my Director, this political story evolved into a character-driven plot that was still set in the context of the policy, but much more controlled and managed such that the purpose of the film was not to criticise the absurdity of politics, but to explore the tension that rose between the public and the private sectors with a coming-of-age narrative. Instead of situating the characters in a public space, we confined them into a household such that political events were not explicitly seen in the film, but rather its implications seeping into the domestic region. This method of altering the physical space in the film has helped to revert the attention of politics, yet not totally dismissing its presence.

Looking back at my ideation to scripting journey, I realised that the transformation had been beneficial to the film. In the midst of reading up on my theoretical research, I came across a statement that says the problem Taiwan cinema faced in the 1980s was that many filmmakers attempted to fit their films to the political dissatisfaction they wanted to address, but this reduced the film as a means only to advance the filmmaker's political intentions, disregarding the narrative altogether (Udden 2009, p130). However, Hou Hsiao Hsien's films captured the people subjected to the laws of nature instead and evaded politics, and yet was still able to accurately reflect Hou's political views with such an approach (Udden 2009, p129). Ultimately, where there is the personal, the public will still be relentlessly intertwined, and it is through chancing upon this piece of advice that enlightened me to apply a similar approach for *Stork*, whereby I changed the story's point-of-view to a subjective character which helped to refocus the political angle and ground the narrative within the household. This change in story angle received positive feedback from my lecturers and peers as it was a refreshing sight to view a politically induced world through the eyes of a child. The incongruent pairing of politics with children was inherently suggestive to the societal changes that were happening.

In addition, the ideation to scripting process was also a daunting experience for me as not only did I have to flesh out my characters thoroughly in this fictional world, the period setting also demanded a level of historical accuracy and authenticity. I conducted research from online sources through the National Library Board portal, as well as visited the National Archives to browse through the recorded oral and visual histories of Singapore in the early 1970s. One major obstacle I faced during the research endeavour was the lack of extensive documentation from these government-approved resources. While they were reliable and accurate to the socio-political events that occurred back in the days, the scope of documentation was limited as the resources mainly provided information about the 2-child policy with its promotional materials for the campaign. Little was said about the people's reactions to the news and what goes on in the heart of an ordinary household. Even in the digital newspaper clippings I chanced upon from that era, the headlines reflected the general response the campaign was yielding, and never touched on the emotional setbacks of families.

In hindsight, my speculations about the archives on national history were proven valid because it was common to see the past through the eyes of the public sphere. The privatised sphere, however, was easily overlooked and underrepresented. It is promising to reflect this truth in *Stork* subtly and encourage people of this day and age to look at the outer and inner layers of each story.

Lastly, another stumbling block that I encountered was being in tandem with my Director's vision. At the very early stages, he proposed to work with me on this story as a Director because he resonated with my concept of revisiting Singapore's past and nostalgia. I also found him the most suitable director for this film because I have seen his past projects of documentaries and knew he had a flair for cultural and historical narratives. Hence, we embarked on our collaboration.

We knew that the period film we were making was not to be self-absorbed into the aesthetics, but to convey the universality of familial bonds and childhood naivety. While we were aligned with each other thematically, we were not so agreeable genre and plot wise, which sprouted from the different interpretations of our characters. There were often debates about what our protagonist's response was to a certain situation, and misunderstandings of what was visualised in both our minds. Furthermore, the Singapore 1970s setting meant more of a national nostalgia to him than a subtle political milestone to me, and this altered the purpose of the historical setting imbued into the narrative as a key plot beat. Eventually, it dawned on me that our discords were neither due to the lack of work we put into developing the story nor our ineffective communication methods, but it was a result of our differing preferences and lens through which we each see the world through. Everything then started to make more sense as I could now comprehend how a misunderstanding could occur despite having our discussions and conclusions written down in black and white.

Having come to this realisation, I decided to act on it. As a writer, I understood the importance of my inputs, however, it is known that the story will ultimately be the Director's film, as hierarchical as it sounds. I felt that my Director should believe in the film he is making with his team because he would have to make many other decisions in line with the Cinematographer, Production Designer, Editor and Audio Post Engineer, that will eventually bring the film to fruition. Therefore, I accepted his directorial style and justification for the decisions he made and changed my approach of writing to trying my best to fulfill his vision with the story I had in hand. Nevertheless, I was heartened that the core of the story still remained loyal to my pitch - the political situation and household dilemma in which we placed a family in.

Words to Visuals

In the midst of reading up on the history of Taiwan's national cinema and its political struggles, I came across an article about Hou Hsiao Hsien and his films that emerged as part of the pioneers of New Taiwanese Cinema, and how Hou's auteur style was very much involved in the tracing of history through the personal realm, as well as the excavation of truths through the interrogation of Taiwan's self-identity (Chang 2019, p2). I witnessed this trend in my Director for *Stork* where he immersed

himself as the author of the story and related his personal childhood experiences to the film. He also brought in his adoration for Japanese Cinema and used *Kikujiro* by Takeshi Kitano and *Treeless Mountain* by So Yong Kim as *Stork*'s main film references regarding directorial style, cinematography, editing and sound design.

Reflecting back on the collaboration, I was rather agreeable to the many suggestions my Director gave with regards to the script, whether it was the way the description was written which influenced the subtext and the genre, or certain clues that enhanced the mise-en-scene. His justification often linked back to his film references and it was encouraging to see reasons well-thought through. However, it took me till post-production to envisage the dilemma of whether the story was indeed suited for such directorial style, or was the directorial style being imposed to fit the story, which might not have been the most suitable. This thought birthed because of the feedback I gathered from some lecturers and peers, that the film did not turn out as they had expected. If discussions have been made prior to production, why was there a situation in which the film did not turn out to be what it was planned for?

Watching the final edit of the film urged me to ponder what went wrong during production such that the story edit did not flow as smoothly as we thought it would when the script was written. There are several possibilities I could pin my doubts on, such as the amount of coverage, the way we covered the scene, as well as how it was being shot. Perhaps the biggest mistake I committed on set was advising my Director on the performance of the child actors I was seeing on screen.

My Director and I were on the same page about how Qingqing was not a very expressive character, despite having a mountain full of emotions in her situation. For every shot we went, we stuck to this overarching guide about her, but her stoic performance on set then became flat in post-production, and this discovery dumbfounded me. This led me to doubt if I had carefully watched out for story coverage on set as the Script Supervisor because Qingqing's flat performance now makes her an emotionless character that does not compel the audience to care for.

In addition, the historical setting appeared more as an aesthetic than intended as the texture and mise-en-scene beautified the artistry of the film but did not enhance the narrative as strongly as planned. Perhaps it was due to our fear of politicising the film too much that it backfired and diminished its presence instead. Eventually, to increase the importance and relevance of the 2-child policy in the film and provide its crucial context in which the entire plot birthed from, a short animation montage of a modified version of the actual campaign was done to situate the narrative in its time and era, as well as clearly justify the inciting incident to Qingqing's course of action.

Having experienced these challenges, I learnt that theory changes when it goes into the execution phase not because it was not thoroughly prepared for, but more to the infinite number of externalities that tweaks and alters theory. A character guide about Qingqing's character may show otherwise during production because the external factors included the child actor's mood that day and the amount of exhaustion and pressure she faced on set. If we had slightly disregarded Qingqing's stoic demeanour and inserted a little more drama on the child actor, the edit may still be able to show her resistance to emotional expression and achieve the stoicness we wanted. I assume if this bit of performance mistake was rectified, the kuleshov editing my Director and Editor were striving for would work out better as it would be shots full of intensity being controlled in emotionless editing, as opposed to flat performance accentuated by an even more deadpan style of editing. Therefore, this was a great learning lesson for me on how to craft the story in another form apart from writing.

Conclusion

Cinema provokes its audiences to reflect, rebuild and reform society through history and culture. It causes us to internalise and reconsider our own desires and identities (Chang 2019, p15). In other words, cinema is a revolutionising tool in today's world to induce changes in its socio-political landscape for the better. The past has shedded new light on certain ugly truths about colonisation and politics, but screen representation of this annihilation has eternalised these facts and served as analysis on the public-private relationship which proves relevant even in today's context.

While Hou Hsiao Hsien's films *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, *A City of Sadness* and *The Puppetmaster* has suffered its due share of challenges in terms of the autobiographical stories or exhibition of the films' final products, they substantiate and justify the emergence of New Taiwanese Cinema which helped to overcome the 'unhealthy' realism that was rife in the country. Unintentionally, these films represented the birth of a representative national cinema and teaches generations after about life's truths. This insight propelled me to further the narrative of *Stork* and craft it to represent more than a political statement, but an observation of its victims that prevail within the family unit in a rapidly modernising decade.

Ultimately, the convoluted presence of the domestic space within public affairs and vice versa, as well as the complex chain of causality both spheres induce onto each other, is no more different than they are similar. The only triumphant way to extricate the destructive consequences caused by this social friction is to attain balance and harmony through unselfish motives and care.

In conclusion, the entire research conducted for my graduation project ranging from references of Taiwan's seismically shifting political climate, its colonisation history and national cinema, to the historical authenticity of *Stork* and the writing challenges I faced, were gruelling and challenging but enriching and a good learning opportunity for me to develop sensitivity to characters both fictional and in real life. My understanding of the interaction between the public and private spaces have deepened and enlightened me on the balance needed for the two sectors to coexist harmoniously, as well as inspired me to investigate the relationships that surround me in my daily life that inhabits similar contentions.

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