ABSTRACT

TAIWANESE IDENTITY AND TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN THE CINEMA OF ANG LEE

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This dissertation argues that acclaimed filmmaker Ang Lee should be regarded as a Taiwanese transnational filmmaker. Thus, to best understand his work, a Taiwanese sociopolitical context should be employed to consider his complicated national identity as it is reflected in his films across genres and cultures. Previous Ang Lee studies see him merely as a transnational Taiwanese-American or diasporic Chinese filmmaker and situate his works into a broader spectrum of either Asian-American culture or Chinese national cinema. In contrast, this dissertation argues his films are best understood through a direct reference to Taiwan’s history, politics, and society. The chapters examine eight of Lee’s films that best explain his Taiwanese national identity through different cultural considerations: Pushing Hands (1992) and Eat Drink Man Woman (1994) are about maternity; The Wedding Banquet (1993) and Brokeback Mountain (2005) consider homosexuality; The Ice Storm (1997) and Taking Woodstock (2009) represent a collective Taiwanese view of America; and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) and Lust, Caution (2007) reflect and challenge traditions of Taiwan Cinema. The eight films share three central leitmotifs: family, a sympathetic view of cultural outsiders, and a sympathy for the losing side. Through portraying various domestic relations, Lee presents archetypal families based in filial piety, yet at the same time also gives possible challenges represented by a modern era of
equal rights, liberalism, and individualism – which confront traditional Taiwanese-Chinese family views. Incorporating many Taiwanese interviews with Lee that underscore the nationalistic essences of his films, this dissertation suggests that Lee’s national identity denotes a triple-fold significance: as homeland, as the nurturing place where he began his enthusiasm for cinema, and as the country to which he still dedicates himself.
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INTRODUCTION

Reconsidering Ang Lee’s Film Career: Taiwanese Identity and Transnationalism

One of the few East Asian directors who have been acclaimed by the American film industry, Taiwanese-American film director Ang Lee attracted the spotlight on the night that he received the Oscar for Best Achievement in Directing for *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) at the 78th Academy Awards in 2006 as well as the same award again for *Life of Pi* (2012) at the 85th Academy Awards in 2013. With such accolades, Lee has been seen as one of Taiwan’s most successful national icons on the international stage. Lee was born in Pingtung, Taiwan in 1954, but his parents are first generation Mainlanders who came to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government in 1949, when Chiang’s army was defeated by Mao Zedong’s Communist Party of China (CPC) in the Chinese Civil War. Lee graduated from the National Taiwan College of Arts (now National Taiwan University of Arts) in Taipei, and in 1978 he came to resume a study of film at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), where he was awarded a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theater-Theater Direction in 1980. He then went to New York University for a Master’s degree in Film Production. At NYU, Lee met Spike Lee, an Academy Honorary Award recipient in 2015, who was pursuing a master’s degree in film at NYU in the early eighties as well and helped him make his student film *Joe's Bed-Story, Barbershop: We Cut Heads* (1983) by serving as an assistant director. While Lee was still in school, his films brought him good appraisals as well as awards. His *I Wish I Was by That Dim*

Generally speaking, Lee’s film career can be divided into two phases. In the earlier phase, encompassing *Pushing Hands* (1992), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), he worked with Taiwan’s Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), the then government-owned film production company. Lee’s talent for filmmaking continued to garner him numerous awards in this Taiwanese period. *Pushing Hands* won CMPC’s Special Jury Award and Best Film; Best Director in the 28th Golden Horse Awards, Taiwan’s most prominent annual film awards; Best Film in the 37th Asia-Pacific Film Festival; and Best First Film in Amiens International Film Festival. *The Wedding Banquet* won the Golden Berlin Bear (Best Film) in the Berlin International Film Festival, one of the most renown and prestigious film festivals worldwide; Critic Award and Coup de Coeur LTC in the Deauville Film Festival; Best Feature Film, Best Director, and Best Original Screenplay in the 30th Golden Horse Awards; Outstanding Film in the 5th GLAAD Media Awards; and the Golden Space Needle of the Seattle International Film Festival. *Eat Drink Man Woman* won Best Film in the 31th Golden Horse Awards; Best Film in the 39th Asia-Pacific Film Festival; two National Board of Review of Motion Pictures Awards for Best Foreign Language Film and Top Foreign Film. Lee produced and co-wrote the original screenplays for his earlier films. Therefore, they carry a strong sense of Taiwanese/Chinese identity, nostalgia toward the past, and Lee’s personal memory of Taiwan/China. From this phase onward, Lee establishes a central trademark that has been
recurring throughout his oeuvre: family. Though each of the three earlier films has their distinctive themes, such as immigration, cultural confrontation, and gender and sexuality – with family as one of the unifying elements linking the three films.

In the later phase, roughly from Sense and Sensibility (1995) to Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk (2016) Lee works with major Hollywood production companies, such as Columbia Pictures, Focus Features (owned by NBC Universal/Comcast), Fox Searchlight Pictures (owned by 20th Century Fox), and Universal Pictures. Lee also works with major Asian production companies, such as China Film Co-production Corporation (one of the most influential government-owned film production companies in China). His fame and award-winning reputation attract enthusiastic media investors and major production companies to fund and produce his films. If Lee’s earlier phase is his Taiwanese era, this later phase can be seen as Lee’s global era, in which the production, distribution, and appreciation (to put it in another term, consumption) of Lee’s films reach a status much wider as well as influential than the previous era. It is also in this phase that Lee turns from making original screenplays to adapting literary works. Sense and Sensibility (1995), Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), Brokeback Mountain, Lust, Caution (2007), Life of Pi (2012), and Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk are all adaptations from the literary works that share the same names. To take a closer look at the films of this phase, Lee’s ambitions to explore diverse socio-historical contexts and genres are obvious and encompass the following: Jane Austen’s nineteen century England, the martial arts traditions in ancient China in the Ching Dynasty (1644-1912), the homosexual romance in the Western frontier in the 1960s, the spy-thriller in Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), a fantasy drifting in the Pacific Ocean, and an Iraq War hero’s homecoming
ironically ending up in a Super Bowl Halftime show. Lee’s concern with family has still been a crucial part of his later films. The filmmaker probes into the intersections of these films’ respective issues through the lens of family as a central narrative focus. And these arrangements help to create a unique “Ang Lee aesthetic” that manifests his sophisticated observations on the East Asian and American culture, values, and societies from a transnational stance.

**A Certain Taiwanese Identity**

To put Lee and his films in a transnational frame does not mean his cinema is not without the influence of a Taiwanese awareness. In this dissertation, I argue that both phases of Lee’s career are heavily influenced by his Taiwanese experience and background. Throughout Lee’s oeuvre, he has been cinematically developing a Taiwanese identity and mediating Taiwanese culture and Western culture (especially American culture). I also argue that Lee’s three primary concerns in his films—familial relations and filial piety (such as in *Pushing Hands* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*), a sympathy toward the oppressed and the losing side (such as in *Lust, Caution* and *Brokeback Mountain*), and a cultural outsider status (such as in *Taking Woodstock* and *The Ice Storm*)—are all related to his Taiwanese experience and national identity. Many critics, such as Whitney Crothers Dilley and Flannery Wilson, regard Lee as a transnational Chinese director and move Lee out of the context of Taiwan cinema. Wilson, in *New Taiwanese Cinema in Focus*, characterizes Lee as a (Taiwanese) “Second Wave” director. Yet, along with the mainstream American media, she also questions the validity of Lee’s status as “Taiwanese” director since Lee resides in New York, not Taiwan. Wilson’s argument might seem plausible,
but it is too subjective to determine a person’s cultural and national identity simply by the place where one lives. In fact, Lee often returns to Taiwan for cinema-related cultural events held by the government or the industry, such as serving as jury for the Golden Horse Awards, sharing his successful Hollywood experience in public discussion forums and interviews, and receiving national honorary awards (both first rank and second rank Order of Brilliant Star awarded by the President of the ROC/Taiwan for his contributions to Taiwan; the National Award of Arts; Outstanding Filmmaker Award of the year and so on). To stimulate Taiwan’s film industry, he even brought Life of Pi’s production team to Taiwan to film the movie.

In a public forum in 2016, Lee talks about how he wishes the media to regard him:

I was hoping that when she [the moderator] introduced me she referred me as a five-time Golden Horse Awards winner. I hope I am referred to as a filmmaker, but this is not a title. The most prominent title that I am often referred to is Oscar [the Academy Awards]. Buowhado [“There is nothing I can do” in Taiwanese dialect]. When I did the ceremonial first pitch for the Mets, they called me “Oscar-winning director…” rather than “Golden Horse winner.”¹ [My emphasis] (“Ang Lee Forum clips for Dummies”)

Lee’s thought contradicts Wilson’s argument and highlight several interesting cultural identity issues. Having obtained two Oscar Awards and been invited to pitch for a Major League Baseball (MLB) team, Lee becomes an example of successful cultural assimilation in America. However, in wishing to be called a Golden Horse Awards winner, Lee identifies himself more with Taiwan’s film industry than with Hollywood. Interestingly, Lee uses “Buowhadio,” a commonly-spoken expression in Taiwanese dialect, to convey his frustration at how international and American media look at him as a transnational Americanized figure rather than a Taiwanese artist. As a second-generation Mainlander, Lee’s command of Taiwanese dialect shows how he is “Taiwanized”; unlike his parents, he grew up in the hybrid cultural scenario in Taiwan and is

¹ The interview is in Mandarin Chinese. The translation here is my own.
influenced by the island’s multiple cultural inputs and various ethnic groups with different dialects. To be more specific, Lee’s use of three languages (English, Mandarin, and Taiwanese dialect), his importance in the two film industries, and his residence in the two countries manifest the director’s cultural fluidity, which is the fundamental basis for his transnational career. Significantly, though Lee possesses such outstanding ability to talk to different cultures, he still defines himself more as a Taiwanese filmmaker and relates himself to Taiwan cinema. This interview highlights a key omission of current Ang Lee scholarship: Lee consciously acts as a Taiwanese transnational director. Culturally speaking, though Lee does not live in Taiwan now, he is part of the island and Taiwan cinema. Lee’s cultural fluidity, transnational career, and film work across various genres and subject matters, make Lee a worthy subject matter in the study of cinema, globalization, and national identity. This dissertation, on a more fundamental level, is based on an interdisciplinary aspect that involves literary studies, cinema studies, adaptation studies, linguistic studies, and cultural studies. On one hand, this dissertation is an extensive Ang Lee study. Though there are many scholarly articles on Lee and his films, there are surprisingly only three book-length volumes: Whitney Crothers Dilley’s *The Cinema of Ang Lee: the Other Side of the Screen* (2007), Chih-Yun Chiang’s *Theorizing Ambivalence in Ang Lee’s Transnational Cinema* (2012), and an edited collection of criticism, *The Philosophy of Ang Lee* (2013), edited by Robert Arp and Adam Barkman. The above three books do not attempt to discuss all of Lee’s films. Dilley’s book covers Lee’s earlier Taiwanese films, *Sense and Sensibility, The Ice Storm, Ride With the Devil, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Hulk* but it stops at *Brokeback Mountain*, while Chiang’s book particularly focuses on *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution*. In addition, they do not look into the impact of Taiwan
cinema and Taiwan’s history on Lee’s cinema and Lee’s status in Taiwan’s film industry. This dissertation includes both Lee’s earlier Taiwanese-made films and later American-made films to facilitate a discussion of Lee as a *Taiwanese* transnational filmmaker, and moreover, it examines Lee’s rarely-discussed film, *Taking Woodstock*, as it is an important film in the way that it not only reveals Lee’s domestic philosophy based on filial piety, but shares a collective Taiwanese political ideology of idealizing American (popular) culture and seeing America as the protector of Taiwan.

**Critical Framework: Globalization, Diaspora, and Cultural Identity**

Stuart Hall, in “The Global, the Local, and the Return of Ethnicity,” recognizes the powerful impact that globalization leaves on national cultural identities in the late twentieth century. Hall defines globalization as:

> [t]hose processes, operating on a global scale, which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time combinations, making the word in reality and in experience more interconnected. Globalization implies a movement away from the classical sociological idea of a “society” as a well-bounded system, and its replacement by a perspective which concentrates on “how social life is ordered across time and space.” (630)

Hall notices how the compression of time and space changes and unsettles national cultural identities to a large extent. He does not think that globalization is a very recent phenomenon. Modernity and capitalism are two cultural and economic trends that have long penetrated national boundaries. For Hall, “*both* the trend toward national autonomy and the trend towards globalization are deeply rooted in modernity” (630). While the trends of globalization and modernity tend to blur the dividing line between the local and the global, they trigger different
growth patterns for national cultural identities. Hall proposes three patterns: in the first pattern, national identities are “eroded” by the homogenization of globalization and become “the global post-modern”; in the second, out of resistance toward the force of globalization, national and local identities strengthen themselves; in the third, the former national identities weaken and give way to new identities of hybridity.

In addition, in “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” Hall discusses the role cultural identities play in artistic representations. Cultural identity is not existing outside or prior to representations; instead, Hall thinks cultural identity is a “production” innate in the process of representation. Film, such as Lee’s work, cannot be seen as neutral and fully objective because these representations are constantly situated under a certain context and, thus, are influenced by its surroundings. Cultural identity, similarly, is not separable from the intrinsically intimate relationship between its context and representations, as Hall clearly stresses, “What we say is always ‘in context,’ positioned” (704). Regarding types of cultural identity, Hall splits the concept into two different categories based upon its (un-)stability: the first category of cultural identity is the “one” that is unchangeable and is shared by a group of people. The second category is forever changing, that is to say, ever “becoming/being.” The latter does not contradict the former but consolidates the former. Hall’s categorization points out the polarized attributes within cultural identities – stability and fluidity.

In this way, cultural representations, resulting from cultural identities, carry the seeming contradictory attributes from the early stages of formation. Crucially, Hall’s first category of cultural identity, or (he also calls it) national identity, takes on a necessary role in founding postcolonial societies. In supporting his theory of cultural identity, Hall discusses postcolonial
theorist Frantz Fanon’s idea that the search for a cultural identity or national identity
“rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others” (705) since this idea relates
to the second scope of cultural identity:

The past continues to speak to us. But this is no longer a simple, factual “past,” since our
relation to it is, like the child’s ration to the mother, always-already ‘after the break.’ It is
always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are
the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are
made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning.
(707)

Hall’s discussion sheds light on the question of who we are as one cultural community or one
country and the efforts of construction from the past. In a postcolonial setting, people feel the urge
to establish a unified conception of selfhood that can consolidate the dividing line between “they
(being whoever not us)” and “us.” The attempt of searching for an identity not only targets
current times but also aims at the past.

To further probe into the impact of globalization on cultural identity, Hall also brings in
the concept of diaspora and how it influences people’s identity:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the
recognition of a necessary heterogeneity, diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which
lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those
which are constantly producing and reproduction themselves anew, through
transformation and difference. (713)

Hall’s definition of diaspora corresponds with the fluidity of cultural identity. The identities
referred to under the situation of diaspora change very often by transforming, absorbing,
differentiating, and renewing. While, in the article, Hall concentrates on black culture in Britain
as his target case, his argument about diaspora identities reveals a “diaspora aesthetic” that
touches on the central figures of postcolonial mentality and its artistic representations and
productions. Adopting this concept of a “diaspora aesthetic,” Hall intends to elucidate a cultural
dynamic that appropriates materials from the dominant culture and reshapes the sources into the
local culture. The transformation of culture subverts the dominant culture through the means of hybridizing. Hall’s first and second categories of cultural identity, though they look contradictory, have very close ties to each other. When cultural identity is in discussion, it is difficult to isolate one from the other, and thus, the features of “oneness” and the features of “constant shifting” should both be taken into consideration.

Though Hall’s subjects are centering on the Caribbean and British Black diaspora, such postcolonial experiences are shared by Taiwanese people. Being a former colony of Japan in the early twentieth century, Taiwan has undergone a series of transitions and cultural transformations, as I will discuss in detail throughout this dissertation. After the Japanese government handed over Taiwan to Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party of China, Kuomintang (KMT) government, Taiwan began its rapid process of Westernization accelerated by the alliance between the KMT government and the U. S. government. Consequently, Taiwanese people are in a perpetual status of looking for a cultural and national identity that can be called “genuine Taiwanese,” and this particular “awareness of Taiwanese” has been more explicitly addressed in recent years. Therefore, Hall’s thoughts of cultural identities as targets of postcolonial subjects are appropriate in the case of Taiwanese culture, and even more useful when analyzing an artist like Ang Lee, a Taiwanese-born filmmaker who grew-up surrounded by Taiwan’s unique postcolonial scenario.

Chih-Yun Chiang, in *Theorizing Ambivalence in Ang Lee’s Transnational Cinema*, relates the discussion of globalization and national cultural identities to the context of East Asia and Lee as a transnational filmmaker. Chiang defines transnational cinema as a notion “used to

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2 See footnote 3 for details on this history.
encompass filmmakers and filmmaking across genres, treating these as elements of a global system that includes the global circulation of financial capital and commodities and the international distribution and consumption of cinematic production” (22). Lee’s own transnational background and experiences as an international filmmaker are best understood in the global context. For Chiang, Ang Lee’s films provide an opportunity to analyze an underlying desire of identity formation in the process of cinematic representations since they reveal that “identity formation for the people in Taiwan is not only a political framing; it has become a structural feeling, emotional attachment, affective desire, and nostalgic sentiment deeply rooted in people’s everyday lives,” (40) and cinema, part of Taiwanese people’s everyday lives, offers a medium to release such emotional tension. In addition, based on postcolonial theories, Chiang defines globalization as:

Globalization is a fully international system of cultural exchange through which imperial power is strategically maintained and expanded. It operates within the network of power relations that is deeply embedded in the political, cultural, and economic legacy of Western imperialism. Through the emergence of global economic forces, categorical identities and differences, such as ethnicity and nationality, proliferate, are (re)produced, and are assembled by various communicative, technological means, involving national myth. Identity is constantly negotiated to serve political ends. (16)

Chiang’s remarks reiterate a postcolonial standpoint that globalization is another force of imperial invasion into the territory of politics, cultures, and economics. The unequal power relationship and the one-sided imperial movement render their colonized subjects, in this case East Asian countries, passive and ready to be exploited. Though she contends that globalization is more of a system of cultural exchange, this system is in fact mobilized and accompanied by strong economic motives. Similarly, Western imperialism is largely a political movement, but somehow it contains no less a degree of economic forces – to exploit for profit. To be more
specific, national cultural identities in the context of globalization are influenced not only by politics but also the economics of capitalism.

Globalization brings the issues of mobility, migration, displacement, and, last but not least, diaspora, into the scholarly discussion of modernization. Chiang views diaspora studies as a means to avoid compliance with the Western model of modernization:

Diaspora studies deconstruct the boundaries of the nation-state, reconstructing a non-Western model of identity formation. The diasporic in-betweeness moves beyond the binary construction of colonized and colonizer, center and periphery, serving as a model for resisting the hegemony of western modernization...diasporic studies are generally concerned with the idea of cultural dislocation, examining the effect of the practices of displacement in relation to a new constitution of cultural meaning. (14)

Chiang’s argument breaks the monopoly of a Western model of modernization and the hierarchy of locations in the colonial discourses. Formerly set in the colonial discourse, the importance of “the center” has perpetually been stressed, while “the periphery” has connoted subordinate, lower, and other values not attached to the idea of the center. She also points out that in diaspora studies, the periphery, or the marginal location, changes itself into a place of creation. Chiang explains that “through the consumption of Western commodities, goods, advertising, and cultural productions such as films, music, and other forms of mass culture, local identities are constantly constructed and reconstructed through the process of interaction and appropriation” (15). In other words, diaspora studies make it clear that through the process of creative reconstruction, the local, or the previously colonized, regains the agency in cultural production so as to be “recognized” and “visible.” Transnational cinema can be seen as one of the cultural products of this process within this context.

Chiang incorporates Mark T. Berger’s and Anwar Ibrahim’s ideas of counter-cultural values so as to show the East Asian resistance and defense, which offer an alternative perspective
to view the process of modernity in East Asia. Chiang first mentions Berger’s term “Asian Renaissance,” which originally was used to discuss East Asia’s political reformation. Berger also refers to the situation as “The battle for Asia.” Berger’s terms, as Chiang explains, “aimed at readjusting the economic and politic structure of Asian nations under the post-Cold War U.S. led globalization project. Berger posited that the major change for Asian from decolonization to globalization is the adoption of the process of capitalist transformation after 1945” (12). Chiang also brings in Ibrahim’s term “Pan-Asian consciousness,” which “was a form of Asian regionalism which sought to provide an instrumental tool during the Asian crisis in 1998” (12).

Chiang goes on to point out the term and idea of “Chinese” is no longer sufficient in the context of globalization. With Chinese people and culture migrating to geographical areas outside of China, the references of “Chinese” become confusing because the term suggests its function as an index of a nation-state, but the cultural signified—people of Chinese ethnicity and Chinese-originated values—has already crossed the boundary of nation-state. What is at stake here is the entire Eastern/Chinese thought-based philosophy. She explains that “The neo-Confucian philosophy was employed not only to distinguish the quintessential differences between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ but also to serve as a tool for the move from the decolonization of Asia toward globalization – not to Westernize Asia but to modernize Asia in the ‘Asian Way’” (12). From Chiang’s incorporation of Berger’s and Ibrahim’s ideas, it is striking to observe the efforts made to claim an East Asian process of modernity. It is more interesting that Confucianism (not Buddhism, Islam, or other equally prevalent philosophy) was used as the main tool/weapon to defend against the forces of Westernization. Chiang’s indication of the international popularity of Confucianism in East Asia helps to form a pan-Asian scenario
where she situates Lee as a transnational filmmaker. Yet, this privileging of Confucianism is not without its pitfalls. In many East Asian countries, China has long been regarded as a powerful empire and colonial force. What Confucianism means to smaller countries (such as Vietnam) may be another colonial or imperial invasion. Besides, the degree of Confucianism’s prevalence varies in different East Asian countries. To say Confucianism represents the thoughts and values of most of the nation-states in East Asia is too arbitrary and one-sided. Though Chiang points out the important status of Confucianism in East Asia and offers an insightful analysis of Lee’s transnationality, she does not fully recognize Lee as a Taiwanese subject nor situate him into a particular Taiwanese sociocultural context.

**Chinese Centrism and the Problem of “Greater China”**

Many scholars share a tendency to situate Ang Lee’s cinema, particularly his Chinese-themed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution*, into the broad context of Chinese cinema and China’s film industry (Chi, 2009; Lu, 2002; Marchetti, 2012; Zhu, 2015; Ding, 2011). However, “Chinese” is a very complicated label since it covers a broad range of concepts. It is necessary and urgent to differentiate whether “Chinese” refers to the nation-state or to a shared culture among Chinese-ethnic decedents who may or may not have direct connections to China as a country. There are also problems with the term “Greater China,” as Gina Marchetti employs it in her study *The Chinese Diaspora on American Screens: Race, Sex, and Cinema* because it homogenizes the ethnic diversity and politics represented by the “Chinese-speaking”
communities in different regions and countries: not all Chinese-speaking people identify themselves as Chinese nationals (2-5).

Multiple questions arise along with the appearance of “Greater China.” First, if the “Greater China” is based on language, does the Chinese language here refer to Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese Chinese, or other branches of Chinese language? Does this Chinese-speaking ability become one of the criteria for national/cultural identity? If that is the case, how do people settle for this identity issue if they are bilingual or if they have multiple native tongues? Also, if “Greater China” is not based on language but on China’s adjacent geographical area, such as Taiwan, Macau, and Hong Kong, then what about the overseas Chinese communities in other neighboring Asian countries, such as Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and other South Asian countries? They are close to China and share Chinese culture to some degrees. Do we consider them members of Greater China? And, if Greater China is based on the impact of Chinese culture, is this “greater” a synonym for the “great” as in “Great Britain” and hence implies forces of colonization and political connotations? To be more specific, to use such an ambiguous and misleading term would only strengthen the cultural hegemony of Chinese Han culture (Han ethnic community consists of the majority of Chinese) while neglecting the nuanced discrepancies caused by heterogeneous regions, political ideologies, and ethnicity groups. If the umbrella term “Greater China” fails to answer all the detailed questions raised by itself, then another term “Chinese identity” is also problematic in its nature. Does Chinese identity sufficiently represent the Chinese culture? Can we view Taiwanese identity the same way we view Chinese identity?
Shu-Mei Shih, in “What Is Sinophone Studies” and “Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production,” ruminates on similar issues about the confusing term “Chinese,” the dominating Chinese Centrism, and the particular situation of “the Chinese Diaspora.” In Shih’s view, the Chinese Diaspora is “understood as the dispersion of ‘ethnic Chinese’ people around the globe, stands as a universalizing category founded on a unified ethnicity, culture, language, and place of origin or homeland” (“Against Diaspora” 26). The Chinese Diaspora stresses the culture of the “Greater China,” which includes the geographically Chinese-related areas (China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) and ethnically Chinese related communities (Chinese immigrants in countries other than China regardless of difference of generations). Shih thinks there are three primary purposes for this broader Chinese Diaspora. First, this unified national power forms the resistance against imperialism and semicolonialism. Second, absorbing Western conceptions and categories of the self, this Chinese-Han centrism becomes the practice of self-examination. Third, by marginalizing and suppressing ethnic minority groups (non-Han), Chinese diaspora helps to build a nation that can avoid problems of sovereignty.

However, being a political and ideological device related to Western hegemony, the Chinese Diaspora somehow establishes another power structure that overlooks minority groups and the heterogeneity among different ethnicity groups in the territory of China as a nation. The Chinese Diaspora overemphasized the identity of Han (people), but there are more than fifty different ethnicities (such as Mongolian, Manchu, and so on) in China. Being Chinese does not necessary mean being a Han. More importantly, the term “Chinese” is often misleading and confusing especially in the context of globalization. As Shih notes, “Chinese, in other words, is a national marker passing as an ethnic, cultural, and linguistic marker, a largely Han-centric
designation” (26). Whether the term “Chinese” refers to China as an index of nationality or as an index of geography or as an index of culture remains ambivalent. The Chinese immigrants’ descendants in South Asia do not call themselves “Chinese,” but “Nanyang” or “Hua.” Though their ethnicity is Chinese-related, labeling them as Chinese is problematic.

In addition to the naming problem, Shih lucidly indicates other pitfalls the Chinese Diaspora generates. On the surface level, the Chinese Diaspora calls for a unifying league and has an implication that all of the Chinese people living overseas desire to return to the home country, China, and to serve the nation. The Chinese Diaspora also reinforces the racialized stereotype that Chineseness is forever foreign and unassimilable so Chinese immigrants can never fully become authentic locals. On a profound level, the current study of Chinese Diaspora fails to see itself as a principle of organizing and it fails to communicate with ethnic studies in other areas (such as the U. S. and Southeast Asia). Besides, the Chinese diaspora does not consider cases of Chinese Americans, “Hongkongers,” and “Taiwanese.”

3 This deviance of identification is germane to the sophisticated political situations and colonial histories in East Asia. Hong Kong became the British Empire’s colony after the First Opium War (1839-1942). From 1941 to 1945, Hong Kong was briefly occupied by the Japanese troops. When World War II ended, the British government resumed their ruling in Hong Kong again. But in 1997 the British government returned Hong Kong to the Chinese government. However, Hong Kong people today, more than 15 years after the transfer of sovereignty, still lean more to the British government than the Chinese government. Taiwan’s case is more complicated. Taiwan was Japan’s colony from 1895 to 1952. In 1952, the KMT government took over Taiwan and began its ruling. In 1949, Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT government were defeated by the Communist Party of China in the Chinese Civil War (1946-1950). Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT government retreated to Taiwan in the same year, while the Communist Party of China established the People’s Republic of China (中华人民共和国 “Chong Hwa Ren Ming Gong Ho Guo”: the PRC) in Mainland China. For over forty years, the issues of nationality and identity have been controversial. In Taiwan, the latecomers (外省人 “wai sheng ren”: people from outside) coming to Taiwan with the KMT government identify them as Chinese (but not with the Communist Party), yet the old residents (本省人 “ben sheng ren”: people from the local province) name themselves as “Taiwanese.” Nevertheless, in recent years, younger generations share a political awareness that since Taiwan has an independent political subjectivity and a different government, Taiwanese people should be called “Taiwanese” rather than “Chinese.”
and ethnicity, Chinese Americans are regarded as Americans (of Chinese descent), but the latter two are somewhat nebulous since many Hong Kong People and Taiwanese people refuse to identify themselves with “Chinese,” but rather call themselves “Hong Kong (people)” and “Taiwanese (people).” Shih contends that “The overinvestment in the notion of the homeland in the study of the Chinese diaspora cannot account for either the global dispersion of Sinophone peoples or the increasing heterogenization of ethnicities and cultures within any given nation” (30). The appeal of the Chinese diaspora causes its own problem because of globalization. It only recognizes “the one homeland” and sees this one homeland as an arbitrary center and foundation for Chinese nation-state, ethnicity and culture. Consciously or not, the Chinese diaspora ironically creates another cultural-political hegemony in East and Southeast Asian regions.

In order to deal with the gap in the study of Chinese Diaspora, Shih proposes Sinophone studies. As Shih states, “Sinophone studies takes as its objects of study the Sinitic-language communities and cultures outside China as well as ethnic communities and cultures within China where Mandarin is adopted or imposed” (11). The issues Sinophone studies tackle are determined by the language, not by ethnicity or nationality. Any language in the Sinitic language family can fit into the category of research focus. Sinophone studies also pay attention to the time and space of the phenomenon. Rather than dealing with wider geography and longer time span, it concentrates on a singular case that is time and space specific. Most significantly, Shih introduces two terms that embody the fixation and fluidity of the migration movement: “root” and “route,” as she explains:

[We should think of] The conception of roots as place-based rather ancestral or routes as a mobile conception of home-ness rather than wandering and homelessness…To decouple home-ness and origin is to recognize the imperative of living as a political subject within a particular geopolitical place in a specific time with deep local commitment…The place of residence can change…but to consider that place as home
may this be the highest form of rootedness. Routes, then, can become roots. (38)

Shih brings up two sets of definitions for “root” and “route.” Generally speaking, “root” has been equated with ancestry and home base, and “route” has been linked to eternal moving, undecided journeys and exile. Shih redefines the meanings of root and route with an emphasis on the interrelation between human and places, and between individual subject matters and politics. What is new from Shih’s expanded definitions is that root and route are no longer standing in two polarized halves but in fact overlap with each other. In contrast to the idea that “having roots” is superior to “moving in routes,” Shih’s new definition of “routes” contains positive agency for individuals because now a person can decide whether he or she wants to call the place he resides in “home.” Even in the process of migration or floating, an individual now has moments of home-ness, rather than a state of sustaining rootlessness.

‘Roots’ and ‘Routes’ in the Career of Ang Lee

Hall, Chiang, and Shih’s ideas all touch upon the issue of globalization and diaspora. Hall creates the space for discussion on diaspora and its relations to cultural production and representations in areas influenced by colonialism and imperialism. While Hall’s cases are primarily from the Caribbean and Britain, Chiang extends the scope to the area of East Asia, another area once exploited and colonized by imperial power. Chiang’s argument offers another perspective of viewing diaspora in East Asia. To consider modernization and globalization as a trend “invading” from Western imperial power, Chiang mentions the East Asian version of modernization – that is to say, adopting East Asian cultural traditions, values, and ideology to modernize East Asian countries. In order to meet the purpose, Chiang exposes scholars’ ideas
that Confucianism might be the unifying principles that East Asian countries can look forward to.
ward. However, while this plausible solution of adopting Confucianism as resistance may seem
feasible, Chiang overlooks the innate hegemony within Confucianism. In Western countries,
Confucianism is regarded as an Asian school of philosophy that spread over many East Asian
countries over a few hundred years. Yet, Confucianism in East Asian countries has long been
associated with China’s imperialist invasion, an association beginning as early as the Han
dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). In this context, the belief system is connected to China’s cultural
and political power. Confucianism, together with other Chinese cultural products, travels to East
Asian countries such as Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and so on. A system of Chinese characters has
been incorporated into the language systems of these countries. And it is no surprise to note that
in recent years the South Korea government has abolished the use and teaching of Chinese (Han)
characters in South Korea as part of the de-Han-ization movement. In this sense, while it may be
beneficial to use Confucianism to resist the Western hegemony of modernization, it is also
highly possible its dominance created another hegemonic force that keeps oppressing minorities
and different cultures in these areas.4

Furthermore, Confucianism has been criticized by feminists for its patriarchal ideas. First
founded by Confucius roughly in 5 BCE, Confucianism has developed for over one thousand
years, but over this long period of time, it also developed many disciplines to “instruct” women.
As Catherine S. P. Farris points out in “Women’s Liberation under ‘East Asian Modernity’ in
China and Taiwan: Historical, Cultural, and Comparative Perspectives,” the statue of Chinese

4 For more on the imperialistic connotations of Confucianism, see Peter Chang’s “Confucian
China and Jeffersonian America,” and Kwon Hee Young’s “From Sinocentrism to Civilization
Discourse.”
women is traditionally lower than men’s because of the idea of women’s subordination, which is influenced by Confucianism. Consequently, though they are now rarely seen in urban settings, foot-binding, concubinage, arranged marriages, and female infanticide were very common in China before the 19th century (332). Even though the idea of gender equality now grows more popular in Chinese and Taiwanese society, the legacy of male preference lingers, such as the habit of “patrilocal” – which suggests married women should live with their husbands’ parents, especially the fathers (if the parents are divorced). In this particular example, while Confucianism respects filial piety in family and encourages the son to take care of his parents by living with them, it also sacrifices a woman’s rights of serving her own parents for women are not only losing their maiden names but also their chance at being their parents’ caretakers. In this way, Confucianism is both insufficient and inappropriate when it is used to discuss gender politics because it is more inclined to speak for masculine hegemony. Notably, Chiang’s discussion of Chinese diaspora does not specify “Chinese” and the term’s full political connotations. The term “Chinese” broadly refers to a possessive adjective. “China,” in the word’s usage here, entails the entity of the nation-state, so the action of possession also strongly suggests political terrorizing, which helps to expand its geographical boundaries and cultural subjects. In addition, “Chinese” as a term is also confusing when the term “Han” is mentioned. It is more problematic because the use of Chinese characters in Japan or Korea is called “Han characters (漢字 “han tsu”)” not Chinese characters.

Historically speaking, Han characters were imported to these countries by early Chinese troops and ambassadors in the Han dynasty, yet “Han” and “Chinese” are not interchangeable. In

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5 For couples that have daughters only, it they are rich enough, they can make their sons-in-law abandon their names to inherit the wives’ family name. But this does not occur very often.
terms of phraseology, Japanese and Korean language systems cannot be considered Chinese-
ization because “Han-ization” is the actual term used in this situation. On the cultural level, it is
somewhat Chinese-related since the historical development of language involves earlier Chinese
culture. Though the total numbers of Han people consist of the largest groups in China, Han-
ization is not the same as Chinese-ization. Being a Han does not necessarily equate with being a
Chinese since for generations many Han people have migrated to other countries in Southeast
Asia, the Americas, and Europe. Through the process of localization and identity formation, Han
people overseas may not identify themselves as Chinese Han people. Thus, Chiang’s arguments
need more clarifications for the terminologies to illuminate the nuanced difference between
Chinese as a nationality label, cultural index, or ethnicity. In light of this, the term “Chinese
diaspora” used in Chiang’s book is too generalized. Chinese as a term has lost its original
meaning, be it political or ethnic, in the context of globalization. Reflecting on recent discussions
of Chinese diaspora and Asian American films, it seems that not all of the subjects in the
discussion are of Mainland China – nor of a Chinese nationality, nor of a subjectively identifying
Chinese culture as a representative culture. Ang Lee is perhaps the most popular of Asian
American filmmakers, and his early films of then contemporary “Chinese” immigrants’
experiences in New York and Taipei, cannot be fully explained by “Chinese diaspora.” The
settings of the films are far away from Mainland China, and the issues involved in the films are
much more than merely culturally Chinese. To enable a true culturally engaging discussion of
Lee’s films, “Chinese diaspora” falls short of offering a useful framework.

In Shih’s discussion of the Sinophone studies, she separates “Chinese diaspora” into
“Chinese” and “diaspora” and explains both terms in detail. As aforementioned, Shih points out
the ambiguous connotations of the term “Chinese” and she calls attention to the power relations within diaspora studies. What is significant is that although globalization brings the national boundaries into question and migration makes time and place unstable, Shih still thinks that place and time specificity is crucial in the discussion of migrant and immigrant subjects, cultures, and experiences. Since globalization makes clear the process of cultural hybridity, resulting from the increase of interactions between different cultures, the trajectory of moving and hybridizing becomes no less important than specifically identifying time and place. Shih’s ideas of “root” and “route” not only accentuate the geographical details but also highlight the historical development of subjects’ movement. Both “root” and “route” thus can also be seen as metaphors for life. Each individual’s life resembles a journey: a person starts with a root and makes various routes in his lifetime. In other words, both “root” and “route” are parts of a person’s life experience. While diaspora has an end when the subject people are fully localized or when the second or third generation terminates the status, the process of “root-” and “route-” making never ends. This non-stop development echoes Hall’s idea of the second cultural identity that is perpetual becoming.

The two terms relate well to Lee’s cinema and life. In Lee’s case, he has always been trying new genres, such as the earlier realistic film *Pushing Hands*, the homosexual film *The Wedding Banquet*, the martial arts epic film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the superhero film *The Incredible Hulk*, the spy thriller film *Lust, Caution*, and the most recent 3D film *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2016); for life, Lee travels to many different countries and through the journeys he makes, he constantly refines his national identity and cultural identity. In addition, to add a new dimension to Shih’s definitions of “root” and “route,” I argue that both of
the terms can be gendered. The image of root is masculine, patriarchal, unmovable, and bound by land. In contrast, the image of route is feminine, maternal, and mobile. From a traditional perspective, land represents the connection between individuals and their ancestry. The idea of land is often linked to the idea of family home, sometimes even to the idea of group community and the idea of nation-state. Claiming a land seems to be a paternal mission. Before modernization and industrialization, farming was the primary means of production. Farming relies heavily on land and in need of a land’s crops for harvest. Land, in this way, brings individuals nutrients and money for survival. Without a doubt, fathers are the main work source in farming. Besides, having one’s own land also means having a space to pass down safely a family’s surname, that is, the fathers’ names. Hence, the role “land” plays in the idea of “root” is very crucial and it is from the beginning carrying the masculine paternal emphasis. Though, in modern societies, farming is no longer the primary vocation, the idea of the land and father has become an innate ideology.

In contrast to the unmovable image of the land and the father, the image of mother looks relatively erratic. Traditionally, married women need to live in their husband’s family house, taking care of the elders and the children when their husbands are farming outside. To pass on the family name, married women change their names to their husbands’ names. While the paternal attempts to consolidate its relations to land, the maternal undergoes a series of transformations and changes, sometimes resulting in dislocation and displacement. The gender politics in “root” and “route” in fact have their historical significance as well as their geographical specificity. Nevertheless, with the impact of globalization and modernization, and with the dimming reliance on ancestral land, the maternal gradually outgrows the paternal
influence. Transformation and dislocation, from the migration viewpoints, become more positive and promising. The oppositions between root and route do not necessary mean an intention to create another hegemonic dichotomy, which rigidly designates certain stereotypical gender roles and features. On the contrary, the features of masculine and feminine in root and route are not isolated from each other, but overlapping and changeable. A person can simultaneously have a root and a route; likewise, a person can have masculine features and feminine features at the same time.

Tellingly, Lee also uses the metaphor of root to portray his life experience. When talking about his career trajectory, he states, “All through my work, I always tend to think that making films was a way of getting away from my past, but you always have to come back to your roots [my emphasis]. You try to get as far as you can, but somehow you always come back. This is the impact of my father” (329). Lee’s self-revelation best illustrates Shih’s idea of root in three aspects: time, place, and patriarchy. Lee links the idea of his father with a natural image of root (根 “gen”). Interestingly, similar to a plant growing from a root, human beings are given lives by their parents, who are another kind of root. Also, a root can be regarded as the hometown (故鄉 “Gu Shiung”: native land) where Lee feels an obligation to return. The geographical reference of hometown can be a real location, such as Taipei (the capital city of Taiwan), where he began his film education and career, but it can also be Tainan (the southern city of Taiwan), where Lee spent most of his boyhood and where his mother lives now. Therefore, Lee’s metaphor of root, to be further explained, is not monotone and unilateral. In addition, Lee, in the interview, highlights the inclination of “going back to his roots,” but leaves out his journeys, or “route.” This omission does not mean Lee does not have what Shih calls a “route.” Instead, Lee was born in Taiwan,
received his education in America, and now he makes films in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Lee’s career is indeed a multi-direction route, and this route is equally important as his “root.” Thanks to his impulse to make films to “get away” from the root, he now directs brilliant films. The contradiction between leaving and returning helps Lee’s artistic creation and cultural identification. That is to say, bearing a root in mind, Lee continues to expand his route based upon the foundation of the root. He has both root and route active within himself as a filmmaker, and as a person dealing with globalization.

**Ang Lee’s Taiwanese Identity and Transnational Cinema**

In the above scholarly discussion, the impact of Lee’s Taiwanese experience on his cinema and national identity is not fully explained. Again, I contend that Lee gradually develops a clear Taiwanese national identity and his cinema is deeply influenced by Taiwanese culture and cinema. One of the possible reasons for the suppression of Lee’s Taiwanese background in discussions might be that Taiwan has long been viewed as part of China (PRC) since the majority of inhabitants are of Han ethnicity and Han decedents – thus highlighting their prevalent Chinese culture and Confucian thoughts, the official language (Mandarin Chinese) and the KMT’s “authentic Chinese” policy throughout Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo’s ruling (roughly from the 1940s to the 1980s). Most importantly, the PRC’s “one China” policy has been widely accepted and recognized by many countries. However, in Taiwan, the island’s complicated political status and colonial history have caused discordant ideas about identity since the 1940s when Chiang’s KMT government received Taiwan from the Japanese
government. The first generation of Mainlanders who followed Chiang to Taiwan still see themselves as Chinese, but the nativists and many third-generation Mainlanders are much in doubt of this identity. Melissa J. Brown, in her book *Is Taiwan Chinese?*, argues that identity is not based on culture or ancestry but on social experiences, and there is misunderstanding about identity in that “ethnic and national identities are based on common ancestry and/or common culture and therefore that identity is grounded in antiquity” (2). To further Brown’s remarks, even though people share a common culture or ancestry, namely the ethnographical feature of “antiquity” (such as history and heritage and so on), people who have different social experiences might have different identities regardless of nationality or ethnicity. Brown’s claim of identity efficiently helps to clarify the seemingly confusing relations between Taiwanese identity⁶ and Chinese identity.⁷ Indeed, though Taiwanese people may share ancestry and culture

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⁶ For Brown, Taiwanese identity is not stable and has been changing through time. She finds that “between 1945 and 1991, Taiwan’s government portrayed Taiwan as ethnically Han and nationally Chinese, even claiming that it was the lawful government of mainland China. Since 1987, for the obvious political purpose of justifying their distance from the PRC, people in Taiwan have increasingly claimed Taiwanese identity to be an amalgam of Han culture and ancestry, Aborigine culture and ancestry, and Japanese culture, in the making for almost 400 years, and separate from China for the entire twentieth century.” (2) Brown’s findings correspond with major changes in the relationship between China and Taiwan. After Chiang’s KMT government retreated in Taiwan, Chiang’s KMT government and Mao’s Communist government competed for the “real, authentic China.” During this period, being a Chinese was the only legitimate identity in Taiwan. In 1987, Chiang’s son, the president of Taiwan at the time, abolished the Martial Law and since then Taiwanese identity became a site for contestation.

⁷ Brown also mentions the foundational “Han civilization” narrative of the Chinese identity. Brown writes, “Han [ethnic group] viewed themselves as a single group embodying Confucian civilization – the Middle Kingdom that stood between Heaven and the barbarian non-Han….the great linguistic, cultural, social, and economic variation among the Han was irrelevant to their classification as part of a single Han civilization. In the PRC, classifying all Han as a single ethnic group both maintains the links of the present-day nation-state to past Han civilization and justifies Han political and demographical dominance as natural and predestined.” (7) The narrative binds ethnic Han culture, nation-state, national identity, and Confucianism together and it creates an impregnable political ideology of “Chineseness.”
with Chinese nationals, because their social experiences are quite different, it is not proper to equate Chinese identity to Taiwanese identity. In recent decades, more and more people are aware of the identity issue and it has elicited hot debates of “China-Centrism” and “Taiwan-Centrism/nativism” in Taiwan.\(^8\)

Under these circumstances, Ang Lee is also conscious of such differentiation between Chinese identity and Taiwanese identity. In an interview published by *The Liberty Times* in 2009, Ang Lee was asked about how Taiwan influenced his filmmaking and whether he would work on Taiwanese subject matters in the future. Lee replied:

> I grew up eating Taiwanese rice, and I have many classmates, teachers and friends in Taiwan. But those Taiwanese experiences are *repressed*. The Mainland history and cultural nostalgia that my parents brought to Taiwan are theoretically the most beautiful longing. However, you find them fading and revolutionized. Besides, the very beginning of them is not even real. It’s a sad feeling; it creates a sense of floating, just like duckweed. It’s the most beautiful, the most secure, but the most unreal thing as well...Taiwan gives me mixed feelings of real and unreal and I can’t describe them exactly.\(^9\) (Lang, par. 30, my emphasis)

Lee’s response bears witness to the transforming political atmosphere in Taiwan and the incompatible split between his Chinese identity and Taiwanese identity. His Taiwanese experience and identity are there but are repressed under the KMT’s “Chinese identity” policy in

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\(^8\) Fu-Chang Wang investigates a version of middle school’s history textbooks and finds that the debate over China-centrism and Taiwan-centrism has also occurred in the updated textbooks. Before the lifting of martial law, Taiwan’s textbooks were mainly about China’s history, classic literature and culture, and geography. There was very little or even nothing about Taiwan. In recent decades, textbooks have begun to add large amount of Taiwan’s history (including Japanese rule, Dutch occupation, and riots against the KMT ruling), geography, and also Taiwanese literature written by Taiwanese nativist writers. See Fu-Chang Wang’s “Why Bother about School Textbooks?: An Analysis of the Origin of the Dispute over Renshi Taiwan Textbook in 1997.” *Culture, Ethnic, and Political nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan: Bentuhua*. Ed, John Makehan and A-chin Hsiau.

Taiwan at the time. Though he has a part of Chinese identity that is passed down from his parents, the identity itself is more like a romantic, unreal yearning than an actual social experience. He also notices that his Chinese identity is “fading” and “revolutionized” since now he begins to question the reality behind his longing for a Chinese identity. This interview not only questions the term “Chinese identity” and its usefulness in a film about Taiwanese and Taiwanese Americans like *The Wedding Banquet* but also validates Brown’s claim that social experience allows one to build his or her identity.

More importantly, in a recent (2016) public discussion forum in Taipei, Lee makes an affirmative announcement of his Taiwanese identity:

*I am Taiwanese….After filming *Life of Pi* (2012), I felt that actually those films [that he made] were *Taiwan cinema*, regardless where I made them. I think how a person is brought up determines his character and worldview. When a person turns twenty, almost everything has been established. I grew up in Taiwan and lived here until I was twenty-three. So, no matter what I do and absorb overseas, in essence I am very Taiwanese. I hope people in the world accept who I am, and don’t put me into any specific frame. [My emphasis] (“Forum Clips for Dummies”)*

If in the past, Lee was searching for a definite national and cultural identity and struggling between being Chinese and Taiwanese, this recent interview shows that he finally settles for a Taiwanese one. Significantly, Lee also regards his films as Taiwan cinema since his films reveal a Taiwan-based character and worldview. His identity-building process corresponds to Hall’s theory of the forming of cultural identity and Brown’s idea that identity is not necessarily based on ancestry or antiquity. Furthermore, in claiming himself as Taiwanese rather than Chinese, Lee echoes what Shih asserts in her Sinophone Studies about the umbrella term “Chinese” and the need to carefully dissect what is inappropriately covered by the term. Hence, Lee’s remarks make an urgent call for a more nuanced “Taiwanese” study of Ang Lee and the correlation

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10 The interview is in Mandarin Chinese. The translation here is my own.
between his films and Taiwan cinema. Answering the call, this dissertation fills the gap left by the previous scholarly discussion by treating Lee not as a transnational Chinese-American director but as a Taiwanese filmmaker who has a global and transnational career.

In the four chapters of this dissertation, Lee’s films—both American-made and Taiwanese-made—are situated in a Taiwanese context and examined together with important pieces of Lee’s own words. It is worth mentioning that many interviews this dissertation cites took place in Taiwan and were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. In these valuable resources, Lee sincerely shares his work experience in America, how the feeling of being a “cultural outsider” influences his cinema, and how his cultural and national identity has changed over time—issues that are not found in sources in English or published outside Taiwan. Therefore, in discussing women’s status, LGBTQ rights, Americanization and American popular culture, and classic Chinese culture, this dissertation incorporates both “interior texts” (films) and “exterior texts” (interviews) and analyzes them with consideration of Taiwan’s politics, history, society, and the industry of Taiwan’s cinema. I contend that Lee is a Taiwanese filmmaker who claims a distinctive place in that country’s cinema since his films reveal a unique Taiwanese national and cultural identity. His films parallel peer Taiwanese filmmakers’ films in terms of genres, the quest for historical truth and democracy, and a keen interest in Taiwan’s social issues.

This dissertation includes four chapters, and each chapter compares two of Lee’s films that share the similar subject matter. Chapter 1, “We Don’t Think About Them”: Searching for Maternity/Modernity in *Pushing Hands* (1992) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), examines two of Lee’s Taiwanese-made family dramas. Rather than following the trend of previous scholarship to stress the importance of the figure of the father, this chapter shifts the focus to the
roles and representations of the new and old mothers – two female archetypes in Lee’s films – and how Lee relates the new mother/maternity to modernity and the old mother to tradition. In addition, both the of the films’ respective families have problems concerning parent-child communication and cohabitation now that the children are grown. Hence, with the two films, Lee represents the transformation, transition, and meaning of the “family” in different social contexts as well as various national boundaries: *Eat Drink Man Woman* records the confrontations of the generation gap, the impact of Westernization, and modern ideas (as opposed to traditional Chinese family views) of marriage, while *Pushing Hands* portrays how Old Chu, an old immigrant in New York City, accommodates American family view and individualism. Both fathers, in the end, abandon traditions of extended family and become “modernized” by having another new nuclear family or living alone.

Chapter 2, “Sexuality, Masculinity, and Ethnicity: *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005),” looks at how Lee deals with the issue of homosexuality within the realm of family. In Lee’s other Taiwanese-made film *The Wedding Banquet*, he addresses the issue in a scenario complicated by heterosexual marriage, cross-cultural romance, and the different concept of “family” between Taiwanese-Chinese culture and American culture. In Lee’s American-made film, *Brokeback Mountain*, he adapts Annie Proulx’s short story and accentuates the characters’ familial relations. Lee’s depictions of male characters in both films question the traditional familial roles of sexuality and gender. But at the same time, his male figures also touch upon the issues of masculinity, ethnicity, and nationalism, especially Wei-Tung and Mrs. Gao in *The Wedding Banquet*, who show that the display of masculinity as an immigrant male is not only about gender performance but also gets entangled with ethnicity and
nationalism. In *Brokeback Mountain*, by presenting Jack and Ennis as a couple, Lee probes into the issue of masculinity and homosexuality and he casts doubt on the archetype of American cowboys and the Western frontier myth. Through pairing *The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain*, this chapter facilitates a cross-cultural reading of Lee’s themes of sexuality in direct relationship to familial bonds. Both films reveal Lee’s Taiwanese background and his family view which is based on traditional Chinese filial piety. More importantly, with these two films, *The Wedding Banquet* in particular, Lee shows his understanding of and sympathy for Taiwan’s LGBTQ movement and communities, which began to fight for equal rights in the 1990s.

Chapter 3, “Portraits of American Family: *Taking Woodstock* (2009) and *The Ice Storm* (1997),” considers Lee’s presentations of American families in the turbulent 60s and 70s when the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, and Watergate changed the prevalent concept of family (especially middle-class family) established in the 1950s. Lee’s portraits of the American family and the Taiwanese/Chinese families are not entirely dissimilar. The familial themes — the awkward parent-children communication, teenager mentality, fulfillment of filial piety, the reaffirmation of family — all closely connect the seemingly different Asian families to American families. In *Taking Woodstock*, Lee shows the audience an innocent, idealized world of freedom and happiness, but in *The Ice Storm*, he candidly presents two dysfunctional families. In some sense, *Taking Woodstock* is the optimistic side of America that Lee admires, while *The Ice Storm* becomes the dark, disillusioned American society he criticizes. Being a cultural outsider, Lee’s two different attitudes reveal a collective Taiwanese mindset; on the one hand, Taiwanese people see America as a protector because America was once Taiwan’s ally during the Cold War period; on the other hand, there are still many who question America’s dominating influence in East
Asia and criticize the phenomenon of Americanization in Taiwan. Interestingly, Lee’s films adopt both viewpoints, and in doing so, the two films prove Lee’s Taiwanese cultural identity and experience.

Chapter Four, “Transnational Re-Imagination of “Home”: Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000) and Lust, Caution (2007),” considers the impact of Taiwan cinema on Lee’s two Chinese-themed films. Lee has been working with Hollywood mainstream film production companies since the late 1990s. Interestingly, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and Lust, Caution, two of his most famous films about Chinese culture and history, both appeared after he entered the Hollywood filmmaking world. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is adapted from Dulu Wang’s Kung-Fu fiction, in which Lee deals with traditional Chinese moral and family values. In Lust, Caution, another film adaptation from Eileen Chang’s original novel, Lee represents the two warring KMT governments during the Sino-Japanese war. Though the two films have often been discussed into the context of Chinese national cinema, which sees Lee as a diasporic Chinese (national) filmmaker, they are more so influenced by Taiwan cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, the decades when Lee was a young cinephile in southern Taiwan. The wuxia genre that Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon adopts and the spy thriller genre of Lust, Caution are both homages to the golden age of Taiwan cinema. Considering the Mainlander background of Lee’s family, the memory of China has always been a crucial element in Lee’s cultural identity. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and Lust, Caution thus serve to relive Lee’s nostalgia for the old China (before the Chinese Civil War). Though, in the two films, Lee shows his sympathy for women and gives them copious power to counterbalance male hegemony as well as oppressions. In Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, the leading female character has an excellent
command of martial arts skills with which she can protect herself from abuse and roam in jianhu (a parallel society of outlaws), while in *Lust, Caution*, the female lead disobeys her male superior’s orders in order to save her lover. The reason behind Lee’s fortification of his female characters is that he identifies himself with the losing side. Politically, Taiwan is marginal and is often denied as a country in the world, and in some sense, the island’s underprivileged status renders its people insecure. By granting his female characters more power, Lee is, to a certain degree, attempting to establish a sense of security, confidence, and autonomy.

This dissertation concludes with a discussion of Lee’s other motion pictures, such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Ride with the Devil* (1999), *Hulk* (2003), *Life of Pi* (2012), and *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2016). Though they have far different settings and subject matters, they again share a theme of family. In addition, some of Lee’s cultural concerns — the cultural outsider and a sympathy for the losing side — are also present in them. Furthermore, the conclusion recapitulates the important themes Lee constantly deals with throughout his film career: parent-child relations and the dilemma between individual freedom and familial obligations. In his production of family dramas over the years, Lee’s focus shifts from the parents (fathers), children, and to the individual. Traditional filial piety, in each film, is challenged and reexamined to accommodate modern or westernized societies. Moreover, Lee’s national identity is also shifting as he makes more films. In recent years, he grows more lucid in differentiating “Chinese” and “Taiwanese.” Tellingly, Lee’s gradual development of Taiwanese identity corresponds to Taiwan’s democracy movement since the 2000: Lee is among the people who now question the meaning of “being/speaking Chinese” and are starting to embrace a unique Taiwanese identity.
Ang Lee directed and wrote the screenplays for his Taiwanese-made films, *Pushing Hands* (1992) and *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994). In *Pushing Hands*, an old immigrant father from China wishes to join his son’s family in New York City only to find he disrupts his son’s peaceful life. *Eat Drink Man Woman* depicts the story of a Taiwanese father and his three daughters in Taipei, Taiwan. Lee’s portrayals of fathers in these early films reflect the filmmaker’s relation with his own father, Shen Lee; as Lee says “I think the influence of the father is something that weighs heavy on most male Chinese filmmakers…I didn’t know what I wanted from life, but I knew I had to please my father. He didn’t speak much and was a very serious man; very Confucian” (Berry 329). Lee’s words help to explain why his early films often carry an air of semi-autobiography: these films are more or less inspired by Lee’s relationship with his father, a Chinese intellectual who emigrated from Mainland China to Taiwan in the 1940s.

Yet, Lee’s father figures are not perpetually powerful. Instead, the central, aging father figure gradually loses his patriarchal power while younger generations take over. Lee suggests in his interview, “he [the father figure] is just a paper tiger. He has a poker face but doesn’t know
what to do. I think I must have had a plan to weaken my father movie by movie” (Berry 336). Lee uses the term “paper tiger” to accentuate the central father figure’s dwindling domination in family domains. By weakening the fathers in the films, Lee not only undermines the seemingly impregnable power of Chinese patriarchy but also anticipates possible counterforces that will replace or balance the patriarchal influences of traditional Chinese culture. To further the complexity of the scenario, Lee’s films are all set in changing transnational and modern societies. Scholars notice the recurring themes of confrontations between different generations, clashes of traditional Chinese/Confucian family views and the Western family values. Because father figures are so central in Lee’s Taiwanese-made films, critics have called *Pushing Hand* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*, along with *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), the “Father Knows Best Trilogy” (Wei, 2005; Huang, 1999; Han, 2011; Dariotis and Fung, 1997). However, the colloquialism is slightly misleading. The central father figures as portrayed by Sihung Lung do not always “know best.” As Ti Wei sharply argues, “the father in the films represent tradition, while younger generation represents the modern…the withering of tradition is unavoidable” (104-105). As if echoing Lee’s remarks about the dwindling father, Wei believes that the traditional Chinese patriarchy is diminishing in modern times. In this way, the colloquialism “Father Knows Best” becomes inappropriate since Lee’s early films are about fathers who “do not know best.”

On the other hand, while scholars place much emphasis on Lung’s father characters, other minor father characters are often overlooked. *Pushing Hands*’ Alex (Bo Z. Wang) and *Eat Drink Man Woman*’s Guo-Lun (Chao-Jung Chen) are fathers of the younger generation in the films but relevant discussion about the difference between two generations is scant in the film
criticism. How does the patriarchy change through the generations? What does it mean to be a father in different times, places, or even countries? In terms of marriage, do gender issues and the changing role of women change a father’s role and status? Lee’s films open up space for further discussion about fatherhood and males in a new era.

Nevertheless, the major oversight here is the lack of discussion of the mother. How do we interpret the mother figures that are as ubiquitous as the father figures in Lee’s films? Are not mothers an important component in Lee’s family portraits? Interestingly, when asked about motherhood in his films, Lee replies,

My mother was also a model of sorts for the mother figure in those films, but to a lesser degree. I think the father figure represents the Chinese patriarchy, the social and psychological structure of society. I am the first son, so I took in a lot of those ideas that women are not important. We don’t think about them. My mother was very nice, but I was raised under that patriarchal shadow, which exerted a lot of influence. (Berry 329)

Lee adheres to a more traditional gender view which prefers patriarchy to matriarchy, that “women are not important” so “we don’t think about them.” Lee’s remarks about women in families in some way reflect the traditional Chinese Confucian values of men’s superiority.

But does Lee really not think about women and mothers? Lee’s early films actually have many mother characters, such as Pushing Hands’ Mrs. Chen and Martha, and Eat Drink Man Woman’s Mrs. Liang, Jing-Rong Liang, Mrs. Chu, Chia-Ning Chu and others. In general, Lee’s mother figures in the films can be divided into two categories: the new mother and old mother. The old mothers are submissive and subordinate to patriarchal society and their husbands. The new mothers are women who enjoy career success, have marriages of their own free will, and live under the influence of modernization and Westernization. The tensions between the old and new mothers parallel the tensions between traditional Chinese-Taiwanese family values and modern Westernized family views. Nevertheless, the division between the old and the new
mothers is not arbitrary because Lee’s female characters sometimes transcend and overlap these classifications. If Lee’s films are about Chinese and Taiwanese family in transitional times, maternity should also be involved in the discussions because the mother figures in Lee’s films do personify notable transitions in both the social and familial sphere.

**Fatherhood, Patriarchy, and Chinese-Taiwanese Family**

Ang Lee’s early films draw relatively less scholarly attention than his later Hollywood films. There might be several reasons behind the scholarly oversight but perhaps the primary reason is that Lee deals with particular Taiwanese-Chinese domestic cultures in his early films, which forge a barrier for American and European audiences. Yet Lee’s focus on familial relations, from this early period on, has gradually become a distinctive feature throughout his oeuvre: *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) portrays the two cowboy characters’ families; *Taking Woodstock* (2009) delineates the relation between the leading character and his parents; *The Ice Storm* (1997) is about two well-to-do families in Connecticut in the 1970s; *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) also discusses the relation between the individual and the family.

In scholarship on Lee’s Taiwanese-era cinema, scholars notice Lee’s theme of family and focus on family issues in particular in the following ways: (1) the conflicts between traditional Chinese family values and Western individualism; (2) the prevalence of Chinese patriarchy; (3) challenges to the traditional Confucian filial piety in modern society; and (4) immigrant subjectivities and diaspora experiences. In Lee’s three early films, *Pushing Hands* sheds light on the displacement of an aging Chinese father in America; *The Wedding Banquet* centers on a
Taiwanese father’s dilemma over whether to accept his only son as a homosexual; *Eat Drink Man Woman* concentrates on a Taiwanese father who loses patriarchal power in his household. For the most part, the father figures are so explicitly marked in the films that they exist as the critics’ primary focus.

Shaorong Huang, in “Filial Piety is the Root of All Virtues: Cross-Cultural Conflicts and Intercultural Acceptance in Ang Lee’s Films,” examines Confucian ideas of filial piety and argues that it denotes obligation, respect, and obedience, the most crucial foundation of Chinese family values. Huang claims that “Lee’s film[s] demonstrate that cross-cultural conflicts are caused mainly by different cultural values held by different cultural communities,” and the possible solution lies in “[the] intercultural acceptance,” which is “based on mutual acknowledgement and appreciation of each other’s cultural values” (53). Qijun Han also notices the importance of filial piety in Ang Lee’s films. In “Across Cultures and National Borders: Diasporic Chinese Family in *Pushing Hands*,” Han states that “in an intercultural context, family is no longer subject to its traditional definition [;] rather, families become the subject of their making. The meaning of family is thus attached by interpersonal relations…. *Pushing Hands* has very effectively demonstrated how interpersonal relations/conflicts within the family can redefine family” (112). Huang and Han both approach Lee’s early films with a focus upon traditional Chinese-Confucian family values. They contend that filial piety constructs the family structure, but, at the same time, filial piety causes conflicts when the scenario is “moved” to an intercultural context.

In total, the place and role of “the Chinese father” are highly relevant to the idea of domestic filial piety. In Lee’s early films, the traditional Confucian family values and filial piety
are represented by the old father: *Pushing Hands*’ Chu, *The Wedding Banquet*’s Gao, and *Eat Drink Man Woman*’s Chu (who is not the same Chu featured in *Pushing Hands*). All of the central father figures are portrayed by Sihung Lung, who later works with Lee again in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Not surprisingly, critics are particularly aware of Lung’s recurring roles of “the father” and their development in the films. In “Generational/Cultural Contradiction and Global Incorporation: Ang Lee’s *Eat Drink Man Woman*,” Ti Wei points out that the figure of the Chinese father is shared by Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands, The Wedding Banquet,* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*. He argues that the fathers represent traditions while the younger generations represent the modern. Moreover, Wei finds that Lee begins with father-son relationships in *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet,* but moves to father-daughter relationships in *Eat Drink Man Woman*. This shifting focus in the films manifests a “gradually weakening father figure across the three films” (110). For Wei, Lee’s arrangement is a reversal because “the children disappointed their father in the first two films, but in *Eat Drink Man Woman* he [the father] disappoints them” (110).

In addition, Wei-Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung’s “Breaking the Soy Sauce Jar: Diaspora and Displacement in the Films of Ang Lee,” Shu-Mei Shih’s *Visuality and Identity,* and Whitney Crothers Dilley’s “Confucian Values and Cultural Displacement in *Pushing Hands*” are among the key critical pieces that provide insightful perspectives to explain the roles of the father and Chinese patriarchy. However, the outcome of such over-emphasis on the father, in fact, is merely a narrow analysis of the old father figures. While the characters played by Sihung Lung are carefully scrutinized, the other male figures are seldom discussed. For example, in *Eat Drink Man Woman,* Chu’s best friend, Wen (Jui Wang), has much the same background as Chu, and he
also behaves like a father to Chu’s daughters. In this sense, Wen undoubtedly can be seen as another representation of patriarchy. Besides, Chia-Ning’s husband, Guo-Lun, as well as Chia-Chien’s colleague, Li Kai (Winston Chao), are both fathers of the younger generations. The transitions of patriarchy through generations are an interesting but undervalued topic in film criticism on Ang Lee’s cinema. In general, rather than saying that criticism about Lee’s films is all about the patriarchy, it is better to say that a large amount of criticism focuses on “the one father.” Scholars such as Cynthia W. Liu (1995), Lan Dong (2006), Sheng-Mei Ma (1996), Ronda Lee Roberts (2013), and January Lim (2006) all discuss a limited view of the father figure Lung plays throughout the films in their scholarship as well.

Issues of gender and sexuality are also key in discussing the early years of Lee’s film career. However, most of the scholarly discussion focuses on this patriarchal singularity and so overlooks the possible feminist ideas Lee instills in his female figures. Importantly, Lee’s female figures, such as seen later with Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon’s Jiao-Long and Lust, Caution’s Wang Chia-Chih, are crucial in the way that they echo Lee’s Taiwanese identity because Taiwan and its people are often on the losing side and underprivileged. Lee’s sympathy toward women, the oppressed, and the weak has gradually become a recurring concern, if not a major theme, in his films after he made Ride with the Devil (1999), a film about the American Civil War, with a female protagonist. In the film the director focuses on the Southern States since he can relate himself to the losing side. In reference to family, the scholarly discussion also tends to avoid the influence of Lee’s transnational-hybrid experiences reflected in his representations of the complexities of culture and identity. In addition, with Lee’s successes

11 See Lee’s interview “My Era and I” cited in the chapter 4.

Despite this, the outcome of such over-emphasis on the father in scholarship on Lee’s early work exists as merely a narrow analysis of the old father figures that overshadow female characters. While Lung’s father characters are often included in the criticism, the role of mothers rarely is discussed. Yet, it is far from reasonable to assume that patriarchy is the only element in Lee’s early family dramas. Since Lee’s family portraits often include mothers in some form, whether present (in the case of Martha in *Pushing Hands*, and Chia-Ning and Mrs. Liang in *Eat Drink Man Woman*) or absent (seen with Mrs. Chu in *Pushing Hands*, and Mrs. Chu and Guo-Lun’s grandmother in *Eat Drink Man Woman*), there are places for mothers. Thus, it is important to establish a discussion that includes the images of mothers in Lee’s family dramas since it will balance the overemphasis on patriarchy and will illuminate the concept of the family in terms of matriarchy.
Mother, Modernity and Traditional Chinese Family Values in *Pushing Hands*

*Pushing Hands* follows a family that faces a cultural, gender, and generational crisis. Chu (Sihung Lung) moves from Mainland China to New York City to live with his son Alex (Bo Z. Wang), daughter-in-law Martha (Deb Snyder), and grandson Jeremy (Hann Lee). Chu has a dark past: during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)\(^\text{12}\), Chu’s family was attacked by the Red Guards.\(^\text{13}\) Though Chu was a Tai-Chi (a kind of Chinese Kung-Fu) master, he could only protect one person in the riot. The father chose to protect Alex, but, as a result, his wife died. After the mother’s death, the father worked harder to take care of Alex and support him through college. After receiving an education in America, Alex marries Martha, an Anglo-American woman, and lives in New York. Chu and Martha do not understand each other and they seldom communicate effectively due to a language barrier. The misunderstanding between Martha and Chu gradually reaches a breaking point. Several intense arguments lead to Martha’s hospitalization for a stomach ulcer. One day, Chu takes a walk around the neighborhood but gets lost. When Alex learns about it, he blames Martha. At midnight, Chu is escorted home by the police. Weeks later, Alex and Martha plan a romantic match for Chu with Mrs. Chen (Lai Wang), but the match makes Chu and Chen uncomfortable. Chu eventually leaves Alex’s home and works for his own living in Chinatown. He fails to meet his restaurant owner boss’s expectations, and is fired. Refusing to accept the humiliation, Chu uses Tai-Chi to defend himself, but later he is arrested by the police. In the police station, Alex and Chu finally realize

\(^{12}\) For more information about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, see *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [www.britannica.com/event/Cultural-Revolution](http://www.britannica.com/event/Cultural-Revolution).

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
that it might be better for them to live separately. The film ends with Chu and Mrs. Chen both leaving their children’s homes to live alone in Chinatown.

In the film, both Chu and Alex struggle to make the father-son relationship function normally. For Alex and Chu, the traditional Chinese family values entail filial piety, respect, and subordination to the father. However, Alex is Westernized and Americanized, and the cultural conflict between the father and the son makes it very difficult for Alex to find a balance between his role as a filial son, loving father, and empathetic husband. Furthermore, Alex’s marriage has cultural conflicts too; he grows up with Chinese filial piety, but Martha believes in American individualism. As a consequence, the couple have tremendously different family values. For instance, Alex follows the traditional Chinese idea of “patrilocal,” a habit of living with husbands’ fathers, but Martha finds it very disturbing. In one scene, Martha complains to Alex:

ALEX. When can I start reading your new book?
MARTHA. There is no new book, can’t you tell? Shit, Alex, are you as out of it as your father.
ALEX. You don’t understand my father.
MARTHA. I have spent every single day in the same room with that man since he showed up here a month ago. Alex, it’s impossible. He’s taken over my work room. I just don’t have the space to think.
ALEX. Not enough space? In China, this house is big enough for four families.
MARTHA. Sure, but they’d speak the same language so they could talk to each other. Alex he hasn’t learned one word of English.
ALEX. And what about you? What have you done but make fun of him, treating him with disrespect.
MARTHA. Alex, I tried.
ALEX. I’m his only son. What do you want me to do?

Martha and Alex’s dialogue shows the clash between East and West values: Alex’s traditional Confucian family values are in conflict with Martha’s modern American family values. Alex’s thoughts of filial piety and the family’s past (how his parents sacrificed for him) remind him that he needs to live with his father and financially support Chu as gratitude. Later in the scene, Alex restates his belief of filial piety to Martha:
ALEX. I grew up believing you should care for your parents the way they cared for you. My father is a part of me. Why can’t you accept that?

As Chu’s only son, Alex thinks he has no choice but to live with Chu to fulfill his filial duty. Yet, in making such decision, Alex repeats what Chu did in the past: sacrificing the mother. While Chu sacrificed Alex’s mother’s life, Alex sacrifices Martha’s individual space in her own home. Alex, out of an intention to compensate his father’s loss (of wife and former life in China), makes Martha suffer from the traditional family values of which Martha does not approve or fully understand.

In Martha’s perspective, Chu should live in his own house, not his son’s home. The major difference between how Alex and Martha see Chu is that Alex sees Chu as another master/owner of the family, but Martha sees Chu merely as a guest. Hence, Chu’s long stay at the house makes Chu an unwelcome intruder who occupies her family, interrupts her work, and intervenes in her relations with Alex. In the opening scene, Chu situates himself in the living room to watch video programs and quietly practices Kung-Fu, while Martha sits, looking blankly at the computer monitor. Martha’s work space (a small adjacent office) is not spacious, but it is not confined either. It is directly connected to the living room; therefore Chu’s every move and sound are noticed by Martha. With this situation, she is forced to participate in Chu’s actions, and shares her space with him since he can easily see her. Martha’s individuality is terminated and changed into group, or collective, actions. Chu’s physical appearance in Alex’s house alarms Martha in the way that her American belief of individualism is under threat from an East Asian culture, which embodies itself in the father figure of Chu.

However, what underlies the dialogue of the scene is Martha’s eagerness to claim gender equality. Whether Alex has his own work space is uncertain since the film does not show the
exact location where Alex works, but Martha’s work space, now half taken up by Chu, is shrinking. The dwindling space also implicates her loss of power and freedom, as if Martha’s matriarchal power is oppressed by Chu’s patriarchal seniority. Unintentionally echoing Virginia Woolf’s famous feminist thought that a modern woman should have “a room of her own,” a career, and a certain amount of income for security, Martha is deprived of such equality and security.

In *Pushing Hands*, Lee stages not only an opposition of Western and East Asian Confucian family values but also an opposition of the old mother and new mother. Noticeably, mothers are prevalent in the film. From the older generation, there are Mrs. Chu and Mrs. Chen; from the younger generation, there is Martha. Lee’s old mothers represent very traditional Chinese women: they are silent, nameless, and willingly take the responsibility to sacrifice for the family. Mrs. Chu gives up her life for Alex, the family descendent, but throughout the film her story is entirely omitted except for the unseen history in which she saves the family. Mrs. Chu does not have her own name (Chu is given by her husband). She merely has an image, mentioned in Mr. Chu and Alex’s recollection. Indeed, Mrs. Chu’s importance only exists *at the moment* when she saves Mr. Chu and Alex and nothing else. Mrs. Chu’s story can be seen as a muted, forgotten woman’s tale buried by the Chinese patriarchal system. She sacrifices twice: first for her immediate family with Chu, and then second for her society, which esteems fathers and sons over mothers and daughters.

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14 Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, first published in 1929, is a collection of feminist essays. Woolf advocates female rights, and encourages women to have rooms of their own and 500 (English) pound a year to support their (writing) career. I found Woolf’s claims are quite pertinent in Martha’s case.
Furthermore, Mrs. Chen offers another type of old mother figure. In one scene at the community center, Mrs. Chen and Chu talk about their reasons for coming to America:

CHU. America is the future of younger generations. Are you from Beijing, too?
MRS. CHEN. Do you think I am?
CHU. You have a Beijing accent, but you don’t look like one.
MRS.CHEN. That’s right. I came to Taiwan with my husband in 1949.
CHU. How about Mr. Chen?
MRS.CHEN. Dead! He was not a Mr. Chen. He died from liver cancer not long after we arrived in Taiwan. They call me Mrs. Chen because of my second husband.
CHU. How about Mr. Chen?
MRS.CHEN. Dead, too. It happened last year. Alas! Life or death, prosperity or poverty, is all determined by one’s destiny. It doesn’t matter if you understand it! Everything is destiny.
CHU. Yes! Yes!
MRS.CHEN. Earlier this year I moved from Taiwan to my daughter’s house here. I send my granddaughter here for Chinese class every Sunday.
CHU. Are you used to the life here?
MRS.CHEN. What did you just say? If I am not bored to death at home, how can my steamed buns have been ruined by your fatty student? You can’t predict it with a computer!

Mrs. Chen’s past reflects part of the history of the Chinese Nationalist Party. After Chiang Kai-shek was defeated in the Chinese Civil War (from the 1930s to 1949), Mrs. Chen accompanied her first husband while retreating to Taiwan. When her first husband died, she married her second husband, Mr. Chen, adopting his name, and reared a daughter. After her second husband died, Mrs. Chen followed her daughter’s family to immigrate to the U.S. In essence, Mrs. Chen’s story is another nameless woman’s tale. Although Mrs. Chen outlives her two late husbands, she still needs to live under her second husband’s name instead of her maiden name. Also, Mrs. Chen fits very well into the traditional mother’s role as a good cook. Mrs. Chen teaches her class how to make steamed crab buns and dumplings, both delicacies requiring knowledge and skill. As if to foil a feminine image of cooking, Lee makes Chu demonstrate vigorous Tai-chi poses

15 See note 3 in the introduction.
alongside Mrs. Chen. The mise-en-scene thereby strengthens stereotypical gender roles in a traditional Taiwanese-Chinese family where fathers are active while mothers are passive.

In other words, Mrs. Chu’s and Mrs. Chen’s storylines reveal the traditional Chinese family ideology and gender relations. According to Feng-Ling Chen, there are five common characteristics of traditional Chinese family: (1) the family is under paternal domination. The family follows the father’s name, and the father has superior power inside and outside the family; (2) Chinese people prefer the extended family, where more than two generations live together; (3) the family is an economic unit. Family members work together or independently to maintain the family economy; (4) Obedience is emphasized with the family. The younger members should respect their elders; children should take care of their parents; (5) Women’s status is inferior to men’s (41-42). The five characteristics help to define Chu’s and Mrs. Chen’s families and the domestic role of the old mother. The two mothers take their husbands’ family names, and relocate with their husbands. Both Chu’s family and Mrs. Chen’s family include three generations or extended families. Among the five characteristics, the last two are the most significant since they explain the traditional Chinese patriarchal system, and the cause of the gender and generation conflicts in the Chu family. Both Alex and Chu believe that the old father should be cared for by the son and stay with the grandson (who will continue the family name). Through tradition and culture, Chu is taught to believe that he has to live in Alex’s house for his retirement. However, Alex’s treatment of filial piety is ambivalent. He does not share Martha’s idea that Chu should live on his own, nor assist Martha to understand Chu better with efforts of negotiation and translation. Alex is caught between the East Asian and Western family views,
unable to identify himself with both sides and ambivalent about his position and domestic function.

In contrast, the new mothers have their voice, individual freedom, and careers to sustain themselves. Martha is a novelist, waiting for her first novel to be published and reviewed by mainstream newspapers. With the upcoming publication of her novel, Martha’s ideas and voice will be heard by the public. Unlike Mrs. Chu, Martha can speak for herself. In addition, Martha is not willing to sacrifice for her family unconditionally. Instead, she negotiates with Alex for her own individual space. Martha’s urgent desire for individual space can be explained by Western individualism. Indeed, Lee’s depiction of Martha, a new career woman and mother, reflects Lee’s shifting gender ideology toward the roles that new generations of women represent.

In the traditional Chinese-Taiwanese culture, Martha’s individuality may be seen as selfish and rebellious. But in a modern Chinese-Taiwanese society, this manifestation of individualism could be applauded thanks to the widely-disseminated ideas of gender equality. Fen-Ling Chen indicates that the movement of industrialization in Taiwan also involves gender equality. The better economics\textsuperscript{16} elevate the level of education among women and women’s status in the family because they have jobs. Similarly, Youna Kim also points out the economic factor serves as the catalyst for women’s higher social status and individualism. Kim argues that “[i]ndividualization is characterized by a growing emphasis on individual autonomy and independence from traditions and social institutions. Women are now released from the

\textsuperscript{16} Chen does not explain what kind of education considerably influences the change of gender role. In fact, since 1968, Taiwan has a system of mandatory education, which legally demands parents to send their children, regardless of gender and ethnicities, to school until the completion of junior school education. The Taiwanese government revised the law and extended the original 9 years to 12 years in August 2014. For more information, see history.moe.gov.tw/policy.asp?id=2 and 12basic.edu.tw/index.php
traditional gender roles and find themselves forced to build up a ‘life of their own’ by way of the labor market, training and mobility” (9). Both Chen and Kim agree that economics undoubtedly help women to possess agency and the rights to make decisions in family and society. From this perspective, Lee’s characterization of female roles from Mrs. Chen to Martha significantly reflects the transition of Taiwanese women from the most traditional type (silent, sacrificing old mother) to the Westernized type (new mothers who search for an individual voice and equal rights).

Old Mothers and New Mothers in Eat Drink Man Woman

*Eat Drink Man Woman* (original title: 饮食男女*“Yin Shi Nan Nu”*17) tells the story of Old Chu (Sihung Lung), a retired chef, and his three adult daughters in Taipei City. The oldest daughter, Chia-Jen (Kuei-Mei Yang), is a chemistry teacher in a high school. Chia-Chien (Chien-Lien Wu), the second daughter, is a senior manager at an airline. The youngest daughter, Chia-Ning (Yu-Wen Wang), is a college student working part-time at a Wendy’s restaurant. After Chu’s wife died, Chu raised the three daughters alone. Chu was a chef, but he is retired since he lost his sense of taste. The Chu family has a tradition of family dinner every Sunday. The atmosphere around the table is not always pleasant, and most of the time, their dinners finish

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17 Lee explains that “I think the [western] audience will be attracted and interested but not sure what the title means. It was a working title, but nobody wanted me to change. In fact, the four Chinese characters merely stand for their literal meanings. Yet, I think the western audiences will have different feelings from the Chinese audiences. The title does not refer to any particular thing but just words. When Wang [Hui-Ling Wang, the screen play writer] first proposed this title, maybe she didn’t have the idea of food and sexuality in mind, but that was my favorite topic” (Chen Bo Hsu 166).
unhappily. The film includes many surprising subplots, all revealing themselves during the family’s Sunday dinners. Early in the film, Chia-Chien tells the family that she bought a house, but soon she discovers that it is a fraud and she loses all her savings. Chia-Ning unexpectedly finds herself pregnant, and she announces her pregnancy and upcoming marriage with Guo-Lun (Chao-Jung Chen). Chia-Jen is a pious Christian. After a failed relationship in college, she determines to remain single and look after her father. Yet, Chia-Jen decides to marry Ming-Dao Chou (Chin-Cheng Lu) after Chou saves her from a love-letter prank played by her students. One night, Chia-Chien finds out that Chia-Jen lies to the whole family: Chia-Jen tells the family that she was dumped by Kai Li (Winston Chao), but Li tells Chia-Chien that he neither knows nor has ever had a romantic relationship with her sister. Later, the most surprising event happens when Chu announces that he will marry Jing-Rong Liang (Sylvia Chang), who is about thirty years younger than him. Except for Chu and Jing-Rong, all of the characters are in great shock since they think Madame Liang (Ya-Lei Kuei), Jing-Rong’s mother, is Chu’s date. In the end, Chu sells the house and starts his new family with Jing-Rong. Chia-Jen and Chia-Ning are both happily married. Chia-Chien, still unmarried, accepts a CEO’s job offer at her company’s overseas office in Amsterdam.

Similar to *Pushing Hands*, *Eat Drink Man Woman* has contrasting images of old mothers and new mothers. Old mothers are represented by Chu’s first wife and Guo-Lun’s grandmother. Interestingly, in the film, both women are shown by black-and-white photos. In an early scene, the camera shows Mrs. Chu’s photo (performed by Chien-Lien Wu, the actress who also acts as Chia-Chien) hanging on the wall of the dining room, in a darker corner, when Chia-Chien, Chia-Ning, and Chia-Jen argue about their parents’ relationship:

CHIA-NING. The only true love in his life was our mother.
CHIA-CHIEN. You call bickering and fighting love?
CHIA-JEN. (turning to look at Chia-Chien) What do you know? Maybe it’s not modern romance to you...but it was founded on real old-fashioned respect and values. [my emphasis]
CHIA-CHIEN. It was an old-fashioned war that ended only when Mom died!
CHIA-JEN. (anxiously) How would you know? You were a kid when she died.
CHIA-CHIEN. I was old enough to know her better.

Chia-Jen believes in a harmonious and traditional marriage relationship, thinking arguments are but one of the elements in a marriage. On the contrary, Chia-Chien thinks that her mother unhappily suffered from conflicts with her husband. What is significant in the dialogue is the contrast between Chia-Chien’s modern concept of marriage and Chia-Jen’s traditional one. The two sisters’ readings of their parents’ marriage reflect the conflicting views of marriage and gender equality in Taiwan. However, though the two sisters attempt to speak for their mother, they are at most merely substitutes, trying to represent their absent mother, whose voice was silenced sixteen years ago. Similarly, Guo-Lun’s grandmother is also represented by a photo. In a scene, Guo-Lun shows Chia-Ning his grandmother’s pictures:

CHIA-NING. Are these [photos] yours? I didn’t know you were into photography.
GUO-LUN. Not really, I only take pictures of my Ah-Ma18. I visit her every week. The camera seems to be the only thing she responds to. You know...with her eyes. Probably the flash.
CHIA-NING. She can’t talk? Maybe she doesn’t want to be photographed.
GUO-LUN. I had the same thought but... (In the darkroom, Guo-Lun fixes a photo in a bath of fixer solution.) Here she comes. (In the bath, the photo gradually reveals a close-up of a thin, old woman, looking painful and bitter.)

The above dialogue suggests that Guo-Lun has particular emotional connections to his Ah-Ma since he visits her very often and attempts to interact with her. In a traditional Chinese Confucian family, younger generations should respect their elders. Guo-Lun is a grandson, and he should pay his respect to his grandmother and submit to her to fulfill filial piety. However, as Chia-Ning

18 The way of calling one’s grandmother varies in different Chinese and Taiwanese dialects. In Taiwanese dialect, a grandmother is called “Ah-Ma (阿嬤).” In Mandarin Chinese language, it is called “Nigh-Nigh (奶奶)” or “Lau-Lau (姥姥)” or “Tsu-Moo (祖母).”
questions, Ah-Ma’s reactions toward the camera do not necessarily mean that she agrees to be photographed. Guo-Lun’s action of photographing may result from his good intentions, but in some way it becomes a unilateral, masculine control over Ah-Ma’s will and body since she now loses her power and control to express herself. In addition, Guo-Lun also plays the role of spokesperson for Ah-Ma. Though the camera captures Ah-Ma’s image on the photo, it is by means of Guo-Lun’s mediation and representation (when he says “Here she comes”) that the audience can eventually see how she looks: painful and bitter. In this way, Ah-Ma’s photo also tells the story of a traditional woman who is oppressed by the patriarchal society (here represented by photographic mechanism).

Both Mrs. Chu and Guo-Lun’s Ah-Ma appear in the form of monochrome pictures, situated in a static manner, and unable to move or to speak for themselves. Unlike audiotapes or film clips, this form of record denies an object’s ability to present itself. It renders a subject more passive because a photographer can control and manipulate authoritative power. The two old mothers’ lives are represented orally and visually through family members’ mediation as well as memory. Moreover, both women are nameless, except for the titles of “Mrs. Chu” and “Guo-Lun’s Ah-Ma,” and they only exist in a dark place. Lee’s use of dark as the backdrop of both old mothers’ images somewhat suggests that old mothers belong to the shadowy past. Similar to Pushing Hands’s Mrs. Chu and Mrs. Chen, the two old mothers in Eat Drink Man Woman are also required to live under the names of their husbands or male family members. In other words, their existence relies on their relations with male members in the family. Echoing Pushing Hands’s old mothers, Eat Drink Man Woman’s matriarchs symbolize the past not only in terms
of the family history but also in terms of traditional women figures: silent, passive, and submissive.

If Lee’s old mother figures in *Eat Drink Man Woman* are the embodiment of the past and traditional Chinese values, his new mother figures evolve alongside Taiwan’s industrialization and modernization. These new mothers possess modern values, if not wholly as urban career women. Chia-Ning, Madame Liang, and Jing-Rong are three distinct new mother figures in the film: Chia-Ning exemplifies the younger generation who venerates individuality; Madame Liang and Jing-Rong mirror urban career women who are competent to raise children single-handedly.

Chia-Ning works part-time at one of Taipei’s Wendy’s. Compared to Chia-Chien’s role as a white-collar career woman and Chia-Jen’s profession of conservative high school teacher, Chia-Ning’s image of the fast-food generation is easily perceptible. She is adept at shifting from an old traditional Taipei (the Chu family house) to a new Westernized Taipei (the fast food chain Wendy’s) – in other words, from a traditional Chinese way of cuisine to a new American way of dining. Chia-Ning’s daily life makes clear that Taipei’s multicultural lifestyle becomes a social pattern that younger generations of Taiwan need to negotiate. To employ Shu-Mei Shih’s terminology of “route (as discussed in my introduction),” Chia-Ning’s schedule of going to work and returning home is an activity of making a *route* to and from the modern, metropolitan city center (the Wendy’s restaurant is at a busy corner) and her traditional Japanese-style Taiwanese family house. While her house suggests Taiwan’s colonial past, her current workplace in downtown Taipei implies the prevalent Westernization which overwhelms Taiwan’s younger generations. Chia-Ning’s “mobile” route illustrates her “cultural migration” (which she experiences through the interactions of Taiwanese and Western cultures) and “geographical
migration” (which she experiences through the interactions of a metropolitan city and traditional household space). In contrast to her father’s root in traditional Chinese (cuisine) culture, Chia-Ning shows her capability in shifting a fixed “root” to a flexible “route”: an ability to adjust herself to different locations and cultures.

In addition, Chia-Ning’s ideas of love and marriage differentiate themselves from the traditional Chinese values. In a traditional Confucian society, women unconditionally accept their parents’ marriage arrangements. Many women do not even know their husbands until the day of the ceremony. Yet, Chia-Ning selects her lover and considers mutual understanding and communication very important in a relationship. When Chia-Ning and Guo-Lun discuss the meaning of love, she asks about his idea about love:

CHIA-NING. You’re just feeling sorry for yourself.
GUO-LUN. No, I feel wonderful. Love is torture. I know that deep in her heart, she [Chia-Ning’s best friend] truly loves me.
CHIA-NING. But she told me she doesn’t love you at all.
GUO-LUN. If she doesn’t love me…then why is she wasting her energy torturing me?
CHIA-NING. That’s not true love. You hardly know each other. You two hardly even talk. Tell me, when was your last real conversation…about your thoughts, feelings and life?
GUO-LUN. I can’t remember. It’s all a blur now.
CHIA-NING. I’ll tell you what’s a blur: your idea of love. True love is being with someone who loves you. You can feel free to express your feelings. Next to her, you can feel free to talk about anything.

Guo-Lun used to date Chia-Ning’s best friend, but the couple did not get along nor communicate well. For Guo-Lun, love comes from pain and true love can only be attained through emotional suffering. However, for Chia-Ning, love means honesty, mutual understanding, and sincere caring. Her definition of love manifests her idea for gender equality. Opposing the traditional relationship or marriage in which the husband/man is situated as superior over the wife/woman, Chia-Ning thinks men and women are equal in a relationship. In a later dining scene, Chia-Ning notifies Chu and her sisters about her marriage with Guo-Lun:
CHIA-NING. I have an announcement to make. I know it sounds incredible… but a lot of times things happen this way.
CHIA-CHIEN. Which class did you fail?
CHIA-NING. I met a boy. A man. We’re in love. We plan to live together. His family has a huge apartment, and his parents will like me. So I plan on moving in with them. But the main reason is…I’m having his baby.

What is so untraditional about this scene is that none of the family member disagrees or rebukes Chia-Ning’s decision of marriage. The father and the two older sisters are reluctant to interfere with Chia-Ning’s individual choice. The scene is crucial because Chia-Ning does not ask for parental consent to marry. Traditionally, parents decide if a couple can get married.\textsuperscript{19} Children should obey their parents’ arrangements to fulfill filial piety. Nevertheless, in Chia-Ning’s case, individual’s choice and belief supersede traditional Confucian values. Chia-Ning thereby stands for the new mother, who challenges the traditional Chinese family dynamics and gender roles. By presenting Chia-Ning’s story, Lee elucidates not only the confrontations between different generations and cultures but also the transitions of family values, moving from collectivism to individualism, in a metropolitan setting like Taipei City.

In addition to Chia-Ning, Mrs. Liang and her daughter, Jing-Rong, are both successful examples of modern (and single) motherhood. Similar to the character Mrs. Chen in \textit{Pushing Hands}, Mrs. Liang followed her husband to Taiwan but soon the husband died, leaving Mrs. Liang behind as a single mother of two. Jing-Rong is a recently-divorced single mother, who works at an insurance company. Jing-Rong has several traits of modern career women: independent, mobile, and a productive economic supporter. Compared to her mother, Jing-Rong has more control over her marriage and individual freedom since she is capable of earning a

\textsuperscript{19} Although more young generations can decide their marriages without parent consent in Taiwan nowadays, it is still the prevalent ideology that they should obtain parents’ consents in advance. (Vice versa, it is not uncommon to see a couple terminate a relation due to parents’ objections.)
living by herself. Jing-Rong’s job (as an insurance agent) requires her to work with various people and travel frequently. In some sense, her job proves her interpersonal ability, social skills and mobility, which are seldom granted to Lee’s traditional mothers. Like Chia-Ning, Jing-Rong’s mobility and independence facilitate her diverse “routes.” Jing-Rong’s image of a well-spoken, outgoing, efficient business woman forms a sharp contrast to the images of Lee’s other traditional mothers, who are silent, passive, and submissive.

While Jing-Rong demonstrates a new mother in the form of an astute career woman, Mrs. Liang, despite her age, also stands as the new mother in terms of her excessive authority as a matriarch of her household. Earlier in the film, the Chu sisters talk about Mrs. Liang:

CHIA-JEN. Yesterday Jing-Feng [Jing-Rong’s sister] called from America. Her mother is coming back.
CHIA-CHIEN. But her green card?
CHIA-JEN. She just can’t stand it anymore. They fight and fight. Even the police came.
CHIA-NING. Mrs. Liang is really hell on wheels.
CHIA-JEN. She can’t live there. The language, no companion for mah-jongg… her son-in-law isn’t Chinese. It is a miracle she lasted that long.

Before Mrs. Liang shows up in the film, the Chu sisters’ dialogue foreshadows a bossy old lady. Lee’s unique character treatment raises audience’s expectations, and at the same time, the scene also reminds audiences of Pushing Hands’s Chu: an old man waiting for a green card, living with a daughter-in-law, speaking no English, and unable to adapt himself in America. But being different from Chu, Mrs. Liang has more autonomy and agency to resume a life in Taipei after she gives up the immigrant life in America. In the scene when Mrs. Liang finally appears, what the audience sees is an imperious woman who is dominating, pushy, and adamant. Her habit of smoking greatly strengthens her androgynous figure, which has both feminine (her wavy dress and shining jewelry) and masculine characteristics (her husky voice and menacing gestures).

Mrs. Liang’s case is reminiscent of the immigration issues that Lee deals with in Pushing Hands.
In *Pushing Hands*, Chu and Mrs. Chen choose to accommodate the cultural differences and stay in America, a foreign country to them, but in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Mrs. Liang rejects adjusting herself to a new country, so she eventually returns to her (second) hometown in Taipei. In both films, Lee postulates various possibilities for elder Taiwanese immigrants in America.

From Chia-Ning and Jing-Rong to Mrs. Liang, the figures of the modern mothers constantly challenge the traditional Chinese Confucian family values and patriarchy. Chia-Ning’s new ideas of marriage and love, influenced by women’s higher social status and gender equality, help her to find Guo-Lun, the most appropriate husband who shares and understands her. Jing-Rong joins an insurance business that traditional women usually are not permitted or able to join. Mrs. Liang, as the head of the Liang household, manages to balance between the roles of mother and father. Regardless of her age, Mrs. Liang, in her sixties, is still considered a new mother due to her autonomy and agency, two of the active characteristics shared by all of Lee’s new mothers. Lee’s *Eat Drink Man Woman* indeed presents a very positive portrait of new mothers who are transformed by modernity.

**Conclusion**

The two Chu families in *Pushing Hands* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*, to some extent, are illustrations of Lee’s modern Taiwanese-Chinese family, in which he hopes to epitomize the cultural and national experiences resonating with many Taiwanese and Chinese people. In *Pushing Hands* and *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the modern is presented as more preferable through the filmmaker’s positive portrayals of new mothers. If Lee’s old matriarchy stands for the
tradition and the new maternity represents modernity, the endings of the two films suggest Lee’s intention to ultimately embrace modernity. In an interview, Lee talks about the themes of family in his early films:

> When I made [my early] films about the relationships between fathers and sons, fathers and daughters, or other family members, I intended to capture the struggles and pains during the process of “family deconstruction,” which will finally lead to “family reconstruction”… In fact, family values change overtime. It has temporality, and it is dramatic…. From *Pushing Hands* to *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Lung’s father roles more or less represent certain characteristics of the traditional Chinese culture. In *Eat Drink Man Woman*, Chu accepts the fact that his family fails and begins a *new* life [emphasis added] at the end. I think that could be seen as my blessings to the Chinese culture. (Chen Bo Hsu 150-153)

In the traditional Chinese culture, one’s family is the most precious treasure and should stay intact eternally. People should be able to procure a sense of security from such invariability. Yet Lee’s family values are very different. He believes in the process of “rebirth”: a process that helps individuals to build a better and newer family. So even though in *Eat Drink Man Woman* Chu painfully fails his first family, he has the ability to establish another one. In addition, Lee emphasizes that family values change as time goes by. His observation of family corresponds to the social context where modernization and Westernization rapidly change the traditional cultural ideologies, social structures, and family dynamics. Lee’s focus on change also manifests itself in the settings of the films. The films are set in modern metropolitan cities: *Pushing Hands* in New York City and *Eat Drink Man Woman* in Taipei City. The setting of big cites often lends itself to the confrontations between the modern and traditional. Unlike rural areas or the country sides where “traditional” lifestyles persist, in big cities the speed of mobility accelerates: almost everything is moving or changing. In this sense, for Lee, though modernity brings confusion and

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20 The interview is in Chinese. The translation here is my own.
confrontations, it still brings positive changes into the Taiwanese society, and these changes guarantee a beneficial future, a “blessing,” as he so sanguinely states above.
In June 26, 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the right to same-sex marriage should be guaranteed by the Constitution. In Taiwan, in 2015, several cities began same-sex union open registration at local household registration offices. As of December 2016, the Tsai administration is pushing a bill to legalize same-sex marriage through the Legislative Yuan. If the bill passes, Taiwan will be the first Asian country to legally recognize same-sex unions. While the bill is still pending, the same-sex marriage issue has provoked robust discussions and debates in the society. Undoubtedly, it has been one of the most controversial subjects in Taiwan recently and it also widely brought the topic of LGBTQ

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22 Those cities are Hsinchu County, Chiayi, Kaohsiung City, New Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, Taipei City and Taoyuan. Those records are not legally binding, nor guaranteed by the Civil Code. However, according to *Taiwan Today*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ official news outlet website, same-sex couples can “choose to make the information available to third parties like health care providers, police and social welfare organizations. In the case of emergency surgery or invasive treatment, the record gives a same-sex partner the right to sign a patient consent form” (par. 5). See [taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=244228&ctNode=2183](http://taiwantoday.tw/ct.asp?xItem=244228&ctNode=2183).

rights to the public attention. However, the issue of homosexuality did not just appear recently in response to the civil rights achievement in the West. Taiwan’s LGBTQ movement started in the 1990s, and as early as in 1993, Ang Lee made *The Wedding Banquet*, a film that explores the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. In *The Wedding Banquet*, Lee carefully portraits a gay couple’s life in New York City, and the conflict between individual happiness and freedom and fulfilling filial piety, which is also one of the major ethical dilemmas being discussed in Taiwan’s current same-sex marriage debate. In 2005, Lee made *Brokeback Mountain*, another gay-themed film about cowboys in Wyoming, which examines the issue of homosexuality from the perspective of family. In both films, the director shows his sympathy for the LGBTQ communities, and his vivid portrays of gay lives help to break down certain misconceptions about homosexuality. Most importantly, Lee’s cinematic interpretations of homosexual issues reveal the progress of Taiwan’s LGBTQ movement since the 1990s.

**Queerness and Homosexuality in Taiwan**

In Taiwan, mainstream views of homosexuality are often taken as an idea imported from the West and thus homosexuality to some degree suggests Westernization and modernization. However, because of cultural difference and divergences in translation, “homosexuality” and, in a broader sense “queer” take on new meanings and significance in Taiwan. Song Hwee Lim examines Chinese translations for homosexuality and queer in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Lim adopts Bret Hinsch’s claim that the translation for homosexuality first starts as “tongxinglian (同性戀)” or “tongxing’ai (同性愛)” and they are “a direct translation of the
Western medical term that defines a small group of pathological individuals according to a concrete sexual essence” (236). “Tongxinglian” and “tongxing’ai” are the most widely used terms for homosexuality and they also gradually become an index for sexual identity through their dissemination. During the early 1990s, another term “tongzhi” was coined in Hong Kong and later introduced to Taiwan. Interestingly, the connotation for tongzhi is far more political than clinical or sexual. The initial usage of the term can be traced back to the early twentieth century when Dr. Sun Yat-Sen was planning to overturn the Ching dynasty (1644-1912). It originally meant “comrades,” and it gains its popularity because of Dr. Sun’s famous saying, “The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades still must work hard” (237). In 1994, “Ku’er” (酷兒), another translation for “queer,” was coined and circulated in academic circles. The emergence of “ku’er” not only marks the early stage of Queer Studies in Taiwan, but also raises more complicated questions about the specific features within

24 Lim thinks the popularization and appropriation of the term “tongzhi” have close relationship with gay and lesbian films. He states that “the term tongzhi was first publicly appropriated for same-sex sexuality by the organizers of Hong Kong’s inaugural lesbian and gay film festival in 1989, and it was introduced to Taiwan in 1992 when the Taipei Golden Horse international film festival featured a section on lesbian and gay films” (237).

25 “Ku’er” is not an entirely satisfactory translation of queer nor can it replace queer. Chi Tai-Wei, one of the intellectuals who coined the term, elaborates that Ku’er’s linguistic and contextual aspects are different from queer’s. Lim states, “For Chi, the pejorative connotation of the term queer has not been reproduced in the term ku’er, and the association of ku’er with ‘coolness’ also cannot be translated back to queer. Calling ku’er a “hybridized/bastardised” (zazhong) product” of cultural exchange and miscegenation, Chi suggests that Ku’er has to continue a dialogue with queer on the one hand and to inscribe local history on the other” (243).

26 “ku’er” is not the only translation for queer in Taiwan. Lim discovers that “tongzhi,” and “guaitai” also refer to queer in different publications and situations. Lim clarifies that “Guaitai already existed in Taiwan as a colloquial term referring to people who are strange or eccentric, thus making it particularly apt for denoting the double entendre in the English word queer” (238). In general, Lim thinks that “ku’er” and “guaitai” are both often used in the academic circle and radical politics, but “tongzhi” is “the most all-encompassing” label for homosexual and queer.
the seemingly homogenous homosexual communities in Taiwan, such as class confrontations, economic status, and north-south urban-rural gap. The “Little Ku’er Encyclopedia” that Lim cites in the article claims that normal people will associate it with such attributes as romantic, artistic circle, high educational achievement, middle-class, yuppie…homosexual without these attributes are in awkward situation: their existence is even unthinkable by society. Where can homosexuals living in rural areas, with no educational achievement, bourgeois banknotes, or young, tempting bodies go? (241)

From the encyclopedia entry, it is not difficult to see that the common imagination of homosexuality and the “stereotypical image” of homosexuals take the shape of middle-class and well-to-do gays and lesbians who can afford this “artistic” lifestyle. What underlies this yuppie façade of homosexuality is an implication of hedonism which suggests that homosexuality is a privileged way of luxury living only granted to a certain class. Though the entry attempts to clarify and unpack the image of homosexual for the mainstream, its existence in the encyclopedia nevertheless perpetuates a negative image.

To consider these varied translations of homosexual and queer more carefully, one might argue that the term “tongzhi” carries a political connotation and thus contradicts its later sexual appropriation. However, intriguingly, tongzhi’s double features do not function against each other. In fact, “tongzhi” reveals the political nature of gay and lesbian movements in Taiwan after the 1990s. If tongxinglian or tongxing’ai is a direct and neutral translation of a Western idea, then the arrival of “tongzhi” brings homosexual movements into a political sphere. As if echoing Dr. Sun’s words, homosexuality in China and Taiwan turn into a revolutionary campaign to subvert heterosexual hegemony. As for the term “Ku’er,” Lim questions its exclusive implications for young, urban-based male homosexuals since “Ku (酷)” also means “cool” and “er” (兒) can mean “son” or “youngster.” For Lim, Ku’er is somewhat a
discriminating term that does not represent the overall experience of Taiwan’s homosexual communities. Indeed, whether it is due to the mandarin Chinese-English translation gap or due to the cultural difference, a perfect translation that satisfies all the required needs is hard to find. The translation problem also sheds light again on the issue of incorporation of Western queer thoughts and homosexual movements into Taiwan’s local cultures and society. In this sense, homosexual issues in Taiwan can be seen as a site for cultural negotiation and contestation between the West and the East.

Many scholars in Taiwan consider queer and homosexual movements a product of Westernization, modernization and democratization. As aforementioned, during the ruling of Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo, Taiwan’s society was severely controlled and monitored by the martial law, which suppressed people’s freedom and rights. During this period, Chiang’s KMT government promoted the “authentic China” policy and Confucianism in order to compete with Mao’s Communist government for the “real China.” As a consequence, a strict sense of family and an orthodoxy of heterosexuality were enforced in the Taiwanese society to produce a real “Chinese society.” From this perspective, homosexuality in Taiwan has been a taboo issue not only because it has been seen as a Westernized vice but also because it violates Chinese family values that are based on Confucianism and filial piety. According to Simon Scott, who spent five years in Taiwan observing gay communities, cultural expectations and pressures dominantly shape gay culture in the country. Since patriarchy and continuity of the family line are part of the social norms, as Scott notices, “men are strongly expected to marry and provide their parents with grandsons, norms that gay men experience as cultural pressure…these cultural expectations are so strong that some gay men often receive the greatest pressure to marry after
‘coming out’ to their parents” (72). Being gay and claiming a gay identity create shame and guilt, for “coming out” represents failure to obtain heterosexual marriage and to bring heirs to the family, both deemed as embodiments of filial piety in Taiwanese society.

Before the 1980s, like the protests against the KMT government held by the dissenters (many of them formed and joined the Democratic Progressive Party later), homosexuality was mainly underground or even unheard among mainstream Taiwanese culture. Not until 1987 when Chiang Ching-kuo abolished the martial law did queer groups start to go public. In the 1990s, Taiwan’s LGBQ movements were gaining more attention and sympathy, if not as much as the DPP’s Taiwan-Centrism politics. Fran Martin notices that the 1990s was an important decade in Taiwan’s LGBQ history. She argues that gay movements in the 1990s were deeply influenced by Taiwan’s modernity, economic prosperity, and the turbulent social and political situations, while the queer and homosexual movements were often reaction and resistance to the sociopolitical background as well. Martin indicates the tendency of multiple translations for terms referring to homosexuality in Taiwan: “tongzhi,” “guaitai” (meaning “freak”), “ku’er”

27 For Scott, gay identity happens “when individuals embrace those sexual acts as part of their identity and construct their lives around it, usually by rejecting heterosexual marriage and seeking emotional fulfillment through relationships with the same sex” (72).

28 Martin writes, “In Taiwan, the 1990s witnessed not only an unprecedented explosion of public lesbian and gay culture (in magazines, social and activist groups, and dedicated commercial venues), but also a boom in ‘tongzhi fiction’ (tongzhi wenxue), which garnered a remarkable number of prizes and accolades from the mainstream literary establishment and became a clearly delineated movement with defining significance for 1990s Taiwanese literature… the decade also saw the appearance of queer theory within the island’s academic cultures” (1-2).

29 For Martin, Taiwanese modernity is a phrase of “a multilayered and internally fractured social, cultural and historical space… it’s a highly synthetic formation that has been shaped in fundamental ways by the Japanese colonialism, Chinese Republican culture, the US military presence and economic aid, and KMY Cold War political and cultural practice. In the past two decades, this mix has been further complicated by the attempts of successive central government to redefine Taiwan’s modernity through appeals to the values of democracy, liberalism, and pluralism” (11).
both indicate queer, and “guaitai yizu (meaning “freak’s clan”)” is the translation for “queer nation.” Compared to what “queer” encompasses in America and Europe, these variations of “queer” in Taiwan in the 1990s also refer to a literary style: an activist movement seeking civil rights for sexual minorities (including sex workers as well as lesbians and gay men); an academic enterprise that drew on the work of Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Judith Habersham as well as Monique Witting and Adrienne Rich to unpack the cultural construction of on-straight sexualities in a local context; and a mode of identification that drew together sexual subculture in new and compelling ways. (26)

Accordingly, the multiplicity of queer does not only exist in its Mandarin Chinese translation but also in its practices among several fields ranging from literary circle, social movements, and the academy. For the academic circle particularly, many prestigious gender scholars from America, such as Butler, Sedgwick, and Habersham, were introduced into Taiwan. Martin contends that Taiwan’s queer and homosexual movements are inspired by American movements. This situation reveals two phenomena: first, the usage of “queer nation,” which pays homage to its American companion, can be viewed as one example of “transnationalization of American queer nationalism” (2). This implies that the movement members seek their “imagined communities” not within national borders but without the boundary of nation-state. Second, “queer nation,” in some sense, also “queers” the then homophobic ROC/Taiwan by using “a global discourse on American queer nationalism for a local politics” (3). Both of the phenomena that Martin specifies demonstrate that Taiwan’s queer and homosexual movements in the society are never exclusively developing inside the island, but are transnational in nature and tied to politics and Westernization.

Martin’s contextualization of Taiwan’s queer and gay and lesbian movements in the 1990s highlights the complexity of the formation of sexual identity in postcolonial and
postmodern Taiwan, where history, time, geography, and trans/national politics were all involved to affect what “queer” meant. In the same vein, Tao-Ming Huang recognizes the crucial contextual factors of Taiwan’s male homosexual movement and social activities. Huang investigates Taiwan’s government policies and social attitudes during the Cold War period. As Huang notes, in Taiwan:

the construction of male homosexuality as a term of social exclusion, it makes clear how sexuality comes to be deployed through the state’s banning of prostitution, and further demonstrates how such a deployment of sexuality gives rise to a specific segment-line of contemporary Taiwan dominant moral-sexual order that is promulgated both by state qua state and by, since the 1990s, anti-prostitution state feminism. (6)

Huang finds that male homosexuals in Taiwan during the Cold War Period (roughly from 1950s to late 1980s) were bound in the public view to perversion, prostitution, AIDS, and was often seen as against social “virtuous customs,”30 which was often taken by the police as an excuse to raid gay bars and hold people in custody. Similar to Martin, Huang marks the 1990s as the important decade for homosexual movements. The homosexual/tongzhi movement in Taiwan in the 1990s can be viewed as a “decolonizing” project, which focused on the question of sexuality. Taiwan had long been a homophobic society, enforced by the KMT government’s “real China” policy. But since the 1990s, lesbians and gays started to advocate for their rights onto the street.

30 The term “virtuous custom” here does not refer to common benevolent customs that are deemed proper by the society. According to Huang, maintaining virtuous customs was Chiang’s KMT government’s policy to control social order (Huang’s examples here are mainly about prostitution), and the government assigned this mission to the police as their primary responsibility. Huang writes, “the KMT government promulgated in 1953 the Police Law, enlisting ‘redressing the customs’ among others, as part of police administration. While ‘redressing the customs’ included getting rid of ‘backward’ social practices such as foot-binding and breast-binding, it was the political management of sex that constituted the most significant part of this particular domain of police administration. Thus, in the name of maintaining ‘virtuous custom,’ the police not only had the mission of rectifying individual sexual misconduct but also the task of administering the leisure/pleasure businesses associated with fostering sexual immorality in general and prostitution in particular in accordance with the Police Offence Law [in effect from 1943-1991]” (84). The police then had greater power to investigate, interrogate, and punish citizens when the police deemed the cases suspicious.
Conventionally, when the term is used in postcolonial discourse, it often refers to the indigenous people’s conscious efforts to fight or resist the control of their colonizers or colonizing empires. Yet, by stating the term “decolonizing” here, Huang does not mean to subvert the colonization and exploitation of foreign countries, as third-world countries defy first-world imperial countries, but to resist the national/internal oppression that government and society inflict on the sexual minority in Taiwan.

Hence, being imbricated into the nebulously network of politics, history, traditions, society, and family, issues pertaining to LGBTQ communities in Taiwan are rarely simple matters of gender identities, sexual orientation, and individual choices. If the Western debates over homosexuality have been based more on individuality and personal empowerment, Taiwan’s discourses of homosexuality are more focused upon family, community, and nation. An individual living or brought up in Taiwan’s society finds it difficult to detach himself or herself from family obligations, social values, and national ideology. Within this context, “masculinity” in Taiwan not only means to fit in certain gender categories, but also stands for fulfillment of the responsibilities of family, society, and nation.

**Queerness and Transnationality: Critical Responses to The Wedding Banquet**

*The Wedding Banquet* was sponsored by Taiwan’s Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) and produced by Good Machine. The film won several international film awards, such as the best film at the Asia-Pacific Film Festival (1992), the Golden Berlin Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival (1993), and the Golden Needle Space Award at the Seattle
International Film Festival (1993). The film was also nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Award (1993). *The Wedding Banquet* sophisticatedly addresses the sexual identity issues interweaved with concerns of family, society, and nation-state. Therefore, the film reveals more of a Taiwanese attitude toward homosexuality and, in general, queer identities. In addition, the film was produced in 1993, which corresponds to the pivotal decade (the 1990s) that served as the turning point of Taiwan’s LGBQ movements. The period of production makes the film an artistic articulation of queer awareness among many others that represent and accompany the decade’s blooming LGBQ movement in Taiwan. *The Wedding Banquet* actually engages a large amount of Taiwanese cultural influence, traditional Taiwan family values, and Taiwanese attitudes toward issues of homosexuality.

*The Wedding Banquet* can be approached as a family melodrama about misunderstanding, conflict, and reconciliation. Wei-Tung Gao (Winston Chao) is a successful Taiwanese-American businessman who lives with his partner, Simon (Mitchell Litchtenstein) in Manhattan. Wei-Wei (May Chin), a tenant of Wei-Tung, is an undocumented Chinese immigrant who wants a green card. Wei-Tung’s parents persuade Wei-Tung to get married, for marriage can bring them grandchildren so as to pass down the Gao blood line. Out of solutions, Simon and Wei-Tung cunningly propose a plan of a fake marriage to Wei-Wei. In this way, Wei-Tung can fulfill his parents’ wishes and Wei-Wei can get a green card. Wei-Tung’s parents come to New York for their wedding ceremony. In a high-end Chinese restaurant in Flushing, Wei-Tung’s father (Sihung Lung) unexpectedly reunites with his former subordinate, who, knowing that the parents are not satisfied with the American way of wedding ceremony, generously sponsors Wei-Tung and Wei-Wei wedding banquet. Soon after the “Taiwanese-Chinese” wedding banquet,
from a onetime sexual encounter with Wei-Tung, Wei-Wei finds herself pregnant. Simon and Wei-Tung have fierce fighting in front of the parents, resulting in Mr. Gao’s stroke and hospitalization. In the hospital, Wei-Tung makes a “coming out” confession to Mrs. Gao (Ya-Lei Kuei), telling her the truth and about his relationship with Simon. Mrs. Gao reluctantly accepts the truth. In the end, the parents poignantly return to Taiwan, accepting the fact that Wei-Tung will continue his relationship with Simon and Wei-Tung’s family responsibility, providing a grandchild, is fulfilled.

Since its premiere in 1993, *The Wedding Banquet* has aroused robust debates over the themes of homosexuality, transnationality, globalization, and diaspora among scholars. On the issue of homosexuality, Andrey Yue thinks the film’s arrangement of plot enables the main characters to seek reconciliation and recognition within blood family, and this device differentiates the film from other films focusing on homosexuality.31 William Leung claims that Lee “remove[s] queer from its contemporary postmodernist setting and reconcile[s] it with the classical unity and purity that one seldom associates with queer,” but Lee “adopts the convention of straight domestic-romantic comedy to retell queer, producing a film in which queer is naturalized by straight dramatization” (26-28). With transnationality, Mark Chiang argues that the film can be seen as a transnational/national allegory, wherein Lee attempts to solve the complicated national relationships among Taiwan, China, and USA. Wei-Tung and his family, who Chiang labels as “transnational capitalist class”32 are privileged and enabled to exploit Wei-

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31 Andrey Yue argues that the film creates “the Wedding Banquet effect” that establishes a new way of investigating “alternative sexual identity model that does not follow the post-Stonewall narrative of coming-out and leaving the blood family” (53).
32 Chiang borrows the term from Leslie Sklair.
Wei, a third world female labor, making her a victim under the transnational capitalist system and Asian patriarchy. Chiang thinks the film presents “a conflict between the two halves of the global system, a new division that is apparent in the racialized class polarization of the contemporary United States” (288). His remarks imbricate the film into the context of Asian American communities and complicate the sexual identity issues with a dimension of ethnic identification in the scenario where characters are from a racial minority.

David L. Eng acclaims Lee’s audacity of breaking the intercultural homosexuality from the M. Butterfly stereotype – the relationship between a submissive Oriental “Asian houseboy” and his “white daddy.” Eng argues that “[T]hrough his ability to claim the domestic space of the U.S. nation-state as a legitimate home – queerness and diaspora emerge in Lee’s film as a new and privileged form of Asian American male subjectivity” (221). Eng believes that discussion of Asian American identity within the discourse of diasporic queerness grants subjects agency and changes the fundamental units of Asian American identity – that is, family configuration.

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33 Homosexuality, as Chiang claims, is used to “contest the demands of national/ethnic identity, by performing the counter naturalization of assimilation, on the impure and inauthentic ethnic subject. In the first half of The Wedding Banquet, sexuality and national/ethnicity identity are elaborated together, so that every representation of sexuality is also simultaneously a negotiation of ethnicity” (277-278).

34 According to Eng, Diaspora refers to a broader spectrum which includes identities such as immigrants, refugees, and ethnic communities and so on. The term “diaspora” entails transnationalism but its political implication is far from being supporting the nation-state. Eng thinks diaspora has double sides – on the one hand, it has resistance to nation-state; yet, on the other hand, it can be operated as conservative sites of nationalism. Eng then addresses the issue of diaspora and sexuality, and he appropriates Jee Yeun Lee’s opinions that diaspora sometimes may be “conservatives diaspora” which are dependent on heterosexual unions to reproduce and pass down the family line. It is through the discourse of “diasporic queerness,” an alternative discussion that goes beyond the border of the nation-state, that Asian American masculinity gains its validity and power and “a reframing of Asian American identity outside of traditional heterosexual and white domestic familial configuration” (221).
However, Eng also deems that queer Diaspora\textsuperscript{35} consolidates the Asian patriarchy in the film while it simultaneously downplays the rising awareness of feminist ideas.

In the same vein, Gina Marchetti discusses \textit{The Wedding Banquet} within the Chinese Diaspora\textsuperscript{36} and the scope of “Greater China.” Marchetti’s specification of diaspora focuses on adopted country/homeland and departure/arrival\textsuperscript{37} and the influence of diaspora makes the essence of “China” unimportant in the film representations by ethnic Chinese filmmakers. \textit{The Wedding Banquet} illustrates that an ethnic Chinese filmmaker may not deal with a Chinatown-related topic, for the film does not present the “real life”\textsuperscript{38} of the Chinese Americans in New York. Similar to Chiang, Marchetti thinks \textit{The Wedding Banquet} serves as political allegory.\textsuperscript{39}

What is contradictory here is that even if diaspora loosens the ties of the national affiliation so

\begin{itemize}
  \item Eng writes, “queer diaspora in \textit{The Wedding Banquet} as a formation that rescripts a domestic patriarchal narrative of home and nation-state, of private and public, on a global scale” (224).
  \item Marchetti utilizes the term diaspora with its extended definition, as she states, “[diaspora] include various scatterings of people who may not maintain the longing to return to the homeland of the exile or the dream of assimilation of the immigrant…those in diaspora cultivate a distinct identity and may have closer ties with others, similar communities around the world than with any ‘homeland’” (4).
  \item With this new dimension of diaspora, Marchetti considers the concomitant problem of diasporic identity. As she argues, “Ties to China may be strong, weak, or broken. Connections to established Chinatowns may be essential to survival or non-existent… Diaspora filmmakers may take up ethnic Chinese subject matter or ignore it or do both” (4-5).
  \item However, one might argue that it is too hasty to make such a conclusion with only one film. In fact, Lee’s \textit{Pushing Hands} (1992) directly reflects everyday Chinatown community and realistic immigrant life. Perhaps it is more proper to say that the representations of “China” and ethnic Chinese subject matters in the films of ethnic Chinese directors have been mediated, adjusted, and transformed with consideration of the culture of the adopted country, the global market, and the taste of a wider audience.
  \item Marchetti finds that “the film’s national allegory is also an ethnic allegory, investigating the meaning of being ‘Chinese’ beyond national affiliation…this allegory still manages to bring together a divided China, by working with rather than against homosexuality, cultural imperialism, and the Chinese diaspora” (115).
\end{itemize}
that being “Chinese” is no longer bound by nation-state, this political ideology of “Greater China” still sees Taiwan as “the missing half” of China and needs to reunite with the Mainland China, the ultimate Chinese home base and nation-state.

Let me take one example from *The Wedding Banquet* to illustrate the fallacy of using essentialist concepts such as “Chinese identity” or “Great China” to analyze the characters. In the film, Wei-Tung grows up in Taiwan and later immigrates to America, a trend followed by many of his contemporaries in Taiwan from the 1980s to the 1990s. Although Mr. Gao and Mrs. Gao, the first generation of Chinese immigrants in Taiwan, maintain their Mainland Chinese ways and traditions, Wei-Tung has no significant ties or relations to the Mainland. Thus, rather than being examined with “Chinese identity,” or “Greater China,” Wei-Tung needs to be scrutinized under the lens of “Taiwanese culture” other than the vast and general “Chinese culture.” The attempt of putting Wei-Tung in a Taiwanese context serves the two major purposes of my dissertation. On the one hand, Wei-Tung’s immigrant experience represents not only the exclusive Taiwanese demographic flow but also the Taiwanese attitude toward homosexuality in the 1990s (as I will discuss in the next section). On the other hand, scholars discuss the film either from the aspects of Asian American studies or from the approaches of transnational/ diasporic queer studies. Some of the critics mention Taiwan, but only as background information. Hence, I contend that Wei-Tung’s case is a specific Taiwanese/Taiwanese-American experience and which should be

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40 Jack F Williams points out in “Who Are the Taiwanese? Taiwan in the Chinese Diaspora” that the trend of Taiwanese students going abroad to study and stay in the foreign countries can be dated as early as the 1940s. Their motives include better jobs and salaries, better professional opportunities, intention to avoid the authoritative society in Taiwan and possible political prosecution because of their political activism overseas. In the 1950s and the 1960s, due to the Mutual Defense Treaty (1954) between the US and Taiwan and the new Immigration Act (1965) there were more Taiwanese immigrated to America. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were averagely 12,000 new Taiwanese immigrants reported each year. Most of those Taiwanese immigrants held professional and executive jobs.
put into the Taiwanese sociohistorical context for a more subtle reading. By contextualizing the
film through the scope of Taiwan, I endeavor to map a more complete scholarship on Ang Lee’s
transnational and queer politics and this study sheds light on the film’s “Taiwanese elements”
that distinguish the film from other Asian queer films.

Transnational Family: Shifting Masculinity and Traveling Patriarchy

In the final scene of *The Wedding Banquet*, the Gaos are at the airport’s terminal gate
waiting to board the flight to Taiwan. The camera shows Mr. Gao raising both of his arms for the
TSA staff for security check in slow motion. The scene then freezes and turns dark. With the
most neutral reading, the gesture can simply signal the end of the journey which the Gaos
embarked on for their only son’s wedding banquet. However, to view it more carefully, Mr.
Gao’s gesture can also be interpreted as a symbol for victory, or in another way, surrender. To
some degree, the final scene leaves an open ending, for Ang Lee does not show Gao’s face as to
offer his audience enough clues to judge whether Gao’s gesture stands for victory or surrender.
This ambivalent, unsettling ending causes great discrepancy in scholarship about Gao and the
Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy he represents. Some scholars, such as Chiang, takes Gao’s gesture
as victory and thinks patriarchy strengthens itself at the end; some scholars, such as Berry, doubt
this claim and think patriarchy weakens now that Gao “surrenders”; others remain neutral and
think the scene needs to be read along with other significant scenes of gender issues in the film.

However, since *The Wedding Banquet* is often regarded as one of the three films that
constitute Lee’s “Father Trilogy,” it is understandable why scholars pay much attention to Gao,
the father figure that Sihung Lung plays. In Lee’s films, father characters are always a central character. It is also undeniable that in Lee’s “Father Trilogy” each of the three old father characters that Lung plays carries different degree of Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy. On that account, in The Wedding Banquet, does Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy really assert itself or does it reduce its power? Does Lee attempt to show Gao and Wei-Tung, a gay man coming-out, as equally victimized by Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy? In Wei-Tung’s case, when Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy clashes with homosexuality, does he lose the right to “inherit” the patriarchy in his household? What kind of negotiation does Wei-Tung need to make to accommodate the seeming chaos of his masculinity, homosexual identity, and patriarchy? Moreover, although The Wedding Banquet is about a Taiwanese family, the major plot takes place in New York City. The “foreignness” of the location for the family requires these pertinent answers for masculinity and patriarchy as well: when Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy is no longer situated in Taiwan or China but America, can we still call it Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy? What kind of transformation, if any, will happen to it? In a previous section, I argue that Taiwanese masculinity is tightly bound with family, society, and nation-state. Does this still hold true in the situation where two different societies and nations are involved?

To bridge the gap between Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy and Asian American patriarchy, and in order to facilitate the discussion of masculinity in these two different cultural settings, it is necessary to mention the impact of Chinese/Taiwanese American immigrant history on the formation of Chinese American masculinity in the United States. Jachinson Chan claims that Chinese American men, due to the early immigration laws,41 were not allowed to bring their

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41 Among those early immigration laws, The Page Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act were the most hostile and influential ones that changed Chinese American men’s lives in America. The
wives to America nor marry whites out of fear of miscegenation. In addition, after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Chinese male immigrants were driven out of construction sites and could only go into occupations which were seen as “women’s” jobs, such as laundry, cooking, and housekeeping. Their inability to acquire heterosexual marriage and their domestic, feminine occupations emasculated these Chinese American males, making them less-than-man when compared to white American masculinities, the norm in the American society. Consequently, from this moment on, Chinese American men’s “feminized position,” as claims by Lisa Lowe, has been inscribed in their representations in the mainstream culture. It is not until the 1960s when Bruce Lee became the new Kung Fu master on screen that Chinese American masculinity gained opportunities to render positive shifts in cultural representation. Bruce Lee’s rocketing career success was partly owed to the decade’s social movement and turbulent political backdrop. Lee’s appearance provides a counterculture and a subversive power for social activist groups, including African Americans and Asian Americans, who were not satisfied with the political status quo. Therefore, Lee’s formidable image as a Kung-Fu master

Page Act of 1875 was enforced to bar "undesirable" people from Asia who came to America as forced laborer (male) or as individuals who engaged in prostitution (female). Eventually, the act prohibited Chinese women from entering America due to their possible inclination to work in prostitution. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 denied all of the Chinese immigrants from being U.S citizens.

42 Chan writes, “The combination of exclusion laws and discriminatory socio-economic practices that refused jobs to Chinese men effectively emasculated the Chinese men. They were treated as inferior men who could not demonstrate their heterosexual identities and they could only find jobs that were deemed by mainstream American society as feminine work” (5).

43 Chan states, “in the context of an emergent Asian American movement, the popularity of Bruce Lee’s image as a martial arts hero who fights for the working class and against Japanese imperialism intersects with the goals of activists who demanded political empowerment for marginalized groups and critiqued the imperialist overtones of the American military involvement in Vietnam. Lee’s characters are consistently represented as the one hero who fights for disenfranchised groups of people” (7-8).
gained considerable popularity during that time since his Kung-Fu wielding image on screen — muscular, corporal, agile, and powerful — is far more masculine than the early negative Chinese American male representations, such as “China Men,” “coolie,” or “yellow peril.” Lee re-defines and re-masculinizes Chinese American masculinity, but this newly-established masculinity represented by him during the sixties was primarily shaped by Lee’s negotiation of external issues, that is to say, ethnic relations and class confrontation. Domestic issues, such as family relations and cultural values, were left untouched or, at least, not dealt with directly.

To complicate this even further, Chan also addresses the Chinese male’s place in Raewyn Connell’s discussions of American masculinities: hegemonic masculinities, subordinate masculinities, and complicit masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity grants a certain group (in this case, white males) a leading position in society, and this hegemonic masculinity “can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominance of men and the subordination of women” (9). Chan argues that Chinese American males are not included in this category since hegemonic masculinity needs to separate itself from ethnic males (men of color). Subordinate masculinity indicates homosexual male’s masculinity subordinated by heterosexual males. Subordinate masculinity is about “gayness,” and “femininity.” It denotes “the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity… from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (9). Complicit masculinity

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44 Lee’s figure establishes a new “image” for Chinese and Chinese Americans: the Chinese Kung-Fu or martial arts expert. Even until today, martial arts genre in Hollywood are still very popular and many recent films have been generated by this stereotype, such as *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) and *The Karate Kid* (2010). In a broad view, Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands* (1992) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) might be included in the genre as well.
refers to those who “do not explicit display a hegemonic masculine front but benefit from or implicit support a hegemonic project” (10). Chan points out that ethnic minority males sometimes fall into this category, and even when they decline such masculinity, they are still on the marginal position as well. More importantly, Chinese American men, similar to women, are oppressed by the (White) American patriarchy system and the situation forces them to either “prove their manhood…or risk the stigmatization of being effeminized and homosexualized” (11).

Yet, it is important to remember that for ethnic minority males, masculinity and ethnic identity are often intertwined and constantly shifting as the sociopolitical context changes. The early Chinese American immigrant history and Bruce Lee’s celebrity cannot illustrate better the intimate relations between Chinese American masculinity and ethnic identity. To probe into the issue of ethnic identity further, both early Chinese American immigrants and Bruce Lee possess cross-cultural and transnational awareness that combines two sets of cultural heritages of their native lands and the adopted countries. Traveling, by boat or airplane, weaves the two cultures together, and it also mobilizes their identification process. However, Chan does not discuss whether or how the transnational mobility influences Chinese American masculinity and ethnic identity, let alone the patriarchy systems in Chinese American society. So, since traveling and globalization gradually generate more “flexible citizens” who can move between nations and cultures, how do we account for transnational masculinity and patriarchy?

I argue that transnational patriarchy, which involves two or more nations, is different from single national patriarchy, such as Connell’s (white) hegemonic masculinity. First, transnational “traveling” patriarchy, as Gao represents in The Wedding Banquet, is able to
transcends the border lines and brings the home territory into the domains of other nations. Therefore, in contrast to single national patriarchy’s fixed hierarchy and stable geographical terrain, transnational patriarchy is more flexible and mobile. And second, transnational patriarchy, immersed into multiple cultures, is prone to evolve and accommodate alternative identities. This is not to say transnational patriarchy is feminist in principle or queer in nature; rather, it means that transnational patriarchy allows different ideas to have dialogue with each other without muting minor voices. Hence, it is no surprise to see Ang Lee deal with gender issues while he depicts transnational patriarchy in the film.

**Transnational Patriarchy, Masculinity, and Homosexuality in *The Wedding Banquet***

Before Wei-Tung’s parents come to Wei-Tung and Simon’s house, Wei-Tung, Simon, and Wei-Wei do a house “makeover” to make the house look “straight” and “Chinese.” Any item which discloses Wei-Tung’s homosexual orientation is replaced by objects that suggest heterosexuality and Taiwanese/Chinese culture. Therefore, Wei-Tung and Simon’s bathroom photo is taken down; instead, Wei-Wei and Wei-Tung’s picture is put on the table to fabricate their heterosexual union. The modern paintings on the wall become the locations for Taiwanese/Chinese calligraphy, an unmistakable emblem for Taiwanese/Chinese culture. It is more noteworthy that Wei-Tung’s “queer” semi-nude picture (in which he covers his groin with only a hat) is replaced by a picture of Wei-Tung in his military uniform. The masculinity that the military uniform suggests, in a way, “straightens” Wei-Tung’s homosexuality, making him now a “good son,” meeting all of his parents’ expectations: being manly and heterosexual. The house
makeover scene is significant in two aspects. First, when Wei-Tung makes effort to “refurbish” his house, he rebuilds his sexual and national identity at the same time. The alternation of interior decoration visualizes Wei-Tung’s shift from a Westernized homosexual to a traditional and Taiwanese/Chinese filial son. Moreover, the house makeover also shows that Taiwanese/Chinese filial piety, for Wei-Tung, binds tightly with heterosexuality. To be a “good and filial” son in the Gao family, Wei-Tung has to be both heterosexual and culturally Taiwanese/Chinese. Second, Gao’s pre-presence (for he has not arrived yet) not only forces Wei-Tung’s identity shift but also dominates the domestic space: what used to be an individual’s private home is now a battlefield between the West and the East, and between heterosexual and homosexual as well.

Later, at the airport, before Mr. Gao makes his first appearance, the camera vividly focuses on the name of the airplane (China Airlines 中華航空公司) and the national flag of Taiwan on the plane. Both the airplane company and the national flag are strong signs of nationalism. In addition, Gao is a retired commander of Taiwan’s military force. Hence, Gao’s arrival, with the hint of nationality, can be regarded as Taiwan’s “national” representative in America. The patriarchy that stands behind Gao, from this early moment on, cannot detach itself from nationalism of Taiwan. Gao’s presence emphasizes the image of “the Taiwanese father,” which, in contrast, makes Wei-Tung to look like a more obvious “Americanized son.” The contrast between the father and the son not merely foreshadows the upcoming cultural

45 “China Airline” is an airline company in Taiwan, while “Air China” belongs to China, People’s Republic China. China Airlines was founded in 1959 by the KMT government in Taipei, Taiwan. It was the one and official airline company that represented Taiwan until the 1990s when the company turned into private-owned and listed on the Taiwan Stock Exchange. The naming “China Airline” is rather confusing and it also remotely refers back to the KMT government’s “authentic China” policy, as I discuss earlier in the chapter. For further information about China Airlines, see china-airlines.com/ch/index.html
confrontation over ways to hold marriage ceremonies but also helps to reiterate the link between Taiwanese patriarchy and nationalism. On top of that, one can argue that Mrs. Gao can also stand for Taiwan’s nationalism because she is on the same airplane. However, although Mrs. Gao travels with Gao, her presence and link to nationalism are weakened by her role – a traditional Taiwanese-Chinese housewife who obeys her husband. From the perspective of family role, Mrs. Gao’s submission to Gao undeniably increases his patriarchal power and his dominance in their family. Gao, foiled by his wife, becomes not only a commander in profession, but also a commander at home. His involvement with patriarchy and nationalism again politicizes the domestic sphere. The house makeover scene and the airport scene well map Gao’s transnational patriarchy by means of space and signs. In the house makeover scene, the upcoming arrival of patriarchy changed the orders of the house, and it also changes the sexual identity and culture of the family members who stay in the house. The queer living space is hence occupied by a more adamant straight Taiwan/Chinese patriarchy before Gao actually enters the space.

Furthermore, at the airport, Gao’s national patriarchy expands into a “transnational” one now that he sets foot on America soil. Traveling enables Gao to perform Taiwanese patriarchy within America. The expansion of territory complicates Gao’s patriarchal identity: in Taiwan, it deals with social and family issues, but in America, it becomes a subject matter of international relations, for it involves with cross-nations relations and the cultural confrontations they entail. Significantly, the idea and agency of traveling differentiate Gao’s transnational patriarchy from traditional patriarchy, and they also relate Gao’s examples to Shu-Mei Shih’s concepts of “routes” and “roots.” In one scene, Gao reveals that he joined the KMT army in order to escape matched marriages, but after the civil war, he was forced to retreat to Taiwan in 1949 and had to
leave his home in Mainland China forever. Gao’s involuntary routes activate and politicize his roots, in this case the places he can claim “homeland” or “mother country.” There is no longer “the one and the only” but multiple hometowns alongside his routes, whether it is China, Taiwan, or New York. In this way, if traditional patriarchy requires one stable location or country to be its “root,” then Gao’s transnational patriarchy becomes more “organic” since Gao’s roots can grow and multiply themselves as if they have living organisms.

Gao’s journey to America, however, intensifies the connection between transnational patriarchy and Taiwan’s nationalism when he encounters New York’s Taiwanese American community. Soon after Wei-Wei and Wei-Tung had their wedding ceremony at New York’s City Hall, Simon treats the whole family to dinner in Flushing’s Chinatown. In the restaurant, Gao and his former subordinate’s dialogue stresses the importance of exerting Taiwanese/Chinese patriarchy and Taiwan’s nationalism in America:

OLD CHEN. This is my restaurant. It’s my third son’s. But what is his, is mine.
MRS. GAO. Now you’re “boss” Chen, right?
GAO. Please join us.
CHEN. Oh, no. I’m not worthy of sitting at your table. (…)
CHEN. (To Wei-Tung) You got married at City Hall?
WEI-TUNG. That’s right. This is our wedding dinner.
CHEN. Young master, I know I’m out of line…but the commander is very well-known and respected. How could you have been so inconsiderate? I’m only a servant, but even when my third son was married, I had a banquet for 200 guests… (to Gao) I’ve got an idea! Although you kids want to be modern, what is a wedding without a banquet? So if you don’t mind that my place is a bit small, and the food not so great, it would please me if I could offer it to the young master for his wedding banquet.
WEI-TUNG. That would be too much trouble for you.
CHEN. No trouble…Young master, I’m not doing this for you. It’s for the Commander. If you don’t let him have this, then you’re an ungrateful son…Commander, you won’t lose face in America. (My italics)

While Gao intends to treat Chen as equal, Chen maintains the patriarchal system and military class even though both of them have retired. The restaurant is owned by Chen’s son, but for Chen, his son’s possessions can be and should be shared by his father, the patriarch of the family.
In addition, as Mrs. Gao indicates, Chen is now a boss who has capitals and employees, yet he still considers himself a soldier of lower rank who is “not worthy of” sitting and dining with his former superior. Chen’s over-modesty “re-presents” an image of Taiwan’s social system in New York, and it, at the same time, consolidates Gao’s patriarchy by preserving and reviving the superior-subordinate relationship. In both cases, Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy is at work even though those Taiwanese people are in America. The familiar Taiwanese society is copied, transplanted, and processed regardless of national boundaries. Furthermore, Chen’s sponsorship in Wei-Tung’s wedding banquet helps to protect Gao’s “face”—dignity and pride—and to save Wei-Tung from being ungrateful and un-filial. What lie under Gao’s “face” and Wei-Tung’s gratefulness are a more traditional Taiwanese/Chinese concept of family that regards individuals not as individuals but as members of an entire family. Similar to the logic behind Chen and his third son’s mutual ownership of the restaurant, Wei-Tung’s wedding is not merely about himself and Wei-Wei but about the whole families, and especially about his parents. For Chen, collectivism of family works in Taiwan, and it should also work in America, and this collectivism of family expands to nationalism. Chen’s respect toward Gao and his generosity, in fact, can be interpreted as an effort to not only save Gao’s face, but all of Taiwanese people’s face in America.

The restaurant scene illustrates the link between Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchy and nationalism; however, the banquet scene highlights a more complicated relations between masculinity and nationalism. When Wei-Tung Wei-Wei are toasting their guests, some guests shout out to urge Wei-Tung to drink:

GUEST 1. This is wrong. You just can’t toast an entire table and just take a short sip. You must toast a full glass to each of us. We all go back a long way…Come on, Tofu-head, if you won’t drink to us, you must at least drink to Taiwan. (my
Binge drinking is a very common activity in wedding banquets in Taiwan. It is a widely accepted custom that the more the groom drinks and toasts to his guests, the more respect as well as gratitude he shows to his guests. Ang Lee does not forget to incorporate this Taiwanese characteristic when he represents rites of passages in *The Wedding Banquet*. As the dialogue indicates, Wei-Tung has to give in to the binge drinking demand to prove not only his nationalism, but also his masculinity. In Guest 1’s lines, if Wei-Tung does not toast and finish his glass, he fails and loses his “face” shamefully in front of his guests. Consuming alcohol in this instance is not just an entertainment but becomes a serious test that helps to screen out unpatriotic/unqualified Taiwanese. In other words, if Wei-Tung cannot or is not willing to drink, he fail to claim Taiwan and his identity as Taiwanese. In fact, drinking to celebrate in wedding banquets taken place in Taiwan might not carry the same patriotic significance; if Wei-Tung holds his banquet in Taiwan, drinking will not be such a test of identity. However, nationalism and patriotism magnify and strengthen themselves through ceremonial rituals when they are placed out of the national boundary. Hence, Wei-Tung and Wei-Wei’s wedding now shifts from an individual choice, to a family business, and finally to a national occasion that other Taiwanese people can participate.

Moreover, Guest 2’s line that “Gao. We dare you to come over here (高偉同，有種過來 Gao Wei-Tung, Yǒu Zhǒng Guò Lái⁴⁶)” does not simply mean to prompt Wei-Tung to drink more or to stimulate the merry atmosphere. In fact, “Zuong/種” in Mandarin Chinese is the same

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⁴⁶ The English pronunciation is provided by the translation system on Taiwan’s Ministry of Education’s website. See crptransfer.moe.gov.tw/.
word as “seed” and it refers to boldness, courage, or masculinity (for it covertly means the ability of reproductivity for one to “spread the seeds”). Therefore, Guest 2’s line can also be interpreted as “Gao, if you are manly enough you will come here.” In this way, the wedding banquet now functions as a communal site to exert Taiwanese nationalism and patriotism, and, meanwhile, as a public domain that pushes a man to attest his masculinity. Again, whether one is masculine or not depends on the community’s approval rather than on one’s personal choice. Wei-Tung’s masculinity becomes something to display publicly. This scene reminds the audience of earlier scenes where Wei-Tung exercises in a gym. No matter where Wei-Tung is, in the banquet or in the gym, his masculinity is constantly shown and accentuated by Lee’s portrayal of external body (sweating muscles) or internal body (ability to drink). As if to contrast the stigmatic image that homosexual men are woman-like, Lee establishes a masculine character in Wei-Tung: represented by a career success, wealth, and an attractive male body. Compared to the restaurant scene, the wedding banquet clearly shows how Taiwanese nationalism is entangled with patriotism and masculinity. As such, the scene strongly leaves Taiwanese nationalism gendered.

Although *The Wedding Banquet* is often regarded as a global (in terms of its distribution) or American film (in terms of its settings), its significant numbers of Taiwanese culture, customs, and ideologies are hard to ignore. Notably, Lee’s depiction of homosexuality is also distinguishably Taiwanese. Indeed, *The Wedding Banquet* deals with two homosexual men in New York, yet Lee’s portrayal of Wei-Tung and the way he interacts with his parents is far from “Westernized/Americanized,” especially in the scene when Wei-Tung reveals his sexual identity to his mother. In the film, after his father is sent to the hospital, Wei-Tung rushes there, and finally decides to coming-out to Mrs. Gao:

WEI-TUNG. I was afraid you couldn’t take it. It’s been 20 years. I’ve been living a big
lie. There has so much pain and joy. I’ve wanted to share with you, but I couldn’t. Sometimes I wanted to tell you everything, but I couldn’t burden you with what has been with me so long.

MRS. GAO. I don’t get it. Why didn’t you tell us Wei Wei was pregnant? What is all this?

WEI-TUNG. Ma, I want to tell you I’ve known it for a few days.

MRS. GAO. After you guys fought this morning…I told her that judging by her bad mood, she’s carrying a boy. Congratulations, son.

WEI-TUNG. My marriage is a fraud. Simon is my real friend.

MRS. GAO. Friend?

WEI-TUNG. Friend. Lover. Ma, I’m gay, and Simon is my lover. We’ve been living together for five years.

MRS. GAO. Simon led you astray? How could it happen?

WEI-TUNG. Nobody led me astray. I was born this way.

MRS. GAO. Nonsense. You had girlfriends in college. Jean. Lei Lei. You were intimate with them.

WEI-TUNG. That was the thing to do. Every guy had a girl. I was no exception. It’s hard for a gay man to find someone compatible to be with. That’s why I treasure Simon so much. Look around you. How many so-called normal couples are fighting, divorced? They only wish they could be as loving as Simon and me. How can you accuse Simon of leading me astray? If it weren’t for Pa’s need of grandchild, and your constant matchmaking, I’d be very happy the way it was.

MRS. GAO. Is the child yours?

WEI-TUNG. Yes. That fake marriage was to get her a green card and to make you happy. But things got out of hand. What a mess.

MRS. GAO. Your father must not know.

WEI-TUNG. I know.

MRS. GAO. It would kill him. What went wrong?

It is worthwhile to point out the meaning underling the location of this scene. Instead of choosing a familiar space, Lee filmed this confession in a hospital. Generally speaking, the hospital is a place for the ill and the malfunctioned. Hospitals are normally places for “unhealthy” people who seek professional medical care. With such a location setting, the scene considerably resembles a clinic consultation between a mental/physical patient and his doctor. In this way, Wei-Tung’s identity as a homosexual man is converted into an illness that needs to be diagnosed, treated, and cured. This problematic and morbid connotation to homosexuality is not foreign to the common belief and fear in Taiwanese society that engaging in homosexual intercourse causes
HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The scene therefore carries a therapeutic tone for Mrs. Gao to accept/heal Wei-Tung’s “abnormality,” or his homosexual orientation.

According to Frank T.Y. Wang, Herng-Dar Bih and David J. Brennan, gay men in Taiwan usually find it difficult to come out to their parents due to the pressure of filial piety and the responsibilities of marriages and providing heirs. Their pressure and family duty result in many fears that they believe will hurt or disappoint their parents. A gay man’s decision to come out depends on how his parents view homosexuality, and in Taiwan, parental attitude toward homosexuality are often negative. Wang, Bih, and Brennan also discovered that there are several strategies which gay men in Taiwan tend to use in the situation of coming out: hiding at home or running away from home, testing and educating parents, and using incremental approach (such as through the negotiations assisted by siblings). On the other hand, parents have five different framings in responding to their sons’ coming-out: transitional framing, social learning framing, filial piety framing, Buddhist spiritual framing, and sworn brotherhood (framing). With transitional framing, parents believe that being gay is something that will eventually disappear when their “children grow” older. With social learning framing, parents believe that being gay results from learning from friends. Filial piety framing requires one to fulfill one’s family duty: get married, regardless of one’s sexual identity. Buddhist spiritual framing is a way for parents to find consolation in religious beliefs. Sworn brotherhood, or male bonding, can be traced back to a well-respected tradition of male-to-male friendship passing down from ancient China. Unlike male homosexuality, male bonding is more socially accepted and is even regarded as beneficial.47

47 Wang, Bih, and Brennan explain that “in traditional Chinese culture, same-sex boding among men is highly valued, perhaps even more so that spousal love (Chou 1997). The ritual of Golden...
Wei-Tung’s lines remarkably correspond to what Wang, Bih, and Brennan outline in their research. Wei-Tung perceives his parents’ conservatism toward homosexuality, so he chooses not to come out to his parents until Wei-Wei’s pregnancy. Wei-Tung’s line “burden you with what has been with me so long” undoubtedly shows his fear of frustrating his parents and becoming an ungrateful son who brings shame to the family. Wei-Tung’s delayed coming-out is a consequence of such fear of parental denial and disappointment. In addition, Wei-Tung’s immigration experience can be read as an example of “running away from home.” In Taiwan’s society where three generation household is regarded as normal, an only son like Wei-Tung should live with his parents and look after them. However, Wei-Tung decides to run away from his home in Taiwan and stay with Simon in New York, “abandoning” his filial piety, a selfish deed deemed by many in Taiwan’s society. Though the strategy does allow Wei-Tung to enjoy certain freedom of individualism and it also protects Wei-Tung’s sexual identity from being known by his parents, it situates Wei-Tung in a perpetual dilemma between family duty and individual happiness. Furthermore, as Wang, Bih, and Brennan claim, Wei-Tung makes attempts to educate Mrs. Gao about the reality of homosexuality. When Wei-Tung says, “It’s hard for a gay man to find someone compatible to be with. That’s why I treasure Simon so much. Look around you. How many so-called normal couples are fighting, divorced? They only wish they could be as loving as Simon and Me,” he is providing a strong counterpoint to the inferiority and stigma that homosexuality carries in the Taiwanese society. As to oppose Mrs. Gao’s efforts to

Orchid (Jordan 1985) in Chinese custom allows men to become such close friends that they may even share clothes. Stigma attached to the term homosexuality may be defused by adopting local cultural notions about same-sex relationships, such as ‘sworn brotherhood’ as a reframe discourse that provides positive interpretation and understanding for men’s intimate relationships” (293).
“straighten” his homosexuality, Wei-Tung tries to make her comprehend the interior nature of his queer life. In addition, Wei-Tung’s decision to come out to his mother, not his father, further conforms to the conventional gender relations in family in Taiwan: while fathers take charge of external affairs (such as work and salary) and major family decisions (such as relocation), mothers are responsible for domestic matters (such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after children) and children are often more close to their mothers. Wei-Tung’s decision proves the intimate relation between himself and Mrs. Gao, and it also reveals Wei-Tung’s concept of family relation as deeply ingrained into Taiwanese culture.

As for Mrs. Gao, her response also can be explained by Wang, Bih, and Brennan’s transitional, social learning, and filial piety framings. After the scene and throughout the second half of the film, Mrs. Gao more than once expresses her wish for Wei-Tung to “recover” from homosexuality and become heterosexual. Homosexuality, for Mrs. Gao, is a short-term illness similar to an influenza caused by infective virus. So, to her, “time heals everything,” and Wei-Tung’s inclination to love men can be cured as time goes by. Moreover, Mrs. Gao’s line “Simon led you astray” reveals her mindset that she thinks Simon “corrupts” Wei-Tung. In Mrs. Gao’s case, she wields both “transitional” framing and “social learning” framing to negate the possibility that homosexuality is a personal choice and that people can be born with and identify themselves with this sexual orientation. Rather, homosexuality is seen as an immaturity in a certain stage of one’s life, as a disease that heals over time, and a negative social influence. Last but not least, Mrs. Gao also uses “filial piety” framing. Mrs. Gao’s question “is the child yours?” shows her concerns about the family duty of producing offspring. Once she receives affirmation
that Wei-Tung has fulfilled his family responsibility to have a child, she reluctantly and partially accepts Wei-Tung and Simon’s relationship.

All in all, though in *The Wedding Banquet* Lee primarily deals with the issue of homosexuality and family, he also discusses how masculinity, nationalism, and Taiwanese culture impact gender and sexual identity. For Lee, when being situated in an overseas location, Taiwan’s nationalism intensifies and becomes a necessity for Taiwanese American communities to hold on to a way to maintain their ties to their homeland. On the other hand, Lee’s representations of homosexuality, personified by Chao and Lichtenstein, conforms substantially and exclusively to Taiwan’s public imagination, cultural ideologies, and common attitudes toward the LGBQ communities in Taiwan. The depiction of the Gao family epitomizes how gay men interact with their family in Taiwan not in the Westernized manner of the diaspora. *The Wedding Banquet* thus can be seen as Lee’s sympathy toward the homosexual issues in Taiwan, and as his reflection on nationalism and mother country.

*Brokeback Mountain* and Debates of Genre and Sexuality

Well, I wish I know how to quit you! First of all, I want to thank two people who don't even exist, or I should say…….They do exist because imagination of Annie Proulx and the artistry of Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana. Their names are Ennis and Jack. And they told all of us who make *Brokeback Mountain* so much about not just all the gay men and women whose love are denied by the society but just as important the greatness of love itself […] On *Brokeback*, I felt you were with me every day. And I just did this movie after my father passed away, more than any other, I made this for him. And finally, to my mother and family and everybody in Taiwan, Hong Kong, China 謝謝大家的關心! Thank you!

48The Chinese sentence here can be translated as “Thanks a lot for your attention and encouragement.”
On March 5, 2006, at the 78th Academy Awards Ceremony, Lee delivered the above speech when receiving the Best Achievement in Directing. He customarily thanked his staff and family, yet, the speech is more than merely an ordinary award show speech in the sense that he points out how his familial and (cultural) nationalism influenced the making of *Brokeback Mountain*. There are two aspects that make the speech significant in this study of Lee. First, *Brokeback Mountain* is about homosexuality and he made the film in support of human rights, which he frames as freedom to seek and fulfill love. This mission of advocating equal rights echoes back to *The Wedding Banquet*, in which Lee also shows his sympathy for homosexual communities. Second, he dedicates this film to his father and family, and he also stresses that his appreciation went to “everybody in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China.” In many of Lee’s interviews, he stresses the great influence of his father, the “muse,” or the source, of his earlier “father knows best” trilogy. The director’s thematic focus of father figures continues beyond the trilogy and clearly reappears in his American films, such as *Brokeback Mountain*. Moreover, in the speech, he deliberately mentions his native country (Taiwan) and two places related with his native culture (Hong Kong and China). Here, Lee’s references to his nationality and cultural roots not only accentuates his status as a transnational filmmaker but also reveals an ambition to bring Taiwan and Chinese culture to the attention of the American mainstream media to allow international audience to “see” Taiwan and Chinese culture. With this context in mind, the speech helps to situate *Brokeback Mountain* into a trademark Ang Lee film, which joins *The Wedding Banquet* to discuss the intersection of homosexuality, masculinity, culture, and familial relations.

The film presents the homosexual love between Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger). The two men first meet in Wyoming for a job for herding sheep.
During their stay on Brokeback Mountain, Jack and Ennis fall in love with each other. When the job is over, Ennis and Jack part, and both get married, have their own families, and settle in different states. After few years, Ennis and Jack meet again and resume their relationship. Jack wants to run away with Ennis, but Ennis refuses due to a childhood trauma, in which he witnessed a gay man being tortured and murdered. Their (secret) relationship continues for few years and one day, Ennis receives the news of Jack’s death. Upon visiting Jack’s family home, Ennis finds the clothes he left on Brokeback Mountain, and it was folded together with Jack’s shirt. Ennis takes the two clothes with him for a reminder of Jack and his love. The film ends with Ennis, now living alone with the mementos of Brokeback Mountain—a postcard and Jack’s clothes—in a trailer, where we see him as he accepts his daughter’s invitation to her wedding.

As a mainstream film about homosexuality, not surprisingly, *Brokeback Mountain* has drawn plenty of discussions, both inside and outside academic circles. In academic circles, scholarly criticism can be categorized into three dimensions: the film and its genre, the issue of (homo)sexuality, and the characters’ familial relations. For the discussion of genre, many scholars situate *Brokeback Mountain* into the spectrum of the Western, but they also argue the film merges the elements of melodrama, romance, and tragedy into the plot. For instance, Robin Wood dubs the film “the first tragedy in Ang Lee’s career” (31). Ara Osterweil thinks that it does not challenge social taboos; instead, by observing Lee’s treatment of characters and the ending of the film, Osterweil finds that the film adopts generic conservatism to represent homosexuality, and in this way, downplays the radicalness of the issue. In the same vein, Thomas Piontek suggests that the film is not radical nor able to change the society’s attitude toward the issue of homosexuality. The film becomes a moral pedagogy and its popularity somewhat shows that
Hollywood has not progressed since *Philadelphia* (1993). For the discussion of sexuality, Martin F. Manalansan notices the racial hierarchy in the film, and the leading male characters’ superior masculinity is based upon colored, marginal masculinity, which Manalansan specifies by pointing out the Mexican gay prostitute in the film. James R. Keller and Anne Goodwyn Jones think that the film enhances the traditional American narratives of manhood and masculinity, and Lee’s treatment “depicts, even recuperates traditional American masculinity” (24), rather than challenges the prevalence of these accepted gender features. The film shows the culture’s enduring prejudices about homosexuality, but debunks the gay/straight dualism by exerting multiple or bi-sexualities. Regarding the discussion of family, Jane Rose and Joanne Urschel set out determining the impact on forming masculinity and individuality. Rose and Urschel consider the social ideology of family and gender from the 1960s to 1980s and conclude that due to “the heterosexist macho culture of 1960s America” (248) and the want of good father and son relations, the two leading male characters suffer from emotional repression caused by their fathers’ mental or physical abuse. In addition to the family background, the hypermasculinity of the 1960s, as represented by cowboy culture, forces the two characters into the struggle of “the masculine” men in the society.

Thus, critics retrace the history of queer films in the Hollywood, and they are in doubt of the film’s pioneer status, as the production company’s campaign advocates, in making queer issues into the main topic of a film. In sum, the majority of critics position Ang Lee and *Brokeback Mountain* within an American cultural scenario. What is certain for those critics are the film’s explicit representations of Americanness, symbolized by the motif of cowboy and the West, and what homosexuality entails in a rather conservative American society in the 1960s.
Notably, though, Chris Berry argues that the film is very Asian, considering the form which mixes Hollywood melodrama with a very Chinese family-ethics theme. Berry finds that “Confucian-derived values dictate that our primary concern is less with the fate of the individual and more with the fate of the family self. As a result, the struggle is between an individual’s sense of duty and their selfish personal desires” (33). In the film, Ennis can be read as a character encountering this dilemma between individual desire and family duty, and this theme has also being represented in Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet*. Interestingly, beyond Berry’s observations, if Lee delineates Taiwanese nationalism (and what it means to be Taiwanese) and masculinity in *The Wedding Banquet* through the issue of homosexuality and family, *Brokeback Mountain* can be seen as a companion film as Lee deals with the similar issues. Though the two films are in quite different periods of time, locations, and nations, the recurring themes in both help to develop a transnational, cross-cultural understanding of Lee’s cultural mediations and negotiations. In other words, since the 1990s, the period when Lee made his three Taiwanese films, he has established his trademark themes of East Asian family ethics and patriarchy that are influenced by Confucianism. When *Brokeback Mountain* and *The Wedding Banquet* are paired together, it is not difficult to find that these important themes repeat themselves even in Lee’s American films. Therefore, within this particular context, the connections and transitions of Lee’s ideas of family and fatherhood in *Brokeback Mountain* illustrate his transnational approaches in handling American culture and familial relations.
Class, Queer, Masculinity in *Brokeback Mountain*

The Little Ku’er Encyclopedia, cited earlier in this chapter, mentions a less noticed but very intriguing discrepancy between urban gays and rural gays in Taiwan. While illustrating the (stereo)typical features of middle class homosexuals, the entry also reveals the less-known situation of “underground” homosexuals, who are either from the lower class or reside in rural areas. Unlike gays and lesbians in Taipei (the capital city of Taiwan) who have access to various resources and bountiful worldwide information about queer rights, those unrecognized, underclass gays and lesbians, deprived of (higher) education and information, often struggle with traditional family values that consider homosexuality as an abnormal act against filial piety. For those underprivileged homosexuals, “coming out” to claim a queer identity becomes difficult because social-economic status and class construct another obstacle for them. Under these social circumstances, it is no surprise that Taiwan’s gay and lesbian movement and activities often take place in Taipei City and Kaohsiung City, two metropolises in Taiwan. The polarized activities sharply widen the gap between urban and rural homosexuals. Nevertheless, the oppositions between urbanity and rusticity, and between middle class and working class do not exclusively exist in Taiwan only. In the United States, the Stonewall Riot in 1969 happened in New York City, another metropolitan area; whereas the story of *Brokeback Mountain* is set in 1963’s Wyoming. *The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain* respectively depict the two divergent social-historical contexts and classes to exemplify the dichotomies represented by urban and rural homosexual lives.

In *Brokeback Mountain*, there are numerous class distinctions between Ennis and Jack, whose life styles and economic conditions represent the working class and the middle class.
Coming from a working-class family, lacking in upbringing and proper education, Ennis is employed in mostly manual labor. Ennis’s poor manner of speaking, containing colloquial English and incorrect grammar, reflects his underprivileged socio-economic conditions. In Jack’s case, though he is from the working class, after his marriage with Laureen, he becomes a capitalist figure (for Laureen’s father owns a truck company) and thus leads an affluent life, which allows him more freedom and less family obligation. The class contrast between middle-aged Ennis and Jack becomes more explicit in the film’s second half. In the often discussed “how to quit you” scene, class differences between Ennis and Jack are drastically shown through their mobility (or lack thereof) and attitudes toward coming-out:

ENNIS. (Responding to Jack’s disappointment over his busy schedule) Jack, I got a work. Them earlier days I used a quit a job. You forget how it is bein’ broke all the time. You ever hear a child support? Let me tell you, I can’t quit this one. And I can’t get the time off. Was tough enough getting’ this time. The trade-off was August. You got a better idea?
JACK. I did, once.
ENNIS. Have you been to Mexico, Jack Twist? ‘cause I hear what they got in Mexico for boys like you.
JACK. Yes. I’ve been to Mexico. Is that a problem?
ENNIS. I’m going to tell you this one time, Jack Twist. And I ain’t fooling. What I don’t know, all the things that I don’t know could get you killed if I come to know them. I ain’t joking.
JACK. (...) We could have had a good life together. Real good life. Had us a place of our own! But you didn’t want it Ennis. So what we got now is Brokeback Mountain! Everything’s built on that! That’s all we got, boy. All. So I hope you know that, if you don’t never know the rest (...) I wish I knew how to quit you.
ENNIS. Then why don’t you? Why don’t you just let me be? It’s because of you that I’m like this. I’m nothing. I’m nowhere (...) I just can’t stand this anymore, Jack.

On discussing the next date, Jack complaints about Ennis’ passiveness and unavailability, but Ennis replied that he will be occupied with ranch work. The dialogue soon turns into an angry dispute over Jack’s visits to Mexico. Ennis reveals his fear that an unexpected disclosure of Jack’s sexuality would be fatal. It is worth noting that Jack’s command of grammar is obviously better, and this linguistic feature, paired with the two characters’ contrasting costumes,
contributes to a clearer cinematic representation of the conflict of social strata. Due to low social-economic conditions, Ennis’s personal freedom is restricted. Unlike Jack, who can afford frequent journeys out of Texas for personal purposes, Ennis is seldom allowed the luxury of holidays. Most of the time, he is bound by family duty and must work to provide financial support. In contrast, Jack has less monetary concerns and is able to travel alone to Mexico, an act that crosses not merely national borders but also a moral dividing line in light of the conservative attitudes toward homosexuality of the period. If Jack is portrayed as more active and less timid to seek gay partners, Ennis is in everlasting homophobic fear and silence about his homosexuality in most occasions.

In an earlier scene, the morning after Ennis and Jack have intercourse on Brokeback Mountain, Ennis casually says to Jack that “you know I ain’t queer,” and Jack replies, “Me neither.” Interestingly, the manner of the talk and the dialogue are doubly contradictory. What Ennis and Jack exchange here is a serious statement to refuse to come-out, and also one to re-claim their heterosexuality. Ennis transforms the scene into the determining moment of asserting (and also concealing) his sexual identity. The lines thus can be seen as a conscious disavowal of their sexual performance, and it foreshadows Ennis’ struggle between self-denial and self-acceptance in the second half of the film. Significantly, the divergence created by speech and action shows that language fails to be a useful signifying tool of claiming one’s sexual identity, and it also brings forward the question of rural gays’ anxious insecurity to identify themselves as homosexual in public. Without education, wealth, and youth, Ennis is remarkably similar to the “unthinkable” gays in Taiwan’s rustic areas. Ennis’s line, “I’m nothing. I’m nowhere,” thus can
be read as a transnational response to the question facing all rural gays, whether in Taiwan or in America: Where do they go to hold onto their queer identity?

Moreover, Ennis’s quietness does not merely come from his lower socioeconomic status, but also from his childhood memory of witnessing a castration, which the film shows to the audience through his subjective recollection. In the scene, Ennis’s homophobic father forces him to witness how Earl’s castrated corpse was “displayed” in public as if to warn him of the consequence of being homosexual. Ennis’s father, who is clearly the patriarchy here, forces Ennis to watch and become complicit in the punishment of “committing” homosexuality. The exertion of the patriarchy enforces fear, compulsory heterosexuality, and social discipline. According to Connell, complicit masculinity applies to the majority of men who follow and obey the rules ordained by hegemonic masculinity. Adopting this concept, young Ennis in this scene is forced into a position of complicit masculinity\(^49\) for he accepts and internalizes, however reluctantly, the patriarchal view of gender and compulsory heterosexuality. The incident inscribes the dichotomy of gender and compulsory heterosexuality in Ennis, making him constantly suppress his own queer desire by reviving the fear of castration, risk of life, and negation of masculinity. This scene helps to explain the impetus, which merges hegemonic masculinity, patriarchal authority, and homophobic fear, behind Ennis’s ambivalent attitude toward his self-identity. This is also the case especially for those, such as Connell’s subordinate

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\(^{49}\)Connell defines complicit masculinity as “masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense…Marriage, fatherhood and community life often involve extensive compromises with women rather than naked domination or an uncontested display of authority” (79-80).
and complicit masculinities, who do not have the economic privilege or strength to resist such oppression.

Yet in *Brokeback Mountain*, hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, and complicit masculinity do not remain stable, and often they shift in different scenarios. Different masculinities are not polarized nor stand-alone; rather, they exist simultaneously in a character. In Ennis’s case, he embodies hegemonic masculinity as he gains patriarchy. Two scenes can illustrate how Ennis demonstrates his hegemonic maleness. When Ennis takes his family to see the fireworks, disregarding Alma’s dissuasion, he beats the two rogues who speak dirty words and behave rudely toward his family. Ennis’s dominance over the two men is clearly shown through his violent body movements. Later in the film, when Ennis comes to Alma and Monroe’s house for Thanksgiving dinner, Alma reveals to Ennis that she knows of Jack and his relationship. Enraged, Ennis attempts to intimidate Alma with menacing gestures and threatening language. Ennis’s lack of respect for and his urge to manipulate Alma underpin his excessive brutality in subordinating women. Ennis’s masculine performance corresponds well to Connell’s suggestions about hegemonic masculinity: it stands on top of other types of masculinities and women.

In a different manner, Jack is initially of a subordinate masculinity because of his queer identity and lower social economic status. When Laureen gives birth to Bobby in the hospital, Laureen’s parents stand around her and the baby, while Jack stands beside the door alone. As Laureen’s father asks Jack to bring cans of formula back to the room, he throws the car keys at Jack nonchalantly and calls him “rodeo” instead of his name, as if Jack is only a servant of the family. The father’s contempt for Jack can easily be sensed through the superiority he wields in
the relationship. When the family have Thanksgiving dinner, Jack and his father-in-law quarrel over whether to allow Bobby to watch football. After a few rounds of shutting down and turning on the TV, Jack shouts angrily at his father-in-law, “Now you sit down, you old son of a bitch! This is my house, this is my child, and you are my guest!” After Jack’s emotional outburst to reclaim his ownership of the household, the father-in-law gives in, both physically and meaningfully, by submissively sitting down at the guest seat and handing the turkey knife over to Jack. On the surface, it is an argument over watching TV and turkey cutting; however, on another level, it is a competition for patriarchal authority and hegemonic masculinity.

“Dining Table Politics” and Father-in-Crisis in *Brokeback Mountain*

In Lee's Taiwanese films, scenes of family dinners play very crucial roles in representing familial relations, conflicts between characters, and generation gaps. For the filmmaker, dining is never merely simple daily routine; eating together provides an important occasion for characters to communicate and show genuine feelings. On the dining table, nothing can be hidden from one another. In *Pushing Hands*, the Chu family's divided meals bring forth the confrontations between traditional Chinese and contemporary American culture. The Sunday dinners at the Chus' house in *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman* are often full of conflicts and surprises due to the poor communication between the father and the three daughters. In *The Wedding Banquet*, Mr. Gao and Wei-Tung's divergent views toward marriage and family usually clash with each other during meal times. These notable scenes contribute to a particular discourse of “dining table politics” that reflects the impact of modernity and Western culture on the traditional Taiwanese-
Chinese family (embodied by various domestic issues, such as progeny, marriage, and cultural identity), and how differently each family member embraces them. In addition to the “dining table politics,” Lee also develops a common theme of “father-in-crisis”: as an aging father faces challenges from younger generations or from Western influences and has difficulty maintaining a family based on traditional Chinese filial piety. Both themes become signatures that migrate over when Lee moves from the Taiwanese era to his American era.

Indeed, *Brokeback Mountain* features the confrontations at the dining table and the illustrations of father-in-crisis. In the middle of the film, Lee arranges two Thanksgiving dinners consecutively to contrast the transformation of patriarchal power in different families. In the first Thanksgiving scene, the two fathers battle for power, but in the second, neither of the fathers is capable of gaining the status and the power of the patriarch. As discussed in the previous section, the Thanksgiving dinner in Jack's house becomes a contest of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy, and it ends with Jack winning the power in the family. Right after the scene in Jack's house, the camera immediately cuts to Alma and Monroe's house, where Ennis and the rest of the family are having their Thanksgiving dinner. Being a guest in another man's household, Ennis participates in a family event where he claims neither ownership nor the position of a patriarch. Even though Ennis is surrounded by his ex-wife and daughters, he is merely a guest. Monroe, the owner of the house, sits at the far end of the table and seldom joins the conversation as if he is only a guest of the family. The kitchen table with two guests but without a real master is uncomfortable. The scene becomes more awkward with the director's focus on Monroe's lack of hegemonic masculinity. The camera carefully captures how Monroe cuts the turkey with an electric knife, an easy act that can be seen as “unmanly,” as opposed to how Jack manually
carves the turkey. Monroe's masculine insufficiency is not only highlighted in this scene but also
in an earlier instance when Ennis brings his two young daughters to the grocery store. Little
Alma Jr. accidentally pushes down many cans of peanuts from the shelf, but Monroe only smiles
tenderly to Alma and helps clean the mess. Compared to Ennis's roughness, Monroe is portrayed
as a very gentle and soft character. However, his mild characteristics are somehow considerably
at odds with common masculine traits – aggressiveness and bodily strength. In this way, Ennis is
a father that loses his household after the divorce while Monroe is a father who fails to meet the
standards of prevalent hegemonic masculinity. Though Monroe and Ennis are fathers in terms of
biological relationship (Ennis is the father of the two daughters and Monroe is expecting a child),
the patriarch of the house is absent in the scene since neither of them is qualified for the position.

If “father-in-crisis” is a prominent theme in Lee's films, in *Brokeback Mountain* it
encompasses several characters. Jack, Monroe, and Ennis all face challenges to their fatherhood,
and it is questionable whether any of them can be called a good father, or “a father who knows it
all,” due to their emotional or physical distance from their children and wives. Contrastingly,
viewing the three old Taiwanese fathers in Lee's father trilogy, not all of them can reach the strict
standards of “good fathers” either. From the old Chinese grandpa Chu to chef Chu to Mr. Gao,
the three characters have several shortcomings in their characteristics or decision-making during
major familial events. However, when it comes to treating the next generations, they foster their
children well, encourage them to enter into marriage, and reveal great eagerness in having
grandchildren. The three fathers' efforts with the younger generations correspond to the
traditional Confucian thought, “There are three ways to be un-filial, the worst is to not produce
offspring (不孝有三，無後為大)\(^{50}\)," which is considered the most fundamental family responsibility for patriarchs in Taiwanese-Chinese culture.

In *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis performs the “Taiwanese-Chinese” task of being responsible for childcare, even though this task sometimes requires sacrificing personal freedom. Such self-sacrifices are most conspicuous in three scenes: when Ennis first turns down Jack's proposal for running away together, when he refuses to go with Jack since he must spend the weekend with his daughters, and when he pushes their date from August to November for a tradeoff work in order to pay child support. Ennis endeavors to be the father of Alma Jr. and Jenny by providing financial support and company. Significantly, Ennis's paternal expectations of Alma Jr.'s marriage is not much different from those three Taiwanese-Chinese fathers. In the final scene, Alma Jr. comes to Ennis's trailer and notifies him of her wedding:

ENNIS. So what's the occasion?
ALMA JR. Me and Kurt. We're gettin' married.
ENNIS. Well, how long you known this guy for?
ALMA JR. About a year. (*Pause*) The wedding’ll be June 5th at the Methodist Church. Jenny will be singing, and Monroe is gonna cater the reception.
ENNIS. Now this Kurt fella — he loves you?
ALMA JR. Yeah, Daddy. He loves me. Was hoping you'd be there.
ENNIS. Yeah, I think I'm supposed to be on a roundup down near the Tetons. You know what? I reckon they can find themselves a new cowboy. My little girl, gettin' married, huh?

Here, Ennis and Alma Jr. become almost the American version of the Chus in *Eat Drink Man Woman*. In that film, the two daughters announce their marriage without asking for their father's permission. Stunned and speechless, the father has no other choice but to accept the unions. In the same manner, Ennis is also surprised and uncertain when Alma Jr. first tells him of the

\(^{50}\) This concept is drawn from *The Thirteen Confucian Classics*, which, as the title suggests, collects thirteen literary texts of Confucian ideas.
upcoming wedding. He intends to ask for more details about Kurt, yet Alma Jr. shifts the focus of the dialogue to suggest that marriage is her own choice, not what her father can determine. In both films, the daughters merely want to receive the fathers’ good wishes rather than parental permission. Chef Chu allows his daughters to decide how to hold their wedding ceremonies (the eldest daughter has hers in a church and the youngest does not have one) while Ennis gives up his roundup work for the ceremony. Importantly, both fathers make certain degrees of compromise to secure the upcoming marriages and promises of progeny. Their compromises echo the prevalent Confucian filial piety about the priority of offspring, which also appears in *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet*. In this way, Ennis is culturally transformed from an American cowboy to a rather Taiwanese-Chinese patriarch, who, along with the three Asian fathers, reiterates the core principle in Lee's philosophy of family.

From *Pushing Hands* to *Brokeback Mountain*, Lee's adherence to the necessity of continuing the ancestral line reflects the Confucian concepts of filial piety. However, it is far from being accurate to call Lee a traditionalist. In *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet*, patriarchal traditions are passed down as sons transfer the family names to grandsons, but in *Eat Drink Man Woman* and *Brokeback Mountain*, it is the daughters who carry on the torches of family, which is not a tradition in Asian societies. Furthermore, in Taiwan, children, especially daughters, still need their parents’ approval for marriage; otherwise they will be blamed for being ungrateful and un-filial. The Chu daughters' marriage announcements and how Chef Chu reacts to the abrupt news are quite untraditional since they defy the hierarchical conventions that seniors should be respected. On the other hand, marriages are often regarded as individual decisions in Western societies, but in *Brokeback Mountain*, the dialogue between Alma Jr. and
Ennis makes the wedding a shared event and the film ends with a hint of an optimistic family reunion. This also makes Ennis's ending line, “Jack, I swear” less poignant and more hopeful as if Ennis is promising Jack that he will live happily.

**Conclusion**

Twelve years after *The Wedding Banquet*, Lee made *Brokeback Mountain*, another homosexual-themed film that depicts a gay couple. In both films, Lee shows two of his central themes—a sympathy for the oppressed and the weak, and family. In *The Wedding Banquet*, by presenting Wei-Tung and Simon’s life and Wei-Tung’s coming out confession to his mother, the director helps the audience to understand what Taiwanese homosexual couples encounter in their lives. In *Brokeback Mountain*, by depicting the fruitless relation between Ennis and Jack, Lee tries to evoke the audience’s sympathy for the two gay men oppressed by society. Rather than merely discussing the LGBT issues, the two films tell stories of family and marriage. *The Wedding Banquets* involves the two generations of a Taiwanese-American family (as Wei-Tung and Simon’s), issues of same-sex marriage (as Wei-Tung and Simon’s), and the traditional Taiwanese-Chinese patriarchal system (represented by Gao), while *Brokeback Mountain* looks into the homosexual issues from the aspect of socioeconomics (urban gay and rural gay), gender stereotypes (such as familial roles and cowboy’s masculinity), and compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage. It proves that Lee's attention to homosexual issues and his concerns about family do not lessen in the new millennium. Significantly, despite the different milieus of the two films, Lee subtly transnationalizes his Taiwanese-Chinese cultural value of filial piety as
he mediates between Taiwanese families and American families. In *The Wedding Banquet*, he portrays Wei-Tung’s dilemma between fulfilling familial obligations (having a heterosexual marriage and producing a grandchild for his parents) and personal freedom (a relationship with Simon). In doing so, Lee brings the difficult situations of Taiwan's gays to the surface so as to gain more public attention, and he also positions the issue within an East-West cultural context to highlight the transnational feature of Taiwan’s LGBTQ movements. Later, in *Brokeback Mountain*, the filmmaker makes Ennis resemble a Taiwanese father, not unlike *The Wedding Banquet*’s Gao and *Eat Drink Man Woman*’s Chu, who takes care of his daughters and wishes them to enter into marriage. In this way, both films echo each other in demonstrating Lee’s cultural mediations between East and West, his sympathy for the oppressed, and a transitional domestic philosophy based on filial piety.
CHAPTER 3


Ang Lee has established himself as a transnational filmmaker through Life of Pi (2012), Brokeback Mountain (2005), and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), which won him wide acclaim. Yet, his American-made films focusing on American history or American life, such as Ride with the Devils (1999), The Ice Storm (1997), Taking Woodstock (2009), Hulk (2003), and Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk (2016), are often underappreciated because critics question whether Lee’s representations are accurate and “American” enough. As a transnational filmmaker who grew up in Taiwan, Lee has been constantly negotiating his status as a cultural outsider in America. Significantly, though being influenced by American culture, Lee’s Taiwanese experience still makes a great impact on his American-made films, particularly Taking Woodstock and The Ice Storm, with which he presents American society in the postwar periods from a Taiwanese perspective. Both films show how sociohistorical contexts and political diplomatic relations help an individual to form cultural identity and national ideology: Taking Woodstock represents Lee's idealized view of American society in the 1960s, while The Ice Storm displays a disillusioned American society in the 1970s. Lee continues to explore the dynamics of family as these two films show an alternative view of America from a Taiwanese viewpoint.

Therefore, Lee’s view of American cultural touchstones, like the famous Woodstock
Music Festival (1969), in some sense, is also a Taiwanese view. It reveals not only the filmmaker’s cultural negotiation between the East and the West, but also a Taiwanese ideology impacted by the US-Taiwan diplomatic relations, cross-pacific media transmission, state intervention, and pseudo-imperialist cultural invasion in Taiwan. In an interview conducted by The Guardian in 2009, promoting his film Taking Woodstock (2009), Lee reflects on his youth in Taiwan and his perceptions of American culture, in particular Woodstock:

[Woodstock] it's like the ideal utopia where passion, sharing, and niceness can be for real, even for a brief time. Woodstock is something like a dream far away...something we worship at the same time the Vietnam War was going on. My hometown was an American Air Force base for the Vietnam War. All kinds of aircraft hovering our heads. It's a mixed feeling. We need security from America from the Second World War and also as a youngster...groovy...so it's really a mixture... [My italics] (Lee 2009)

Lee learned about Woodstock along with American hippie culture in the 1960s while a youth in Taiwan. As a stressed teenager, longing for a place free of school work, patriarchal control, and repressed social life, Lee found Woodstock the perfect and benevolent wonderland. When he remembers his youthful view of 60s America, Lee bridges and emphasizes the connections between himself as Taiwanese and the U.S. Broadly speaking, in the twentieth century, modernization and Westernization spread in East Asian Countries, especially South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong. In some sense, America was seen as a very good model of civilized, developed country. But it is too narrow to say Lee’s romantic longing and idealization of American power is the common view in East Asia; rather, compared to the attitudes held by other Asian countries (such as Japan, China, Vietnam, and the Koreas), his noticeable admiration for the U.S and the way of seeing the nation as Taiwan’s own protector are very typical Taiwanese. Lee uses “we” twice when he describes the feelings toward the American military force. For him, it is not a personal fervor for American heroism, but a collective and public emotion shared by
“we Taiwanese people” in a specific historic time. Lee’s idealization of Woodstock is not a pure or natural product, either. Instead, it comes into being in the political context where the diplomatic relations and Taiwan’s military dependence on America have both shaped Taiwanese political awareness and cultural identity. The interview also reveals the sense of insecurity among Taiwanese people due to the threats from The People’s Republic of China (PRC). America’s intervention has been considered a great help that saved Taiwan and its people from falling under Communist control.

In another interview, Lee discussed what the Korean War meant to him as a Taiwanese person:

When I grew up in Taiwan, the Korean War was seen as a good war, where America protected Asia. It was sort of an extension of World War II. And it was, of course, the peak of the Cold War. People in Taiwan were generally proAmerican. The Korean War made Japan. And then the Vietnam War made Taiwan. There is some truth to that. So when this hippie thing started to come up, I remember admiring the Americans. … On the other hand, you feel this insecurity – like any conservative view – that if America decided to go the other way, what would happen to us? Where is the protection, the foundation? So there is some of that tension in the film. [My italics] (Lee “Ang Lee”)

The interview further illustrates a shared attitude among Taiwanese people – that “pro-American” political view has been present since the Cold War. Indeed, American influence in Taiwan reached its peak during the Cold War, yet after the 1970s, American culture and political intervention continue to root in Taiwan’s society. Nowadays, Taiwanese people’s lives are still influenced by the US, not much different from Lee’s youth. The triangular relations of US-China-Taiwan reveal that Taiwan’s internal politics and sovereignty are barely a domestic affair, but a controversial issue that involves PRC, Taiwan’s most important love-and-hate Other, and the US, the unofficial protector of Taiwan. Therefore, I argue that since World War II, the US has been seen as Taiwan's the most important protector, and also because of American cultural products (such as pop music) circulated in the island, many Taiwanese people have rosy
idealizations about the affluent and free lifestyle in the US and the American culture, which is in sharp contrast to Taiwan's conservative and repressed society – controlled by Chiang's KMT government and Martial Law. *Taking Woodstock* and *The Ice Storm* not only reflect these public Taiwanese attitudes, but also the director’s private memories of his youth. In other words, the two films as a pair show a collective Taiwanese view about the United States: *Taking Woodstock* presents the ideal America that Lee worshipped in his youth, while *The Ice Storm* depicts a realistic and disillusioned America that he criticizes. Though being a cultural outsider in America, Lee somehow manages to capitalize on his cultural distance to offer these two America-themed films based on transnational mediations of cultures and political situations.

**The United States and the ROC/Taiwan’s Relations in the 1960s and 1970s**

The 1960s has played a very significant historical role in American politics, domestic affairs, economics, racial groups, and popular culture. John C. McWilliams points out that the decade in the United States was full of revolution, transformation, nonconformity, and reactions against the previous decades as “American[s] revolted against conventional moral conduct, civil right violations, authoritarianism in universities, gender discrimination, the establishment, and, of course, the war in the Southeast Asia” (1). Bernard von Bothmer mentions the two different political phases of the sixties: the “good sixties” and the “bad sixties.” The two terms are widely used by the liberals and the conservatives, respectively, when they refer to the era: conservatives use the terms more literally to criticize the protests and cultural changes later in the decade, while liberals use them more ironically to support the social change. The “good sixties” covers
the year 1960 to 1963, and it directly includes John F. Kennedy’s presidency, great national
defense and effective oppositions to Communist power, non-violent civil rights movements, and
the continuation of social standards from the past. The “bad sixties” come after 1963 and extend
to 1974. The term generally is concerned with the United States under the two presidents,
Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, anti-Vietnam War protests, radical and violent civil rights
protests, and a turbulent society that faces unparalleled challenges and contrasting ideas.

Indeed, counting the important historical events and figures in the era, 1960s and the first
half of the 1970s observed the rise and the death of African American activists Martin Luther
King Jr. and Malcolm X, the assassination of JFK in Texas, the legalization of public sale of the
Pill (oral contraceptives), the two Civil Right Acts, President Johnson’s The Great Society
program, hippie culture and the use of LSD, the Stonewall riot, Woodstock, Watergate, NASA’s
Apollo missions to the Moon, the Arab oil embargo, and so on. Yet, in many ways, the Vietnam
War, which increased US presence in East Asia, was the defining foreign policy issue of the era.
The United States invested a great amount of money and people in the fourteen years of war. As
of 1970, the number of American troops in Vietnam exceeded 500,000, and the casualty rate was
more than 50,000, not to include injuries and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The war
instigated a series of anti-war campaigns, the rising of counterculture, and the prevalence of
youth revolt. The war also made Americans reconsider and question the meaning and the purpose
of the nation’s military engagement in East Asia. During this particular period of time, Baby
Boomers began to come of age and confront values and traditions about politics, social justice,
and family, and American involvement in East Asia was at the center of this revolution.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Taiwan underwent a number of social transformations and
economic reforms. Chiang Ching-kuo’s successful Ten Major Construction Projects (a series of civil infrastructures) helped bring Taiwan wealth, and further accelerated Taiwan’s modernization, which was on the solid foundation set during the previous Japanese ruling period. In the three decades from 1949 to 1979, Taiwan shifted from a Japanese colony to a more modernized and wealthier island, if not yet a “country,” due to the unresolved Chinese Civil War. However, the country was firmly controlled by the KMT government’s iron fist. From 1949-1987, the government enforced Martial Law, which consisted of many regulations to monitor, control, and maintain social order. During the period, society was closely watched by the Taiwan Garrison Command (台灣警備總部). This governmental unit had excessive power used to arrest and punish Taiwanese people who “threatened ROC security and public order” (Roy 89). The Taiwanese society under Martial Law was highly restricted and repressed; the people’s rights to protesting, free speech and travel were all censored and prohibited. True freedom, democracy, and human rights were nearly impossible to seek under the authoritarian regime. The most significant exemplification is no other than Taiwan’s “White Terror51,” when thousands of Mainlanders and Taiwanese, especially intellectuals and elites, were sent to prison or were

51 Roy offers a clear explanation of the incident, as he writes, “The darkest facet of Taiwan’s Martial Law was a campaign of large-scale, politically motivated arrests of intellectuals and others during the 1950s that became known as ‘White Terror.’ Part-time or amateur political activists were frequently collared, charged with a serious crime such as plotting the overthrow of the government, and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. Estimates of the number of victims of the White Terror run as high as ninety thousand arrested and about half that number executed. The numbers of arrests and executions from the 1960s through the mid-1980s may have been lower, but a similar pattern continued. This was not solely an anti-Taiwanese campaign; thousands of Mainlander refugees were killed as well” (90). As Taiwan becomes more democratic in the new millennium, more and more people demand the KMT party to assist in nation-wide campaigns to reveal more historical truth and make compensations for the victims. After the lifting of Martial Law in 1987, films began to focus on the historical period and the trauma in the Taiwanese society. Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s Good Men, Good Women (1995), A City of Sadness (1989), Wan Jen’s Super Citizen Ko (1995), and Adam Kane’s Formosa Betrayed (2009) are among the films dedicated to this issue.
executed because the KMT government believed those people were against the KMT rule. As opposed to American society in the 60s, where citizens had the right to fight for social justice and equality, the Taiwanese society represented a sharp contrast in terms of expressions of freedom.

Nevertheless, the culture and politics of the United States generally was very familiar to Taiwanese people since the Pacific War. In 1950, the Korean War broke out, and President Harry S. Truman sent the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait to prevent a Communist takeover of Taiwan. The Truman administration’s decision to defend Taiwan was the result of the US communist containment policy, since Communist China eventually joined the Korean War, which consolidated the enforcement of this policy. In 1954, the KMT government and the United States signed the Mutual Defense Treaty. In 1960, President Dwight Eisenhower visited Taiwan, and in the same decade, Taiwan served as a US military base during the Vietnam War. Yet, in the second half of the 1960s, the Nixon administration gradually changed its attitude. In 1971, the KMT government was expelled from the United Nations, and in 1979, the Carter government terminated the diplomatic relations with Taiwan and officially recognized the Beijing government. Following the termination of the diplomatic relations, the Carter administration derecognized the ROC, ended the Mutual Defense Treaty, and withdrew the US military forces from Taiwan. Instead of an official nation-to-nation agreement, Carter signed the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) with the KMT government, which promises to “provide for continued American commercial and cultural relations with Taiwan…also outlines the terms of America’s security commitment to Taiwan” (25). The TRA lists crucial issues such as weapon purchase and the United States’ role in the PRC-Taiwan peace, and the United States and related affairs in Taiwan are managed by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) rather than an official
ambassador office.

An Americanized Taiwan

Despite the fluctuating diplomatic relations between the United States and Taiwan, many Taiwanese people of the era treated the United States as an amiable and respectable protector. American entertainment was believed to be more versatile and definitely “popular” than Taiwan’s monotone entertainment, then fully controlled by the KMT government and limited to certain genres permitted by the state. With the American troops stationed in Taiwan, clubs, radio stations, music, films, and language, on a large scale, “invaded” the previous cultural matrix that combined Han-Chinese culture and Japanese culture. Popular music and singers in the 1960s and 1970s, such as rock and roll and pop music (ranging from Elvis Presley to the Carpenters), enthralled the younger generations, who viewed the American culture with admiration and awe. English, especially American English, was seen as an index of cultural advancement and cultivation. Nicholas D. Kristof points out the keen enthusiasm and extreme high acceptance of American culture and language in Taiwan:

The fascination with American culture – more than with Japanese, European or Hong Kong culture – is apparent everywhere in Taiwan. American films are frequently shown on television and in movie theaters, with subtitles but not dubbed. Language schools are everywhere….Chinese here seem to admire America not only as an escape route but also for its popular culture, business opportunities and graduate schools. (para 14-17) [My italics]

Kristof’s comments underscore a cultural phenomenon – to see America as a utopia – that is distinguishably Taiwanese. What lies behind this (and does not show in Kristof’s report) is a prevalent cultural assertion that since American is a powerful country, speaking English
constitutes acquiring a powerful language, and a Taiwanese person can thus elevate himself or herself. In the same vein, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh notices that “the peculiar adherence to postwar American popular music…reveals a preoccupation with American culture, which paradoxically constitutes the core of a Taiwanese collective memory…American music generally represented an advanced, fantastic western world” (5-7). Yeh’s remarks not only echo Kristof’s observance, but once again emphasize the collective nature of this cultural obsession.

Hong-sheng Zheng argues that the 1960s is the decade when European and American culture comprehensively entered Taiwan. One of the mediums was the Armed Forces Network Radio Taiwan (AFNRT)52, now the International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT), which contributed to the widespread cultural phenomenon, and changed the youth audience’s tastes in Taiwan over the years. The radio station, as Zheng writes, was “an important channel for young students to listen to ‘the voice of the superior country’” (459). “Through the introduction and circulation of songs, books, and images,” as Zheng continues, “American youths’ ‘countercultural movement’—including its key components such as ‘flower children,’ hippies, rock and roll, and drug use—broadly informed Taiwan’s young intellectuals. At the same time, the notion of ‘modernization’ (understood predominantly as “Westernization”) gradually took on a radiant layer of sacredness in the eyes of youths in Taiwan” (459). Zheng’s findings specify the high degree of Americanization seen in the Taiwanese youth as well as, generally, their

52 According to the “About ICRT” webpage of the radio station’s official site, “ICRT was born on April 16th 1979, after the break in diplomatic relations between Taipei and Washington. From 1957 to 1979, the station’s predecessor, Armed Forces Network in Taiwan, served the needs of the US military then stationed on the island. AFNT was sold to the Taiwan government for US$1 as the American troops pulled out.” The station’s primary missions are “bridging cultural gaps and integrating the resources of Taiwan’s local and international communities for the ROC’s continued growth and prosperity,” and it helps Taiwanese people to “better understand English and join the global community.” www.icrt.com.tw/page_details.php?&mlevel1=5&mlevel2=9.
idealization of the American culture. Nevertheless, when the US is dubbed “the superior country,” relatively, Taiwanese people’s mentality of inferiority also manifests itself through the comparison. It is based on this lack of confidence and sense of inferiority that some Taiwanese youth during the time identified with a more modernized American culture, which comprised such “sacredness” and implied social advancement and stronger national power.

Of course, cultural studies scholars have long been criticizing America’s cultural invasions overseas, especially in developing countries within Asia and the Middle East. Edward Said argues that America is the new imperialist power which follows in the footsteps of the older European colonists to expand and deploy military arrangements in the so-called Third World. In his influential book, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said insightfully specifies that the foundation of American expansion is economic, but still intermingles with cultural ideas and ideologies, which uphold American exceptionalism and its mission to bring order and “peace” to non-European and Far Eastern countries. The so-called responsibility of “saving the world” has permeated into American mainstream media and the circles of social elites who believe that Europe and America should lead the world and that “America loved to think that whatever it wanted was just what the human race wanted” (287).

Said’s opinion has reverberated in recent Asian scholars’ discussions about the prevalence of American popular culture in East Asia. Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh contends that Taiwan has been in “a neocolonial codependent state of semiautonomy and semidependence” (15). Yeh explicitly indicates Taiwan’s unusual political reliance on America after World War II. Importantly, she notices the counter voice from Taiwan’s Nativist literary circle, which saw America’s existence in Taiwan as the major obstacle that stood between Taiwan and its true independence. This local
subversive voice shows that not all Taiwanese fully embrace America and its influence. Allen Chun further calls attention to the practice of “Americanization” in Taiwan. He argues that Americanization involves “a mass standardization of routine lifestyle and societal mindset [that sees] American modernity as the social norm…Americanization is in essence a generic process of pop culturalization” (504). Chun dismantles the close relation between Americanization with daily routines and popular culture, which targets and changes wider and younger populations in Taiwan.

In essence, as Kuan-Hsing Chen argues, the American political and military involvement in East Asia from the 1950s to 1970s created a very dominant “anticommunist-pro-Americanism structure” (7) that effectively established the evil image of communism. This anti-communist force also undermined the deimperializing and decolonizing impetuses in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. Chen contends:

Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, and South Korea became U.S. protectorates [after World War II], but since subjectivities in East Asia were so heavily colored by the favor of American influences [,,] the countries might more accurately be described as American subcolonies. *The United States has become the inside of East Asia, and it is constitutive of a new east Asian subjectivity….The cold war mediated old colonialism and new imperialism…The Vietnam War reinforced the anticommunism-pro-Americanism structure.* (8) [My italic]

Chen’s remark highlights Taiwan’s highly dependent and semi-colonial status in its relations with America. Furthermore, he claims that America has already been an inseparable part in the local subjectivities. Chen’s findings therefore echo Said, Yeh, and Chun in their skeptical views about American presence in East Asia, and his political examination of the area also encourages an alternative approach that considers more of nationalism, de-colonialism, and what it means to be “Taiwanese” when the essence of Taiwan is already a mixture of various cultures. Generally speaking, the above cultural scholars clearly enunciate that Taiwanese people internalize the anti-
communist ideology that demonizes communism but idealizes democracy and capitalism; meanwhile, they also to a great extent identify with American values as well as lifestyles due to the high degree of Americanization in Taiwan.

Strikingly, Lee brings up the issue of American Exceptionalism in an interview:

The United States leads the world, and American values become our core values. It is in the center of the stage, and the whole world sets itself on the good and bad, values of judgment, and consumption of the United States, and not to forget its people and military forces. And [American] English is very influential, too. I think not only Americans, but the whole world should observe the US, and to discuss America as a phenomenon. Because doing that is also discussing human behaviors. (Lee 2013)

Lee uses a rhetoric of generalization, such as “our,” and “the whole world,” to differentiate America and regions outside America. This rhetoric reflects American Exceptionalism when Lee mentions the country as a role model for “the world.” This mindset shows that Lee, as a Taiwanese subject, also internalizes America’s neo-imperialist ideology. However, he also encourages people to examine America. Lee’s identity shifts from a “semi-colonized” subject to an active observer who attempts to deconstruct America as a powerful phenomenon. Though the director does not directly discuss America’s politics and foreign policies in East Asia, the interview echoes the recent critical trend and reveals a critical attitude toward American imperialism generated by his distance as a cultural outsider. It is because he is now situated in a liminal position between Asia and America (thanks to his transnational career) that he becomes able to scrutinize his past fascination with America from a more comparative position.

_Taking Woodstock to (Taiwanese) Heart_

In the winter of 2013, Lee went back to Taiwan to serve as the chair of the jury for the
50th Golden Horse Awards, Taiwan’s most important annual film awards. On November 25, he was interviewed by Dr. Kwang-chung Yu (余光中), the professor Emeritus of English at National Sun Yat-sen University and a very prominent poet in Taiwan. When Dr. Yu asked Lee whether rock and roll inspired Taking Woodstock, Lee replied:

In fact, after shooting Lust, Caution (2007), I really wanted to find a more innocent and happier subject for my next film. When people talk about Woodstock, they are thinking about the music since music is the primary feature of it. Woodstock was a concert, and many fans thought they could listen to lots of music. When I read the novel (the original novel by Elliot Tiber), I felt that actually Woodstock’s music was pretty awful, albeit it was a classic. Woodstock’s environment was very bad. It was just a happening…a lot of young people established a “Da Tong Shi Zhie” there…But this happening ended the innocent era of the 1960s… People had a fantasy toward the nation, and it went through the Vietnam War, Civil Rights protests, human rights activities, African American rights movements, feminist awareness, and equal rights movements. 1967 was the most beautiful moment when everything joined together. It was hippie. After that, situations went downhill. In 1969, it was like the final radiance in Woodstock. No one died, no one fought, and everyone gathered there like in utopia…I really wanted to film a happier and more innocent subject to commemorate the loss of an innocent era…The novel is about a family next to Woodstock, and I think it hits the core spirit of Woodstock.53 (Lee 2013)

Lee is very interested in the 1960s, which he considers “an innocent era.” Lee uses two different phrases to describe Woodstock: a Chinese saying, “大同世界 (Da Tong Shi Zhie),” and Utopia. Da Tong Shi Zhie is a term borrowed from The Book of Rites, a classical Confucian text of morals and regulations. The term is first proposed by Confucius to promote the ideal political realm he longs for, but later the term gradually becomes a reference to a happy, peaceful, and harmonious world in general. Utopia is a derivative from Thomas More’s Utopia, a book about an idealized nation that has a perfect political system. In this sense, Woodstock converts itself into Lee’s spiritual haven after the exhausting filming of Lust, Caution. Though the director did not explicitly pursue an equivalent in the film, somehow, the linkage between the Eastern and the Western ideal world strongly makes this American film transnational and universal. Lee sets up a

53 The translations are my own.
youthful and innocent world that satisfies both Eastern and Western political imaginations. As he points out, the film was inspired by the musical event; however, paradoxically, both of the levels of *Taking Woodstock* move beyond the field of music to a wider social context.

*Taking Woodstock* is the story of a family. Elliot Tiber (Demetri Martin) is a designer in New York City. Because of his parents’ financial crisis, he returns home to Bethel, New York, to help his father Jake (Henry Goodman) and mother Sonia (Imelda Staunton) run their motel, the El Monaco Resort. Upon reading the newspaper, he notices that the Woodstock Festival was denied at the planned location, Woodstock, New York. In need of more money to pay off their mortgage, Elliot contacts Michael Lang (Jonathan Groff), the main organizer, in hopes that Woodstock Festival can be held in Bethel. Lang agrees and borrows Max Yasgur’s pasture lawn for the festival. The preparation process of the concert does not go smoothly. First Elliot faces the opposition and protests from the town people; then their motel is under inconvenient renovation so that it can accommodate more guests. And later, the family is also harassed by gangsters. In order to cope with these troubles, Elliot hires a transgender Korean-War-veteran, Vilma (Live Schreiber), for motel security. Elliot intends to join the concert himself; however, instead, he joins a hippie couple’s drug and sex escapades in their van. The next morning, Elliot has breakfast with his parents and quarrels with them over whether he can leave home for his own career. The next day, out of surprise, Elliot finds that Sonia secretly hides a great amount of cash in her closet, which is sufficient enough to pay for their mortgage. In the end, with Jake’s encouragement, Elliot makes up his mind to leave his family for California.

When it was released in 2009, *Taking Woodstock* did not draw much at the box office in
North America, which, according to Lee, was about the same as *Eat Drink Man Woman*. In “Subverting Heroic Violence: Ang Lee’s *Taking Woodstock* and *Hulk* as Antiwar Narratives,” David Zietsma argues that the two Lee films abandon the narrative of heroic violence, which is popular in American cinema. Instead, Lee establishes an alternative heroism based on de-masculinization and nonviolence so as to criticize patriotic militarism. Zietsma adopts Douglas Lackey’s term “universal pacifism,” which denotes that “all violence is ultimately destructive and therefore should be avoided” to explain Lee’s philosophy of nonviolence, which shows “a more human and more effective path to personal and national redemption” (193). Nancy Kang’s “Homo Migrants: Desexualization in Ang Lee’s *Taking Woodstock*” offers a clear historical LGBT context of the original novel of *Taking Woodstock*, and argues that the novel fits in the category of coming-out story (since much of the novel deals with Elliot, the protagonist, and his sexual orientation as homosexual). Yet, Kang claims that with the film adaptation, Lee shifts the novel’s focus and downplays the novel’s homosexuality, and adds that “what should have been a coming-out story veers off into a discourse weighing filial piety against duty to self.

Desexualization is a strategic approach to the work’s plot and characterization that renders peripheral what was originally central, namely homosexual identity formation” (210).

Kang’s argument echoes William Leung’s “So Queer Yet So Straight: Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* and *Brokeback Mountain*,” in which Leung also states that Lee attempts to normalize the queerness in his two gay films. Both Kang and Leung suggest that Lee’s cinema about

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54 According to The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) the box office gross for the film in USA was $7,443,007 (in September 2009), and *Eat Drink Man Woman*’s box office gross was $7,294,403. *Taking Woodstock* [www.imdb.com/title/tt1127896/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1127896/), and *Eat Drink Man Woman* [www.imdb.com/title/tt0111797/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111797/).

55 I have discussed more of Leung’s article in my previous chapter about *Brokeback Mountain* and sexuality.
homosexuality does not sufficiently develop the issue of homosexuality. In short, Zietsma and Kang similarly situate the film into an *American* context. Zietsma compares the film with other American hero movies and anti-war narratives, and Kang relates the film to the equal rights movements in the 1960s in America. Yet, this single-cultural approach does not consider Lee’s Taiwanese background and how it re-shapes the events in the film. The approach falls short in addressing how the Woodstock festival, being a transnational cultural phenomenon itself, influences and resonates in places outside the US. Lee’s Woodstock is not merely an American Woodstock, but it is also a *Taiwanese* Woodstock, for it represents a Taiwanese ideology impacted by the US-Taiwan diplomatic relations, cross-pacific media transmission, state intervention, and pseudo-imperialist cultural invasion in Taiwan. Also, Zietsma’s and Kang’s readings lack in-depth discussions of *family*, the most important theme in Lee’s cinematic world. If there is a central idea that threads through Lee’s oeuvre, it is the filmmaker’s domestic philosophy, which Lee, in *Taking Woodstock*, again positions at the center of the storytelling.

**A Utopia…Still Bound by Family**

Lee’s Woodstock experience all started with TV\(^5^6\), then just a recently launched entertainment medium in Taiwan. Lee recalls that “there were guys with big hair, jamming guitars, a sea of people,” and that “I was pretty dull and focused and wasn’t particularly cool but I could sense something big was happening” (Hiscock). At that time, Lee was a much stressed

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\(^5^6\) In 1962, Taiwan’s first TV station, Taiwan Television (TTV), was found and began to broadcast shows. [www.ttv.com.tw/group/15/aboutTTV/default.asp](http://www.ttv.com.tw/group/15/aboutTTV/default.asp).
and repressed 14-year old school boy,\textsuperscript{57} who faced strict social and parental expectations in the sixties’ Taiwan\textsuperscript{58}. Lee had a demanding father who valued schoolwork, since studying and passing examinations are a traditional way to secure a better career in East Asian countries. Under these circumstances, for Lee, Woodstock was not only an unforgettable cultural shock that broaden his horizons but also a remote wonderland where he could escape from political reality and monotonous schoolwork. Nevertheless, Lee’s \textit{Taking Woodstock} is not in any sense a Young Adult film about youth unleashed, fantastic escapism, or self-indulging hedonism. On the contrary, it emphasizes the importance of taking one’s family responsibilities.

In one of the early scenes, Elliot and Esther, his older sister, have a conversation about their parents:

\begin{quote}
ESTHER. Oh, Elliot. Now’s your time, to go to California like you’ve always wanted, to paint and design, be free, not a slave for those two in that Catskill prison.
ELLiot. \textit{I can’t give up on them now.}
ESTHER. Why not? They gave up on you a long time ago.
ELLiot. No, they didn’t. It’s the opposite. \textit{I’m the one they still want around.} I guess that means they love me more than you.
ESTHER. That must be a great consolation to you.
ELLiot. How’d you do it sis? How’d you get so sane?
ESTHER. I just walked, Elliot. I just walked away until I found a place of my own. [My italics]
\end{quote}

This conversation helps to set a milieu for Lee’s family drama, in which a child is caught between a struggle between the individual goal and family duty, a recurring theme in Lee’s Taiwanese films and American films. In the filmmaker’s other work, whether it is the second

\textsuperscript{57} See Hiscock.

\textsuperscript{58} During the 1960s, the Chiang government’s Martial Law prohibited free speech and restricted human rights in order to maintain a submissive society. It was also during this peak time during Cold War when the widespread anti-communist slogan, “Keep secrets confidential from hostile spies is everyone’s responsibility (保密防諜人人有責),” disseminated throughout Taiwan owing to incessant government propaganda. The highly alerted and straining society, caused by the anti-communist ideology and a totalitarian regime, made Taiwanese people exceptionally cautious of their expressions, since spying eyes might have been all around.
Chu daughter in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, the Taiwanese gay son in *The Wedding Banquet*, or the homosexual cowboy in *Brokeback Mountain*, the children’s dilemmas between family and individual are always the focus of the films. In *Taking Woodstock*, Elliot faces the same challenge again: to choose himself or his obligations. Elliot and Esther take on very different attitudes toward their family. While Elliot “can’t give up on them” when the parents are in a supposed financial crisis, Esther “just walked away,” to seek her own life. On one hand, Elliot and Esther resemble the two sides of the dilemma: the daughter represents the priority of personal goals, while Elliot sticks to family duty. On the other hand, from a cultural viewpoint, the brother and sister are also the embodiments of diverging American and Taiwanese/Chinese domestic values.

In traditional Taiwanese/Chinese culture, it is typical for parents to have strong preferences toward boys, as it is believed by the society that sons, not girls, are supposed to live with parents, take good care of them, and inherit the family business. For girls, expectations are smaller because daughters eventually marry “out.” This traditional attitude toward gender also manifests itself in an old Chinese saying, which states, “Married daughters, spilled water (嫁出去的女兒 潑出去的水59)” to refer to the situation where married daughters, like spilled water with no way to return, now belong to their husbands, not their families of origin anymore. The saying well explains the gender expectations in the traditional Taiwanese/Chinese family. In the film, after her exit, Elliot, Jake and Sonia do not mention Esther, as if Esther does not exist. Her marginality in her family of origin further enhances the Taiwanese/Chinese tradition now that a

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59 I consulted Taiwan’s Ministry of Education’s Chinese dictionary for the saying and its definition. pedia.cloud.edu.tw/Entry/Detail/?title=%E5%AB%81%E5%87%BA%E5%8E%BB%E7%9A%84%E5%A5%B3%E5%85%92%E5%BC%8C%E6%BD%91%E5%87%BA%E5%8E%BB%E7%A%84%E6%B0%B4.
married daughter is invisible. Nevertheless, Esther makes the decision to walk away by herself. Her autonomy and agency subvert the Taiwanese/Chinese tradition, making her a more independent and Westernized individual than a forgotten daughter. Conversely, Elliot appears to be rather East Asian with his ties to the parents and the Tiber family business. Elliot returns to the Catskills not merely for Sonia and Jake, but also for the motel, the family business that represents the reputation of the Tibers. Additionally, there is a special relation between Elliot and Sonia. When Elliot mentions that he understands the “special way” of seeing (Sonia’s left eye), he refers to the closer mother-and-son bonding between him and Sonia, an exclusive one lacking in Esther and Sonia’s relations. It is noteworthy to compare this particular theme to The Wedding Banquet’s mother and son relations. When Wei-Tung Gao decides to come out, he chooses to disclose his sexual identity to his mother, not his father. Wei-Tung’s mother serves as her son’s confidante, whom Wei-Tung trusts. In Elliot’s case, Sonia is more like a superior, from whom Elliot attempts to win approval. In the former mother-and-son relations, Wei-Tung and his mother are of the same status, but while the latter group is a hierarchical one. If Wei-Tung and Mrs. Gao’s relations are untraditional and Westernized, then Elliot and Sonia can be seen as performing a more traditional Taiwanese/Chinese parent and child relation.

This Taiwanese/Chinese-like family relation reiterates later with Lee’s recurring motif of dinner table scenes. In the breakfast scene, Elliot tries to communicate with Sonia but it turns into a quarrel:

ELLiot. So I was thinking, when this is over…
SONIA. What a mess! It’ll take months to clean up.
ELLiot. But we can keep some of these new people on, right? We can afford the help now. And with the place paid off, maybe it’s time you thought about some permanent staff, people to help you run the place, make some improvements.
SONIA. What are you talking about? That’s why we have you!
ELLiot. I’m just saying, I was thinking, when this is over, with all the money now, I could take a trip…
SONIA. And where did you get those pajamas? You’re not going anywhere dressed like that!
VILMA. We’ve made brownies! Wonderful brownies! Some very special brownies! Elliot?
ELLiot We’ll take a pass.
SONIA. You see, Jake? That’s just like him. He doesn’t want dessert, but does he think to ask his mother?
ELLiot. You know what? That’s enough. You know, I’m the only one here, out of hundreds and hundreds and thousands of people, who’s having breakfast with his parents! Do you think Janis Joplin’s mom is backstage telling her to tuck her, I don’t know, her whisky bottle into her pocket, or something? Or Jimi Hendrix’s mom is telling him to wash his hair? I’m just going to go to Max’s and enjoy myself--- and you know what? Go ahead! I’d love to see you eat one of those brownies – you should have two!

Every time Elliot is about to talk about his plan to travel, Sonia interrupts him as if she is afraid of hearing about his plan for leaving. Sonia’s concerns show her over-protection when she reminds him of his inappropriate outfits and table manners. Interestingly, Demetri Martin, the actor who plays Elliot, interprets the role as “when we first meet Elliot, he doesn’t have a real relationship with anybody. He seems kind of stuck between obligation to his family and cutting the cord. Guilt seems to be a big part of what keeps him in the kind of behavioral patter he’s in [my emphasis]” (Schamus 136). Indeed, Elliot does show a sense of guilt in his behavior in the film. Martin’s performance and the Tiber family’s Jewish roots tie firmly to the Jewish-American connotations of familial guilt and overbearing mothers. Significantly, these two Jewish domestic issues also illustrate Taiwanese/Chinese filial piety as well.

Elliot’s guilt can also be seen as the Taiwanese/Chinese side of him; the side for whom evading the responsibilities of looking after one’s parents is un-filial and thus should be condemned. Elliot’s strong obligation of filial piety also shows itself even when Sonia is not around. In an early scene, Elliot talks to Billy, a Vietnam War veteran suffering from PTSD.

60 For more on this cultural connotation, see Joyce Antler Joyce (2007).
After Billy shouts several “motherfuckers,” Elliot uneasily stops him and says, “Billy, can you just stop with the motherfucking this and motherfucking that. Please?” Uncertain about what Elliot means, Billy simply responds, “Fuck?” taking off the word “mother” in his harangue. Elliot then rightly answers, “Yeah. Fuck.” This brief conversation of indecent expressions correspondingly reveals Elliot’s respect and protection for his mother. Even though Sonia is not really present, he still feels offended and in need to save his mother from the abuse of language. Therefore, whether it is in the dialogue between Elliot and Esther, in the dining scene, or in Elliot and Billy’s short conversation, Elliot’s difficulty of making decisions and his relations with Sonia underscore his contesting self-identity between Taiwanese/Chinese filial piety and American individualism.

In addition to the mother-and-son relations, *Taking Woodstock* also addresses father-and-son bonding. The film portrays Jake as a very silent and powerless man, in contrast to the dominant mother, Sonia. Interestingly, Jake continues several traits of Lee’s distinguished father characters, as Jake, General Gao, Chef Chu, and Old Chu are all quite silent, melancholy, and aging. Yet, among those old fathers, Jake seems to be the least patriarchal, leaving the mastery of the house to Sonia. In many scenes, Jake gives in to Sonia to talk and to decide on business. Due to Jake’s calmer temperament, the relation between Jake and Elliot is milder, and often does not involve emotional outbursts. In one of the closing scenes, Elliot tells Jake his decision to go to California after they find out Sonia’s secret savings:

ELLIOIT. Hey, Dad (…) I was gonna come say good-bye. I hope that's okay.
JAKE. Listen. Sit. A month ago, I was a dying man. I would think to myself, "It's nice of Elli to come back here "to tend to a dying man." Who knows? Maybe tomorrow I'll be dead. But now, I'm alive. You understand?
ELLIOIT. No.
JAKE. It's because of you. I'm alive because of you. And what should I want now, but for you, my son, to live, too? Huh? That's not so much to ask.
ELLiot. No, it isn't.
Jake. They're all starting to leave, the young people. Who knows where? They don't even know. And now you're one of them. You go.
ELLiot. I'll stay in touch. I'll be back.
Jake. Yeah, sure you will. Elliot. My hip, my...Elli, that business with your mother [about her hidden cash] ...Don't worry about it.

At first glance, it seems that Elliot still wants to ask parental permission and even forgiveness. Rather than saying Elliot respects Jake and would not hurt his feeling, it is more proper to say that in the Tiber family there is an implicit hierarchy, where parents are always above and superior to children. Not until Jake says “you go,” does Elliot frees himself from the obligations of taking care of his parents and business. Consequently, Elliot’s newly gained independence is still partial because it is granted by his parents. However, to probe further, it is Elliot who saves the family motel business. The scene thus can be read as Elliot, now the patron of the family, making sure that his patronage will persist in his parents’ own hand. As Jake says to Elliot that he “is alive” again, Elliot’s efforts not only keep the family intact but also rejuvenate his aging parents. Moreover, when Elliot discovers Sonia’s secret cash, she merely explains, “Elli, I was scared.” The mother fears that if Elliot is aware of the wealth, he might be unwilling to return home. Although Sonia’s lie results from her wish to let her family reunite, it is still a betrayal to Elliot, and the mutual trust in the mother-and-son bonding is severely stricken. Yet Jake mends the family relations, thanks to his regained youthful power granted by Elliot. In this way, Taking Woodstock is unique when compared to other Lee films in terms of family saviors. In Pushing Hands, The Wedding Banquet, Eat Drink Man Woman, and Brokeback Mountain, parents (usually the fathers) are powerful and traditional parent-child relations regulate the families. However, in Taking Woodstock, it is the child who protects the family from collapsing because the aging, powerless father and a dishonest mother lose the control of their domestic affairs.
Taking Woodstock thereby depicts the relations between parents and their son in a nuclear family. Yet, in the Tiber family, the biological daughter, Esther, does not occupy much attention. Instead, the familial role and responsibilities are taken by Vilma, a Korean War ex-Marine. In Vilma’s first scene, he reveals to Elliot his incredible military, sexual, and family background:

VILMA. You do need real security around here.
ELLiot. And you’re real security?
VILMA. OK, I may be a grandfather…
ELLiot. You’re a grandfather?
VILMA. I married young, the night before I shipped out with the marines.
ELLiot. You’re a marine?
VILMA. Semper fi, you little prick. Sergeant, Korea…
ELLiot. No kidding. [Vilma shows him a picture]
VILMA. That’s me with the cigar. That one – he was the love of my life. Killed. Sniper. I went out on patrol, found the Chinese puissant who did it, and broke his neck with my own hands.
ELLiot. My God!
VILMA. Actually, I made that last part up. But I would of if I’d gotten a hold of the sonofabitch, and I’d do it today if I found him.

Vilma appears as an attractive woman in this scene. Yet, as Vilma introduces herself and her wish to find a job, Elliot begins to realize that Vilma is not an ordinary lady, but a man who chooses to dress and live as woman. Vilma is full of confrontations and conflicts. She is both man and woman; she looks as friendly as a neighbor but she has amazing muscles at the same time; she is feminine but she was once a masculine soldier. Vilma is significant in two perspectives: family and nation. In light of family, Vilma serves as a substitute sister for the Tiber family. Vilma keeps Jake company, taking patrol with him; she offers advice to Elliot; and she reconciles the son and the parents. In the previously discussed breakfast scene, Vilma attempts to stop the quarrel by sharing hash brownies. Later, when Elliot returns home, he finds his parents finally ate some of Vilma’s brownies and are happily dancing in the rain. Because of Vilma’s interference, Elliot joins his parents’ celebration and becomes closer to them. Vilma bridges Elliot and his parents like a second daughter of the family. Undeniably, the representation of Vilma emphasizes the
importance of family harmony. As she introduces herself, she is also a grandfather. In some sense, she enjoys the freedom of choosing her sexual and gender identity, while still fulfilling family obligations – to continue the bloodline. Vilma shows Elliot an eclectic role model who does not need to decide between self and family but has the luxury to embrace both options. Moreover, on the national level, Vilma’s previous position as Marine sergeant of the Korean War renders the security guard job more meaningful: she brings the harmony and peace to the entire country and families. Therefore, no matter which is the case, Vilma’s androgynous character highlights a stronger power of comfort, relief, and defense, which transcends the cross-line of gender category. To situate Vilma into an even broader political and historical context, Vilma’s achievement as a Korean War hero would remind many Taiwanese people of the old days when the United States was Taiwan’s most reliable ally. The Korean War prompted the United States to defend Taiwan, and thus, the war produced a savior for Taiwan. Vilma, the incarnation of the Korean War, provokes a collective memory as well as an almost ideological nostalgia of the fifties when Taiwan had sufficient national defense, steady economic growth, rapid modernization, and better political diplomatic relations internationally. That being said, if *Taking Woodstock* exposes Lee’s political and cultural imagination, Vilma serves as an epitome of the benevolent United States, which gave Taiwan great help as a friend and even as a big brother/sister – another domestic reference that highlights the perceived close relationship between the two nations.
In the interview with Dr. Yu in 2013, Lee also talks about his cultural views of the United States in relation to *The Ice Storm*:

In the past, we [Taiwanese] watched America on TV, so when I was first in America I felt like walking into a film set. Those people were real and alive… The Hollywood films we watched here [in Taiwan] worshipped the United States… but the lives in films are most of time not truth. It’s just that Americans wish to live like that way… When I was more familiar with America, I found that many things did not match these films…. Later [after *The Ice Storm*] I filmed *Brokeback Mountain*. It is very different from the Westerns; it is the real America, not like what you have seen in other films…. When Americans talk about America, they don’t often reveal the truth because they idealize themselves… I didn’t realize that [*The Ice Storm*] was something that I didn’t understand and something that American didn’t want to face. I think when foreigners make a film in the United States… it is usually more accurate…. We don’t have preconceived ideas because we got the fact through research…. I dare say that my American films are more precise than those made by Americans, but whether they are *American enough* is another matter…. I discovered that actually I have *mixed* many things: *I look at the West from an Eastern perspective, and I inspect the East with a Western viewpoint. That is my life.* [My italic] (Lee)

*The Ice Storm* can be seen as Lee’s disillusioned America, one that he comes to realize after he had a real encounter with the United States. With *The Ice Storm*, Lee surprises both international and American audiences with the film’s darker representation of American life in the 1970s, when the country faced a series of blows to its national confidence. The film is set in 1973, which, according to Lee, “was America’s most ‘embarrassing’ year, with Nixon, polyester, the admitting of defeat in Vietnam, stagflation, the energy crisis” (Schamus viii). In the film, Lee emphasizes several national memories – the Vietnam War, the emergent TV-watching habits, Watergate, and ultimately, a nation struck by “severe weather” both literally and metaphorically. Due to the close alliance between America and Taiwan, those political events are not unfamiliar to Taiwanese people. Sadly, the early seventies were not good times for Taiwanese, either. Taiwan left the United Nation in 1971; Spain terminated its diplomatic relation with the country.
in 1973; and even Nixon visited Mainland China and signed the Shanghai Communique with the Communist government, a political move that can be seen as a great blow to Taiwan. Politically speaking, the country became rather alienated in an “ice storm” too. The Ice Storm hence reminds Taiwanese of the gloomy decade and how people were frustrated and disappointed by their countries. If Taking Woodstock is a joyful, innocent, idealized America for Lee, then with The Ice Storm, the director presents and criticizes the dysfunctional society and family.

Significantly, what further enhances Lee’s sharp focus on American life is no other than his cross-cultural experiences. As suggested above, Lee specifies that foreign and American filmmakers tend to differ greatly in their American films. This consideration of nationality signals fundamental transnational issues, such as those of the cultural insider/outsider in relation to diverse subjectivities and representations of nationalism(s). In Lee’s case, these factors motivate a considerably candid portrait of American middle class family with which he tries to deconstruct the perfect image of America that he was exposed to in his youth. Interestingly, Lee mentions that acculturation is still the most difficult task for him even after many years in America. As a cultural outsider, his distance renders The Ice Storm not as culturally imagined as his Taiwanese films. But it is equally sincere in discussing the American Dream from a more Taiwanese-Chinese perspective, which prioritizes welfare and reputation of the nation and family over the profit of an individual. In doing so, Lee is very acute to point out his liminal position where he is always between the East and the West, having the cultural inputs from both sides, but still able to possess a certain degree of objectivity for critical examination.

Based on a novel by Rick Moody, The Ice Storm is about two upper-middle class families in New Canaan, Connecticut, in 1973. The Hood family consists of Ben (Kevin Klein), the
father, Elena (Joan Allen), the mother, and two teenage children, Paul (Toby Maguire), and Wendy (Christina Ricci). The Hood family is close to their neighbors, the Carver family, which includes Jim (Jamey Sheridan), the father, Janey (Sigourney Weaver), the mother, and their children, Mikey (Elijah Wood) and Sandy (Adam Hann-Byrd). Ben has an affair with Janey, but she wants to end the relationship since he grows more possessive and serious. On Thanksgiving evening, with an ice storm coming, the Hood family has dinner together. Afterwards, Paul takes the train to New York City to visit Libbets (Katie Holmes), a wealthy classmate spending the holiday alone. Wendy goes to the Carvers’ home, but finds only Sandy there; Mikey has gone out to explore the landscape covered by ice. Wendy and Sandy try to have sex, but after they drink some alcohol, they fall sleep. Ben and Elena go to a neighbor’s house for a “key party” in which wives pick up car keys from a fish bowl and have sex with the keys’ owners. When Janey picks her key, Ben tries to stop her, and Jim soon realizes their extra-marital affair. Feeling embarrassed, Ben locks himself into the toilet for the night. Later, Elena picks-up Jim’s key and they go into Jim’s car to have sex. Jim offers to drive Elena home. When they arrive at the Carvers’ house, Elena finds Wendy and Sandy sleeping in bed. She wakes Wendy up, telling Wendy to dress herself and go home with her. On his way home, Ben finds Mikey has been killed by a broken power line. He sends Mikey’s body to the Carvers’ house, where Jim and Sandy are shocked and sad upon seeing Mikey’s body. Janey is also woken up by Jim’s crying. The Hoods leave the Carvers’ house for the train station to pick up Paul. When the entire Hood family are in the car, Ben looks at Paul and starts to cry.

Among the scholarly reviews of *The Ice Storm*, Susanne Schmetkamp thinks that the film not only “offers an aesthetic experience” but “becomes a philosophical treatise” (231). David
Koepsell claims that the film poses the “existential dilemma of how to live” (245) but provides a possible solution in that the Hood family can “remake themselves … in a way that can cope with existence more authentically” (250). George T Hole argues that “[the] significance [of life] is obtained only by viewing one’s existence as a life film, a work of art that culminates in one’s demise” (252). Whitney Crothers Dilley thinks that Lee probes into the fragmentation of family and “the moral and spiritual emptiness” (101) in the society at that time, and that Lee “explores intergenerational conflict by focusing on the younger generation; bringing their indiscriminate longing to the forefront” (101) which continues the themes established in Lee’s Chinese era. In short, the existing *The Ice Storm* criticism either focuses on metaphysic discussions of human life or on the film’s response to American society in the 1970s. These critical pieces treat *The Ice Storm* as an isolated film, and often neglect its substantially intimate association with Lee’s evolving view of America from a Taiwanese perspective. Except for, to a limited extent, Hole, the critics do not consider the influence of Lee’s complicated Eastern identity. The director’s subjectivity as a cultural outsider from Taiwan and the different view generated by his cultural and national position have not been discussed.

*The Ice Storm: What Family Means in Dark Times*

*The Ice Storm* is set in the 1970s, a political and cultural “dark time” in American history. The wave of social transformation initiated in the previous decade had found its way into the middle class and challenged the most fundamental family values of the nation. The traditional beliefs in wealth and freedom in the decade had been questioned and the ideal of white, middle-
class family also had been examined by the critical atmosphere in the 1960s. In the social context, the dishonest Nixon administration and the decaying religious values not only shattered people’s confidence in institutions, but also failed to set good moral models for people to follow. *The Ice Storm*’s mise-en-scène, including many notable set designs and culturally significant props, such as interior decorations and documentary clips on retro TV sets, help to represent this era as to remind the audience the paradoxical nature of the 1970s – materialist and abundant yet spiritually bleak and empty.

*The Ice Storm* audaciously deals with familial disorder caused by social chaos as well as frustration. The Hood and Carver parents are very self-absorbed, living in a reclusive world of sex and alcohol, not much interested in politics, social news, or even weather. Instead, the children behave more like adults in thoughts and their attention to real society and the environment. The first example is Paul Hood and his meditations on the meaning of family. In the very beginning of the film, Paul is alone on the train, reading a comic book about a family tragedy where the superhero father stupefies his own son:

PAUL. (reading the lines in his comic book silently) Then you’ve turned him into a vegetable. Your own son. Don’t you see, Sue? He was too powerful...if his energy had continued to build, he would have destroyed the world! In issue number 141 of *The Fantastic Four*, published in November 1973, Reed Richards has to use his anti-matter weapon on his own son, who Annihilus has turned into a human atom bomb. The problem is that the cosmic rays that infused Richards and the rest of *The Fantastic Four* on their aborted moon mission have made young Franklin a volatile mixture of matter and anti-matter. Your family is kind of like your personal negative matter. And that’s what dying is – dying is when your family takes you back, thus throwing you into negative space...so it’s a paradox – the closer you’re drawn back in, the further into the void you go. And that’s what happened the morning of the ice storm – the morning death became a member of my family.

Surprisingly, Paul, a high school student, exerts a highly profound meditation that blends together philosophy, the meaning of family, physics, and existentialism. Compared to other characters in the film, Paul appears to be the most mature, calm, and sober person in the chaos of
New Canaan. Paul’s pessimistic view of family in this scene sets the tone of the entire film: family life cannot co-exist peacefully with individuals, and any effort to retrieve the two is destined to fail. Significantly, Paul’s meditation continues Lee’s signature theme on the struggle between individuals and family, which can be traced back as early as *Eat Drink Man Woman*. In Lee’s early Taiwanese films and the other two American films discussed thus far in this dissertation, there is always compromising space between individual and family. Yet *The Ice Storm* begins with an extremely hopeless response that negates such space, as narrated by Paul. In his reference to *The Fantastic Four*, he describes family as one’s “negative matter,” which leads an individual nowhere but to destruction. To be more specific, in this early scene, Paul adopts the comic book’s philosophy that the relation between individual and family is an absolute dichotomy. An individual can only align oneself with one side.

Nevertheless, the characterization of Paul serves as the catalyst that transforms the atmosphere of the film, and it also alters the role of family and its relations with individuals. Paul keeps moral teachings and moderate behaviors in mind when people around him are out of control. On the night in Libett’s apartment, Paul tries to stop Libett from taking drugs. He could have taken advantage of Libett when she is not conscious, due to the effect of alcohol and drugs. Yet the film portrays him as chivalrously resisting sexual temptation, protecting Libett from another classmate’s intended harassment, and obeying Elena’s command to come home by midnight. Interestingly, tracing the name’s etymology, it is also the name for Paul, the Christian Apostle, who is the patron of writers and missionaries. Hence, the name not only highlights Paul Hood’s connections with books and knowledge, but also foreshadows his responsibility of guiding lost people back to the road of good. Not until the film approaches the end does it reveal
that actually Paul’s first scene is a flashforward. The scene happens in the morning after the ice storm. Near the end, the film replays the scene once again, and makes Paul reread optimistically the same page of *The Fantastic Four* before the train stops at the station, and before the rest of the Hood family show up. The dawn further dispels the hopeless air of the beginning of the film. The final scene is rather promising with Paul’s renewed confidence in family displayed as he smiles. Paul seems to outgrow the philosophy of the comic, no longer steered by the melancholy thoughts in the book but becoming more self-assured of himself and the future.

*The Ice Storm*, in some sense, is didactic in tone. Lee uses the story of the two families to demonstrate the indispensable function of family: family is a safe haven that shelters and brings redemption to members who err. The function is particularly explicit when Jim and Ben cry in two different scenes. The first crying scene happens when Ben brings Mikey’s body back to the Carvers’ house. Upon seeing it, Jim cries loudly and that not only melts Sandy, making him cry, but also wakes Janey from sleep. Jim’s tears have the effect of *breaking the ice*: thawing Sandy and Janey’s emotional coldness. Because of Jim’s crying, Sandy finds a way to express his emotions rather than creating destruction, as he used to do. Also, hearing Jim’s crying, Janey opens her eyes calmly and pensively on the bed, looking morally revived. The second crying scene takes place when the Hood family are all sitting in the car. Ben looks at Paul, who returns with an innocent look, and Ben cannot help but to cry. When Ben sees Paul’s innocence, he recalls his moral failures and sobs. Ben’s tears stand for redemption, of cleansing one’s guilt and sin through an emotional outlet, and they also enforce Paul’s importance as the catalyst. Interestingly, Mikey is the catalyst of the Carver family, too. Mikey’s death changes Jim, and the rest of the Carvers. Both Paul and Michael are popular names that have their source in religion.
Mikey shares the name with Michael the Archangel, protector of people. His death can be seen as an angelic sacrifice to save the family from dysfunction and collapse. Therefore, with the names of Michael and Paul, the implications behind the Christian names make the film more like a moral parable, with its intention of disseminating and promoting the healing effects as well as the importance of family.

To probe further, with the two crying scenes, Lee deconstructs certain prevalent masculine traits. Both fathers cry in front of their families, and their tears are triggered by their sons. An open outburst of crying undermines their authority as patriarch and parent and at the same time weakens these two fathers’ masculinity. Considering other characteristics that Ben and Jim have, such as dishonesty, adultery, and insincerity, the father figures in this film contradict Lee’s previous father roles in terms of morals, self-respect, dignity, and, particularly, the capability to hold the family together in chaotic times. Though both fathers lose much of their paternal power, their tears somewhat reveal a hope of purgation and restoration, and initiate a force of awakening. In this way, their tears resemble catharsis. The Ice Storm, with Mikey’s untimely death, the parents’ immorality and the children’s sacrifice, pays homage to classical tragedies. The plot reminds audiences of Shakespeare’s King Lear and Sophocles’ Antigone plays in which children also take on the responsibility of family.

Indeed, the teenage children of the Hoods and the Carvers are considerably more thoughtful than their superficial, materialist parents. If Paul and Mikey stand for philosophical and secular solutionists, Wendy acts like a liberal social activist. In one early scene, Wendy and Ben talk about Watergate and Nixon:

WENDY. Nixon, doofus! It’s incredible. He should be shot.
BEN. Hey, drop the political assignation stuff please.
WENDY. He’s a liar! Dean told him on March 21st about Kalmback and Hunt, all
about payoffs to the Watergate burglars, so you tell me where the so-called “Dean Report” is, but you can’t because it doesn’t exist, because he lied about Haldeman and Erlichman and the April 17 tape, that’s why! Liar!

In contrast to Ben’s political nonchalance, Wendy’s moral judgment and knowledge about the political scandal display her engagement with the real America. In the entire film, adults do not mention Watergate or, really, anything related to politics or world affairs. Whether at the dinner party or the key party, adults are far more interested in gossip, sexual topics, and whiskey. However, Wendy follows news reports on TV, generating criticism based on her moral standards. Wendy’s sharp eye is not limited to Watergate and the lying politicians. At the Thanksgiving dinner, she also shows her preoccupation with the real history of Early America as well as international economics, as she says, “Dear Lord, thank you for this Thanksgiving holiday, and for all the material possessions that we have and enjoy, and for letting us white people kill all the Indians…and steal their tribal lands and stuff ourselves like pigs…while children in Africa and Asia are napalmed and...” While Elena, and Ben are shocked upon hearing Wendy’s “heretic” prayers, Wendy honestly reveals the history that many Americans are uncomfortable with or do not give a second thought to. The scene echoes Lee’s family dinner motif as seen in his other family dramas, and it vividly characterizes the dynamics of the family. Wendy’s disclosure again foils the parents’ deliberate ignorance and the two generations’ discrepancy.

Inheriting much of the sixties’ subversive spirit, Wendy offers a cynical evaluation of the white privileges that the upper-middle class owns both on a national and world level. Wendy faithfully illustrates how Natasha Zaretsky defines the new generation of that era:

But the young men and women who became activists during this period rejected the cultural logic of postwar America and challenged the domestic ideal that had emerged in tandem with a mass consumption economy in the 1950s. In large numbers, young people deserted “the system,” critiqued the affluent society for its failure to provide their lives with real meaning, and argued that the spread of middle-class suburban prosperity had been predicated on violence and deprivation in other places: the rural South, the inner
Zaretsky claims that the American family in this period, from 1968-1980, was synchronized with the national decline. The previous family ideal that featured a rich middle class living in big houses in suburbia was re-examined through various critical perspectives of gender, ethnicity, and class. In addition, the 1960s, undoubtedly, played an important role in illuminating a new generation of equal rights. Wendy seems to be carved out of such a new trend of thought, representing the new generation who refuses to unconditionally believe rules written by authority. Furthermore, Wendy’s outsider, or rebellious stance in criticizing America is somewhat close to Lee’s position as a cultural outsider, who has less cultural burden, or intransigent patriotism. In another scene, Wendy and Sandy talk about Sandy’s broken G. I. Joe doll and the Vietnam War:

SANDY. He’s supposed to talk all kinds of stuff, but he’s like malfunctioned.
G.I. JOE. Mayday! Mayday! Get this message back to base!
SANDY. Same thing. Again and again. (…) this knot’s called a bowline. Let’s hang him.
WENDY. He’s dead.
SANDY. If it wasn’t raining we could take him outside and blow him up.
WENDY. He wouldn’t blow up. He’d just get all mangled or twisted. [She undresses the doll] It looks like someone got to his private parts before us.
SANDY. Communist Viet Cong.
WENDY. They left it in the jungle.

The dialogue not only subverts the prevalent narrative of American military forces, but also the superiority of white masculinity. Wendy and Sandy’s playful but cynical conversation is accurate enough to sense the problem that the nation faces. The miniature soldier, a white male body, is often regarded as symbol of America’s nationalism, jingoism, and patriotism. However, in this scene, the doll is broken and presented as if to parallel a nation in crisis. Sandy’s word “malfuctioned” renders the G. I. Joe doll tremendously powerless. On one hand, the doll can refer to real American veterans who suffer from PTSD so they cannot function normally. On the
other hand, the doll’s incomplete body indicates incapacitated masculinity, castrated by the Vietnamese Communists and forever lost “in the jungle.” But no matter the reading, America’s national confidence, intertwined with white masculinity, is damaged by the Vietnam War. The G. I. Joe doll hence provides a counter narrative of American nationalism, one that does not celebrate patriotism and jingoism, but deprecates them.

Thus, *The Ice Storm* tackles the frustration and failure of the nation; yet, at the same time, the film also conforms to Lee’s domestic philosophy, which enunciates that family is the ultimate place an individual can go to for redemption and healing. Through the discussions of weakening paternity and generational conflict, Lee frames this critical era in America with unparalleled sharpness, a strengthened emphasis on family, and a keener focus on children. With a viewpoint as a cultural outsider and transnational artist, the director offers a competing interpretation of the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the dark side of the white middle class in the United States. Lee’s cultural distance, after all, makes *The Ice Storm* a compellingly candid film that reveals a disillusioned America and perhaps even a broken American Dream.

**Conclusion**

In Lee’s Taiwanese trilogy, Lee concentrates on parents and the challenges they face, such as the impact of modernity, Westernization, immigration and acculturation. Yet in *Taking Woodstock* and *The Ice Storm*, Lee shifts his focus to children and how they react to family responsibilities and societal changes. Through a central theme – the struggle between individual and family – Lee adroitly bridges his past and current films, the East and the West, and the old
and young. He constructs certain universal standards shared by people in different cultures and nations. Yet, somehow, the two films manifest and strengthen Lee’s Taiwanese-American identity. With representing both an idealized and cynical view of America’s military involvement in Asia, including the Vietnam War, rock music and popular culture, spiritual and material life, Lee not only reviews the history of America but also evaluates his youthful days in Taiwan as a cultural observer who maintains some distance from both countries. Last but not least, *Taking Woodstock* and *The Ice Storm* also help the artist to participate in American history, a bold step that moves him from periphery to the center, and from passiveness to activeness.
CHAPTER 4


In an interview from 2015, Ang Lee discusses his feelings toward Taiwan and his self-designated responsibility of being an oversea Taiwanese:

[S]ometimes I need to be honorable because I want to muster dignity for people in Taiwan and Asia…. I am afraid when people say ‘Lee loves Taiwan’ because that is very stressful to me…. To love one’s country is a natural thing, and it is one’s instinct even though you don’t talk about it…. Our generation witnessed the second Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Civil War, and the moment when Japan returned Taiwan to the KMT government…. Our generation not only has concerns about the country, but also holds a positive view about the future…. Whether to stay overseas or return to Taiwan, we have the thought of ‘home and country’ and integrity in our heart.” (Lee 2015)

Here, Lee discusses how his patriotism is practiced through the responsibility of putting Taiwan on the map. He recounts critical historical moments in the twentieth-century Chinese history, which, in his mind, help unify the generation of the postwar Baby Boomers in Taiwan, and consolidate a firm Taiwanese identity that prioritizes the concept of home and country. This interview thus shows the crucial cultural and national ties which connect Lee to Taiwan. This chapter will first examine the impact of Taiwan’s film industry and popular film genres, in the 1960s and 1970s in particular, upon Lee’s cinematic aesthetics. Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (2000) and Lust, Caution (2007) can be seen as Lee’s homages to Taiwan cinema because the two films re-invent two popular genres of the 1970s: martial arts and anti-Japanese (patriotic pro-KMT) films. In addition, Lee handles national history, cultural identity, and political ideology but at the same time he casts doubt on established “historical facts” and endeavors to scrutinize
them. Lee’s treatment of historical topics corresponds to the core values of Taiwanese New Cinema and parallels the wave of democratization after the uplifting of martial law in 1987. Therefore, as if to echo Lee’s interview, the thought of home and country is omnipresent in the making of the two films. As I argue in the previous chapter, family and nation, for Lee, mutually influence each other. *The Ice Storm* and *Taking Woodstock* best illustrate the close relation between family and nation: in the two films, family reflects the national political situations. In *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution*, family themes are presented through the individual’s dilemma between family obligation and personal freedom. In *Crouching Tiger*, Yu Jiao Lung joins jianhu as free swordswoman, leaving her family duties behind. In *Lust, Caution*, Wang Chia-Chih gives up her loyalty to the government in order to save her lover. Yu and Wang’s decisions to go after personal freedom also manifest Lee’s idea that women have great strength but they have long been overlooked. Lee’s employment of women in both films not only echoes the Wuxia genre and the spy thriller genre in which female protagonists are highlighted and able to compete with men, but also reflects Taiwan’s political transitions: from an authoritative society to a more liberal one seeking equal rights and democracy.

### What’s Happening at Home? Postwar Taiwan Cinema Since 1949

Taiwan cinema began during the period under Japanese rule. From the very beginning, the industry has not been limited by the geographical conditions of the island and has never been in any sense culturally monolithic; rather, it has been hybrid and transnational in terms of production and consumption. There were imports from overseas, such as Japan, Shanghai, and
Western countries, and also locally-made films (sponsored by Japanese production companies and co-produced by Taiwanese and Japanese). In the early years following the KMT’s relocation to Taiwan, the government was not very enthusiastic in employing or developing cinema. In 1954, the KMT government established the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC)\(^61\), but they did not implement any specific policy on cinema until the next decade. Instead, Taiwanese-dialect films (taiyu pian), made by local medium-to-small sized production companies, were thriving and enjoyed great popularity among local Taiwanese audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. Mostly in black and white, taiyu Pian spanned across various genres, and were influenced by Hollywood, Japan, and Hong Kong films.\(^62\) Although the majority of taiyu pian was made with low budgets, taiyu pian became mass entertainment for local Taiwanese and yielded good profits. Comedy, like Brother Liu and Brother Wang on the Roads in Taiwan (Hsing Lee, 1959), costume drama, Xue Pinggui and Wang Baochuan (Jee-Ming Ho, 1955), espionage, The Best Secret Agent (Ying Chang, 1964), and news-adapted drama, Mad Woman (Ke Bai, 1957), were among the most popular ones.\(^63\)

In the 1960s, CMPC’s manager, Hong Gong, proposed and initiated the “Health Realism” movement for Mandarin-language films so as to promote a pro-KMT-government national identity. Inspired by Italian neorealism, Health Realism proposed a similar realist mode but was different in the ways in which the KMT’s propaganda were neatly incorporated into the diegesis.

\(^61\) Before 1949, the KMT government owned China Film Studio in the mainland, responsible for producing pro-government work, such as newsreels and anti-Japanese propagandas. After the KMT government came to Taiwan, it first set up Taiwan Film Company (Taiying). Later in 1954, the government combined Taiwan Film Company with the Agriculture and Education Motion Picture Studio (Nongjiao) to found CMPC. See Yeh and Davis 18.

\(^62\) See Hong 62; Yeh and Davis 23.

\(^63\) See Lee’s “100 years of Taiwan Cinema” 45.
The Taiwanese society portrayed is humanistic, idyllic, and benevolent. Hsing Lee’s Oyster Girl (1964) and Beautiful Duckling (1965) are the first two Healthy realist films. Set in rural Taiwan, Oyster Girl and Beautiful Duckling feature two young working-class female protagonists and their family lives. Both films are family melodramas and promote the importance of filial piety and good morals. However, Healthy Realist films are very political. Guo-Juin Hong criticizes the movement’s political purpose, as he writes, “Healthy Realism was a unique cinematized stasis of change, a peculiar condition for a modernizing nation in which the notion of change…is caught in a perpetual state of stagnation where in film aesthetics is trapped by nationalist ideology” (67).

In the 1970s, Taiwan faced a series of diplomatic setbacks. After the country left the United Nation in 1971, many countries, such as Japan, de-recognized Taiwan as a country and terminated their diplomatic relations. Domestically, local pro-democracy groups of activists continuously protested against the KMT government. Under these circumstances, CMPC began to produce various anti-Japanese films so as to boost the sense of pro-KMT nationalism. During

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64 See Yeh and Davis 26.

65 For example, in 1977, due to the KMT’s unfair intervention in Taoyuan’s mayoral election, Zhongli citizens started a riot against the Zhongli police. The Zhongli Incident, as it is called, is considered the first civic riot after the 228 Incident (1947) and it influences the preceding pro-democracy movements. In 1979, the Formosa Incident (Kaohsiung Incident) occurred in Kaohsiung when the KMT government arrested and prosecuted the leading pro-democracy figures in a demonstration hosted by Formosa Magazine. Involving many major activists who later formed and served as the core members of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the Formosa Incident is also considered the most important civil rights movement during the martial law period. The participants of the Formosa Incident included Annette Lu (呂秀蓮), the Vice President of the ROC from 2000-2008, Chia-wen Yao (姚嘉文), the former President of the Examination Yuan from 2002-2008, Chu Chen (陳菊), the current Kaohsiung mayor (2016), I-hsiung Lin (林義雄), and Ming-the Shih (施明德), two of the former chairmen of the DPP and very influential civil rights activists. See “DPP releases book commemorating the Kaohsiung Incident”; “Meilidao shijian 美麗島事件.”
this period, there were three topmost political missions for CMPC: reassuring that the KMT
government was the main force in the second Sino-Japanese war, refusing PRC’s call for
Chinese unification, and rejecting Taiwan’s independence movement.\textsuperscript{66} CMPC’s mission to
serve politics was ingrained in its patriotic, anti-Japanese films, such as \textit{The Everlasting Glory}
(Shan-Hsi Ting, 1974), \textit{800 Heroes} (Shan-His Ting, 1975), \textit{Heroes of the Eastern Skies} (Tseng-
Chai Chang, 1977), and \textit{Victory} (Chia-Chang Liu, 1975). Many of these films are adapted from
the history of the second Sino-Japanese war, and often feature famous KMT military personnel.
These films adopt KMT’s view of history, emphasizing the theme of a nation in crisis and aim to
provoke the audience into steadfast patriotism and Chinese nationalism. Wenchi Lin further
divides anti-Japanese films into two sub-genres: spy thrillers and war epics with national
heroes.\textsuperscript{67} Lin finds:

\begin{quote}
 in the 1960s the War of Resistance provided spy films in Taiwan dialect and
Mandarin with a convenient narrative structure to create cold war stories in the
fashion of James Bond—style spy films. In the 1970s, when Taiwan found its
national identity challenged, the War of Resistance was once again employed to
boost the Taiwanese people’s national spirit on screen. (“Of Female Spies and
National Heroes in Taiwan” 55)
\end{quote}

Lin’s study of the anti-Japanese films not only refines the genre but also clearly points out the
periods when they won widespread popularity, synchronizing the development of the film
industry with the nation’s political situation. Interestingly, as Lin notices, spy thrillers often
highlight female secret agents, while war films focus on male national heroes. Lin also elucidates
that unlike war films of the 1970s, spy thrillers do not have strong “national loyalty” and the
Sino-Japanese war serves as only historical background.

\textsuperscript{66} See Huang par. 2-5.

\textsuperscript{67} See Lin’s “Of Female Spies and National Heroes in Taiwan.” 40-61.
Outside of these films, the two most popular genres of the 1970s were wuxia films\(^68\) and family melodramas (film adaptations from Qiong Yao’s romance novels in particular).\(^69\) Wuxia films are not to be confused with kung-fu films. Wuxia films often feature fighting with weapons (such as swords and knives) and came into fashion in the 1960s. But in the 1970s, the genre gradually was replaced with kung-fu films (known for their rapid, physical punching and kicking) due to the popularity of Bruce Lee, whose Hong Kong-made films *The Big Boss* (Wei Lo, 1971) and *Fist of Fury* (Wei Lo, 1972) did very well at the box office. Taiwan’s wuxia and kung-fu films were considerably influenced by Hong Kong films. King Hu is the most famous wuxia film director of the period. Hu’s *Dragon Inn* (1967) was a great commercial success and thereafter the wuxia genre became very popular in Taiwan until the 1980s. Hu’s films are characterized by his notable fighting scenes, beautiful landscapes, unique artistic conceptions, and carefully-designed costumes.\(^70\) In his study, Andrew Chan notes Hu’s use of contrast between light and darkness and outward/inner space and Hu’s incorporation of Chinese classism. Lee and Chan both agree that Hu creates a benchmark and leaves an enduring legacy in wuxia films.

Another popular genre was melodrama. Qiong Yao, a famous romance author, wrote

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\(^68\) According to Rong Cai, Wuxia films originate from wuxia literature, a genre that traces back in ancient China.\(^68\) Wuxia combines two elements: wu (武), which stands for martial arts skills, and xia (侠), a term for “a chivalrous hero who defies legal and social conventions in his quest for justice, honor, and personal ambitions” (445). Wuxia literature has been widely consumed in Chinese-speaking communities and these “xia” characters becomes a cultural icon and the embodiment of good force to balance evil power and corrupted courts. Wuxia is not in documentary nor realist mode, as Cai notes, “[f]antastic in nature and nonconformist in ideological orientation, the wuxia world is more imaginary than reflective in its relation to the real world” (445).

\(^69\) See Yeh and Davis 35; Yip 52; Lin 41-42.

\(^70\) See Daw-Ming Lee 47.
many romance novels which became major literary sources for film adaptations. For example, *Four Loves* (Hsing Lee, 1965) and *The Silent Wife* (Hsing Lee, 1965) were great successes in the film market and thus they launched the trend of Qiong-Yao-style melodrama films in Taiwan. Melodramas based on Qiong Yao’s novels “helped mark the peak of Taiwan film’s so-called Golden Age (when Taiwan films were popular enough to get advance financing from around Southeast Asia)” (Yeh and Davis 35). Qiong Yao film adaptations were often set in China of the 1930s to 1940s (or an unspecific past) to portray characters facing difficulties based in class, educational background, or gender difference, with a belief in love provided as the solution to their problems. Daw-Ming Lee criticizes that these films firmly follow the patriarchal system and traditional morals, and they emphasize female characters’ sacrifice as a central virtue.

Moreover, Qiong-Yao-style melodramas, along with martial art films, have been criticized for being escapist films because they evade overt politics or social problems.

In the 1980s, domestic Taiwanese audiences gradually lost their interest in Taiwan-made Mandarin-language films and turned to Hong Kong films instead. In addition, Taiwan cinema was in need of international recognition. Therefore, CMPC began to fund and produce local Taiwanese-themed films with Hou Hsiao-hsien’s *The Sandwich Man* (1983), the film that is

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71 Ibid.

72 See Daw-Ming Lee 46-47.

73 Critics have divergent views of escapist film genres. Hsiung-Ping Chiao thinks Healthy Realist films, the Yellow Plum Melody costume musicals, and Qiong Yao film adaptations are all about nostalgia and escapism. June Yip lists swordsmen epics (wuxia), martial arts films and Qiong Yao film adaptations as “films of pure escapism.” Wenchi Lin justifies three Qiong Yao films (*The Young Ones*, 1973; *The Heart with a Million Knots*, 1973; *The Autumn Love Song*, 1976) made in the seventies, thinking that they incorporate social issues such as social mobility, but he agrees that the majority of Qiong Yao film adaptations are formulaic and escapist. See Hong 65; Yip 52-53; Lin “More than Escapist Romantic Fantasies” 1-3.
considered the start of Taiwanese New Cinema movement. According to Berry and Lu, Taiwanese New Cinema only lasted five years, from 1983 to 1987. Taiwanese New Cinema often focuses on “the common experiences of individual people and Taiwan society” and was known for its styles of realism and modernist expressionism (Berry and Lu 5). Notable Taiwanese New Cinema films include Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s *The Sandwich Man*, *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), Edward Yang’s *Taipei Story* (1985), Yi-Cheng Ko’s *Last Train to Tanshui* (1986), and Yi Chang’s *Jade Love* (1984). Engaged in the vigorous pursuit of historical truth and cinematic aesthetics, Taiwanese New Cinema won international acclaim but not the domestic mass audience’s favor. It is a common belief that the movement is responsible for “the total collapse of commercial cinema in Taiwan” (Yeh and Davis 56).

From the 1980s to 2000s, Hong Kong films and Hollywood films dominated Taiwan’s film market. Though there were several good quality Taiwan-made films that made profits, such as the coming-of-age film *Growing Up* (Kun-Hou Chen, 1983), Chinese Civil war films *A Home Too Far* (Yen-Ping Chu, 1990) and *Red Dust* (Yen Hao, 2000), the glove puppetry film *The Legend of the Sacred Stone* (Chris Huang, 2000), and queer film *Blue Gate Crossing* (Chin-yen Yi, 2002), the majority of Taiwanese films could hardly compete with imported films at the box office. However, since Taiwan’s political climate started to change in 1987, the year when martial law was lifted, Taiwanese people have enjoyed more freedom in expression and speech (such as forming political parties and newspapers). In the year 2000, the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) presidential candidate Shui-bian Chen and vice president candidate Annette Lu won

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74 See Berry and Lu 6.
75 See Yeh and Davis 8.
the election (presidential term 2000-2008), a success that profoundly frustrated KMT and ended its fifty years of authoritative one-party ruling in Taiwan. KMT’s Chinese nationalism and national identity soon turned out to be problematic, as more and more people thought that they were more tied to the land of Taiwan, not the mainland. This revisionist view of national and cultural identity is also reflected in recent Taiwanese cinema, and since the second half of the 2000s, there has been a revival.

Terming the localizing tendency of recent Taiwan cinema as bentu⁷⁶, Emilie Yeh maintains that “Taiwan cinema today draws on bentu topography, in which Japanese colonial past and KMT rule are preserved together as vestige of local time, and lasting marks of Taiwan identity” (10). Her analysis of Taiwan’s recent film industry helps to explain the success of Cape No.7 (Te-Shang Wei, 2008), a romantic comedy film that explores Taiwan’s Japanese colonial period⁷⁷ with a plot carefully incorporating the landscape of Southern Taiwan. As one of the best-selling films in Taiwan’s film market⁷⁸, Cape No.7’s popularity and profits encourage films

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⁷⁶ According to Yeh, the term “derives from bentuhua, referring to the indigenization movement, and an ideology fundamental to Taiwan’s political reforms and democratization in recent decades….” (9). Bentuhua stresses the ties to the land of Taiwan, as Yeh writes, “[s]ometimes bentu stands for Taiwan nationalism, defining the island as a nation in a specific, local term…the bentu is more sharply defined as a Taiwan-based sentiment” (9) See “Bentu: Marketplace and sentiments of contemporary Taiwan Cinema.”

⁷⁷ Cape No.7, along with sports film Kano (Umin Boya, 2014), are very different from the anti-Japanese films in the 1970s, as both films portray the Japanese aids and establishment (education and civil infrastructures) in Taiwan’s colonial period, though colonial-driven, in a positive way. Yeh talks about the ambitions of bentu movement (both commercially and aesthetically) and she includes Cape No.7 as one of the bentu examples, as she explains, “[bentu] deals with various issues: community rebuilding, ethnicity, travel and heritage…Taiwan cinema…wants to be artistically sophisticated and commercially potent; it tries to represent the local as national; it accommodates tastes both provincial and cosmopolitan. This I believe is the basis for the commercial success of Cape No.7, Monga, David Loman or even Seven Days in Heaven” (‘Bentu” 11).

⁷⁸ Cape No.7’s ticket sale made about NTD $530000000 (USD $17700000). See Taiwan Film
focusing on local Taiwanese history, Taiwanese identity, and the land of Taiwan itself – seen in the genres of fantasy film *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* (Ten-Lun Yeh, 2014), sports film *Kano* (Umin Boya, 2014), historical film *Seediq Bale* (Te-Shang Wei, 2011), and culinary comedy film *Zone Pro Site* (Yu-Hsun Chen, 2013). Karen Ya-Chu Yang notices that the recent cinema has a different historical view from Taiwanese New Cinema, as she writes, “Taiwan’s colonial history is no longer a past that needs to be strenuously overthrown or repressed in order to construct Taiwan’s own culture and identity… nor is there a reemergence of traumatic colonial/postcolonial pathos or haunting ghosts as featured in Taiwanese New Cinema” (45-46). Yeh and Yang both explicitly point out that in recent Taiwan cinema, there is a strong attempt to search for and build a Taiwanese national identity.

When Ang Lee received the Award for Outstanding Filmmaker of the Year at the 44th Golden Horse Award in 2007, he delivered a speech that shows him tying his identity to Taiwan cinema:

> I feel so moved by this award. It is very meaningful to me because I am proud of being a *Taiwanese* filmmaker and I am honored to represent Taiwan….The biggest market for Taiwan cinema is Mandarin-language film market. Our major advantages are our freedom and the culture we inherit. We need to hold on to them….Let us fight for Taiwanese-made films. *Go Taiwan cinema.*

(continuation 11 “Ang Lee acceptance speech”)

Lee’s speech provides a fitting lens to examine the relation between Taiwan cinema and his Mandarin-language films. While the existing Lee criticism of *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution* mainly focuses on his Chinese roots, pan-Chinese cultural nationalism, and his global career, this chapter positions the two films in the scope of Taiwan cinema to enable a reading of Lee’s


79 Lee’s speech is in Mandarin-language. The translation here, along with the two italicizations, are mine.
Mandarin-language Chinese-themed films that relate the auteur to the place where he became a cinephile. Indeed, concerning genres, Lee’s *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution* are indebted to Taiwan cinema of the 1970s. Many critics compare Lee’s wuxia interpretations in *Crouching Tiger* with King Hu’s *Dragon Inn* and *A Touch of Zen* (1971) and find that Lee adopted several notable styles from Hu, such as the fighting scene in the bamboo forest and the depictions of beautiful landscapes, to salute the wuxia film master of the 70s [Dilley, 2015; Liu, 2008; Wang and Yeh, 2005; Martin, 2005; Lu, 2013]. Emilie Yeh further argues that *Crouching Tiger* combines wuxia and family melodrama (wenyi)80 in the way that the two leading female characters serve as both swordswomen and romance heroines. As an anti-Japanese film, *Lust, Caution* also follows the spy thriller genre by featuring a leading female secret agent during the Sino-Japanese war. *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution* thereby can be seen as directly inspired by Taiwan cinema of the 1960s and 1970s.

Moreover, Lee’s filmmaking career parallels King Hu and Hsing Lee, who Davis and Yeh name the “founding fathers of Taiwan cinema” (2). Like Hu, Lee relocates to many different places, receives a Western education, and is exposed to a great amount of international films that deeply influence his cinematic styles and aesthetics. Both Hu and Lee elevate the wuxia genre by introducing new stylistic elements into their wuxia films, such as incorporating large amount of natural landscapes, religious and spiritual thought, and dance-like choreography for fight scenes. Like Hsing Lee, Ang Lee is interested in themes of filial piety and family, and is eager to try various films genres. Hsing Lee’s films span across many genres that “attests to both shifting commercial demands and changing cultural politics,” yet, they maintain the same styles (“camera

80 See Yeh’s “The Road Home” 206.
work, editing, and narrative strategies”) and themes (“family values, ethics, tradition, culture, and nation”) (Hong 68) throughout his career. Many of Hsing Lee’s films highlight the importance of filial piety, and the “centrality of the father/son duo” (Davis and Yeh 33).

Moreover, Lee’s pursuit of historical truth also corresponds to Taiwanese New Cinema. According to Yip, during the martial law enforcement, local Taiwanese experience and different views of history were banned and suppressed “through an ‘organized forgetting’ that sought to maintain the myth of a coherent Chinese nation unified with the mainland” (69). This “‘popular memory’—images of modern Taiwanese people and their diverse experiences,” is the main subject that Taiwanese New Cinema attempts to revive in response to Taiwan’s developing national and cultural consciousness. (69) The most famous example is Hou Hsiao-hsien’s *A City of Sadness* (1989), a film which explores the highly politically-sensitive history of the 228 Incident. The dynamic quest of historical truth are also present in Lee’s *Lust, Caution*, in which he revives the obscure history of the pro-Japanese KMT government so as to offer an alternative view to the official one belonging to Chiang Kai-Shek’s KMT government. Although Lee’s films do not belong to Taiwanese New Cinema, and by no means could Lee be called a Taiwanese New Cinema director, *Lust, Caution* still echoes the wave of the Taiwanese cinematic revolution in the 1980s. Overall, Lee has a strong tie to Taiwan cinema and its influence persistently operates in his films.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Wuxia Cinema and Critical Response*

In a roundtable discussion of *Crouching Tiger* in 2010, Lee elaborates on how Hong
Kong and Taiwanese wuxia films inspired him:

I grew up reading serial wuxia novels in newspapers and watching a lot of wuxia films, including the early Cantonese wuxia films, black-and-white films, and those wuxia films of the 1970s and 1980s. Wuxia novels and films are my youthful daydreams. For people who didn’t pursue academic success like me, [we] can imagine the wuxia world. I am very interested in Chinese martial arts, so that becomes a direction I have always wanted to try since I started my career…. People of my generation watched Taiwan’s and Hong Kong’s wuxia films when we were young…. I stressed both the story and fighting scenes when I filmed my martial art piece…. My wuxia film is the work in which I instilled much of my feelings and emotions, and with it I tried to work on something “intangible” for the first time. In the past I focused on reality in historical films or contemporary films… [filming *Crouching Tiger*] was fresh to me, and it satisfied my youthful longing for the wuxia world.81 (Lee par. 2–5)

Lee reveals that he has been a cinephile and wuxia fan since his high school days in Taiwan. His early immersion in film becomes a retentive memory of home that he continues to deal with in his film career. With *Crouching Tiger*, he revives wuxia films, a popular cultural legacy, but at the same time the film reminds the director of home, adolescence, and family in Taiwan. With filmmaking, Lee is able to bind himself closely to his home and country even though now he resides in America. In this way, the making of *Crouching Tiger* is similar to *Taking Woodstock* (2009) and *The Ice Storm* (1997), although the subjects are very different. In other words, by making these films, Lee finds another way to envision a national and personal past and consolidate his national and cultural identity.

*Crouching Tiger* depicts the relations between a group of martial art experts. Shu-Lien Yu (Michelle Yeoh) is entrusted with the mission to escort the sword, Green Destiny, to Beijing. The sword once belonged to Mu-bai Li (Cho Yun Fat), a famous Wudan martial master who intends to quit jianhu. After Yu successfully delivers the sword, Jiao-Long Yu (Ziyi Zhang), a young

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81 The discussion was conducted and published in Mandarin Chinese. The above translation is my own.
female aristocrat, steals it. Jiao-Long secretly studies kung-fu under Jade Fox (Pei-Pei Cheng). Li notices Jiao-Long’s talents for martial arts and proposes to be her master, but she refuses. On the night before Jiao-Long’s wedding, Xiao-Hu Lo (Chen Chang), her lover, asks her to elope with him. Jiao-Long declines Lo’s plan, but the next day, Lo interrupts her wedding. Jiao-Long later decides to join jianhu. Shu-Lien asks Jiao-Long to return the Green Destiny, but Jiao-Long refuses and leaves. Li follows Jiao-Long to a cave only to find her poisoned by Jade Fox. Li kills Jade Fox but gets fatally wounded when he tries to protect Jiao-Long. In the end, Jiao-Long meets Lo in Wudan Mountain. Rejecting Lo’s offer of returning to the western desert together, Jiao-Long flies down from the bridge and leaves Lo and Wudan behind.

*Crouching Tiger* undoubtedly is one of Lee’s masterpieces and was a blockbuster. It gained a huge commercial success and received a great amount of scholarly attention in America and Chinese-speaking countries. *Crouching Tiger*’s criticism has four dimensions: (1.) Chinese culture and cultural nationalism, (2.) transnationality and transnationalism, (3.) the wuxia genre, and (4.) gender. Fran Martin found that the film “creates a pan-Chinese cultural nationalism that constructs a triumphal, post-modern version of ‘Chineseness’” (149) that can speak to wider audiences via “allo-identification,” which breaks the borderline of culture and ethnicity. Whitney Crothers Dilley focuses on the boundary-crossing quality in Lee’s films, as she writes that “[they] represent not only the international crossing of boundaries but the repackaging and appropriation of Chinese cultural identity” (118). Chih-Yun Chiang maintains that “Chinese identity is co-constructed as a disparate, yet collaborative project by audiences from different Chinese communities,” and the film works to tie individuals to “the national identity and an

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*82 For the film’s gross, see the detailed information of box office on Internet Movie Database. www.imdb.com/title/tt0190332/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus.*
imagined ‘home’” (61). Sheldon Lu argues that as a transnational/global film, *Crouching Tiger* challenges the long-standing concepts of national cinema, Third Cinema, and diaspora cinema. Nonetheless, the film, which aims to present a “good old China,” fails to provide more authentic and sophisticated Chinese culture.83 Echoing Lu, Shu-Mei Shih also points out the problem of the performers’ inauthentic accents. She criticizes that “inauthenticity and incoherence aptly describe the film and the setting and expose the illusion that such martial arts films reference an eternal China and essential Chineseness” (3). For criticism on genre, Yeh argues that *Crouching Tiger* combines Wuxia and Wenyi, which transform the film into a wuxia-melodrama filled with kung-fu and romance. Nai-Huei Shen contends that Lee incorporates elements of Hollywood fantasy films and magical realism to represent space and fighting scenes in the film.84 On gender, Martin thinks Lee adopts western third-wave pop feminism to present Yu Jiao-Long as a contemporary rebel girl.85 Conversely, Rong Cai indicates that the Chinese swordswomen are seen as “‘a spectacle of misplaced ambitions and problematic desires’” (444) and needed to be “harnessed and controlled to ensure the male authority” (449).86

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84 See Nai-Huei Shen(沈乃慧) “李安的中國奇幻想像,” 197-213.

85 Martin then elaborates on the similarities between Jiao-Long Yu and contemporary women, as she writes “[the film] is associated with…the markedly Euro-American…pop-cultural preoccupation with the rebellious yet pretty super-heroine….Jen’s rebellion against the patriarchal structures of family and marriage, her yearning for personal freedom, and her gender-crossing in becoming a superior fighter and itinerant ‘warrior-boy’ make her…less descendant of the legion celluloid nüxia dating back to the Chinese cinema of the 1920s, than…creations of a decidedly 1990s Euro-American pop culture” (156).

86 See Cai “‘Gender Imagination in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and the Wuxia World,’” 444.
In sum, critics position *Crouching Tiger* into the spectrum of transnational film and focus on issues of the authenticity of (classical) Chinese culture, Chinese cinema, diaspora, and wuxia genre. Except for Yeh, who relates the film to the wényí films of the 1970s, very few critics discuss the film within the field of Taiwan cinema, let alone consider Taiwanese cinematic culture as the impetus for Lee’s wuxia masterpiece. However, the discussions of (in)authenticity shed light on the fact that *Crouching Tiger* is Lee’s ideal of Chinese classical culture, which, along with *Taking Woodstock* (in which he idealized American culture), first came into his mind in his youthful days in Taiwan. In this way, *Crouching Tiger* again underscores Lee’s status not as a Chinese national in search of history and recovery from the trauma of the Cultural Revolution (a focus of the fifth generation directors in Mainland China), but as a Taiwanese filmmaker who fantasizes over Chinese cultural heritages. It is also worthy to mention that Lee is not the only filmmaker influenced by the popularity of 1970s wuxia. Hou Hsiao-hsien directed his first wuxia film, *The Assassin* (2015), which also features a swordswoman, to fulfill his boyhood wuxia dream. In this way, the interest of re-creating an ancient world filled with confrontations between good and bad, nebulous interpersonal relations, and outstanding female characters becomes a shared Taiwanese cultural consciousness. This not only evokes the nostalgia for the golden age of Taiwan cinema but also paves the way to a national cinema in the face of transnationality and globalization.

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87 See Walsh’s “Killer Instinct.”
A Debate of Family and Individual Freedom

*Crouching Tiger* continues to explore the most important recurring theme in Lee’s films: the dilemma between pursuing individual freedom and fulfilling family commitments. As discussed in previous chapters, characters, such as *Eat Drink Man Woman*’s Chia-Chien and *Taking Woodstock*’s Elliot, often hesitate about whether to leave home or stay. In *Crouching Tiger*, Jiao-Long longs to become a swordswoman, but she is trapped by the arranged marriage her parents made for her. In the first half of the film, Jiao-Long wavers between a career in Jianhu and family obligations. Her indetermination results from Shu-Lien and Jade Fox’s *debate* on home and the individual. “Debate,” in this particular context, is a concept of presenting arguments in a structured way in which speakers take turns to deliver speeches as convincingly as possible to appeal to an audience. In many scenes, Shu-Lien and Jade Fox respectively present different arguments of home and Jianhu to Jiao-Long in hope that she accepts their values. The shifting discussions between Shu-Lien and Jade Fox thus are very similar to a formal debate more than argument.

Shu-Lien considers family duty the priority and marriage a necessity in a woman’s life. When Jiao-Long first meets Shu-Lien, Jiao-Long idealizes Jianhu as a free world, but Shu-Lien dispels her illusions by saying, “Fighters have rules too: friendship, trust, integrity. Without rules, we wouldn’t survive for long.” For Shu-Lien, Jianhu is not a world of outlaws totally unbound; rather, it is another society that regulates individuals as well. Jiao-Long explains that she does not have a chance to live the life she wants before the upcoming marriage. On hearing this, Shu-Lien solemnly tells her, “It’s the important step in a woman’s life, isn’t it?” Marriage becomes a more important lifetime career to a woman than individual freedom. Whether it is about Jianhu
or society, Shu-Lien believes that there is not much individual freedom to relish. Shu-Lien can also be seen as a good example of a domesticated woman who internalizes patriarchal rules and intends to pass them on to Jiao Long. Later, Jiao-Long consults Shu-Lien about Jianhu and freedom again, but Shu-Lien denies the possibility of such personal freedom:

**LONG.** I wish I were like the heroes in the books I read. Like you and Li Mu Bai. I guess I’m happy to be marrying. But to be free to live my own life, to choose whom I love…That is true happiness. […]

**LIEN.** Yes. Do you know I was once engaged to be married?

**LONG.** No, really?

**LIEN.** His name was Meng Si Zhao. He was a brother to Li Mu Bai by oath. One day, while in battle, he was killed by the sword of Li Mu Bai’s enemy. After, Li Mu Bai and I went through a lot together. Our feelings for each other grew stronger. But how could we dishonor Meng’s memory? So the freedom you talk about, I too desire it. But I have never tasted it.

**LONG.** Too bad for Meng, but it’s not your fault, or Li Mu Bai’s.

**LIEN.** I’m not an aristocrat as you are… but I must still respect a woman’s duties.

What is personal freedom to Jiao-Long appears to be unruly and indecent to Shu-Lien as she replies that she must adhere to “a woman’s duties” to marry the man her parents selected. The discrepancy between Jiao-Long and Shu-Lien is not just caused by their conflicting ideas of individual freedom but also by the two women’s social statuses. Jiao-Long, an aristocrat, has more access to privileges, such as private education and literacy, and is able to enjoy more, yet still limited, freedom brought by wealth and political influence; Shu-Lien, who is upper-working class, risks her life in security to make a living. Shu-Lien’s last line reveals her class inferiority and anger, for she regards Jiao-Long’s longing for excessive freedom and her admiration for the relation between Shu-Lien and Li as an insult.

In ancient China, men could take as many wives as they could afford without being labeled immoral, but women were taught to have only one husband to be virtuous.88 Therefore,

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88 The concept shows gender inequality in ancient Chinese society. There is also a proverb saying, “A chaste woman never marries twice, and a loyal courtier never serves two kings.” For
for Shu-Lien, she is still Meng’s wife-to-be since he did not renounce the marriage before he
died. In this way, any progress more than friendship between her and Li is regarded as forbidden
and dishonored. In a later scene, Shu-Lien reiterates the importance of family and virtuous
behavior for women when Jiao-Long seeks her help. As Shu-Lien helps Jiao-Long change back
to women’s clothes, Shu-Lien tells her, “Here [in the security agency] you must be in proper [my
italicize] attire.” Shu-Lien then instructs Jiao-Long to return to her parents, as she says, “Look at
the trouble you’ve caused. Now you know what Jianhu life is really like…. You can run from
marriage, but not your parents.” Shu-Lien’s insistence on wearing the right clothes—women’s
clothes for Jiao-Long—shows Shu-Lien’s rigid concept of gender in the way that one’s gender
performance should be consistent with the societal (and male) expectations—another set of
unwritten rules in a patriarchal society. This instance echoes Cai’s criticism that even though the
wuxia genre offers women more power and rights than other genres, female desire is still seen as
an act of gender trespassing. Indeed, for Shu-Lien, the “correct” gender performance, along with
a family view that parents are the topmost priority, renders personal freedom impossible.
Ironically, Shu-Lien inherits the security agency after her father’s death, but her job as the head
of the agency, traditionally taken on by men, does not entitle her to freedom from family
responsibilities or to marry freely, but rather magnifies her subjugation to the patriarchal order.

In contrast, Jade Fox’s view of family and jianhu advocates extreme individualism and
absolute freedom from all kinds of rules. In an early scene, Jade Fox urges Jiao-Long to leave
home for jianhu:

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more information about the proverb, see the entry page on the Ministry of Education’s website.
pedia.cloud.edu.tw/Entry/Detail/?title=%E7%83%88%E5%A5%B3%E4%B8%8D%E6%9B%B
4%E4%BA%8C%E5%A4%AB%EF%BC%8C%E5%BF%A0%E8%87%A3%E4%B8%8D%E4
%BA%8B%E4%BA%8C%E5%90%9B.
JADE FOX. Come with me. You don’t want to waste your life…as the wife of some bureaucrat. Denied your talent…as master and disciple we will rule. […] LONG. That [stealing the Green Destiny] was just for fun. How can I leave? Where would I go?
JADE FOX. Whenever we want. We’ll get rid of anyone in our way. Even your father. LONG. Shut up!
JADE FOX. It’s the Jianhu fighter lifestyle…kill or be killed. Exciting, isn’t it? […] LONG. Master…I started learning from you in secret when I was ten. You enchanted me with the world of Jianhu. But…once I realized I could surpass you, I became so frightened! Everything fell apart. I had no one to guide me, no one to learn from.
JADE FOX. Believe me, I’ve a lesson or two left to teach you!

In contrast to Shu-Lien, Jade Fox considers Jiao-Long’s marriage a waste of potential. Personal achievement is far more important than commitment to family obligations. Jade Fox’s view of Jianhu is counter to Shu-Lien’s as well. While Shu-Lien sticks to jianhu’s rules of respecting fellow fighters, Jade Fox believes in absolute individual freedom that one can kill as one likes without abiding by any rules. Jade Fox’s version of Jianhu also defies patriarchal order. She covets the knowledge of martial arts in the Wudan Manual, but since the Wudan School does not take women, Jade Fox seduces Li Mu Bai’s Wudan master and murders him when he refuses to share the manual with her. Jade Fox’s killing can be seen as a desperate attempt to fight back against patriarchal hegemony. As the dialogue shows, Jade Fox agitates Jiao-Long to challenge her father, a symbol of patriarchal order.

Therefore, if Shu-Lien is seen as a docile, the-angel-of-the-house, who respects society and rules, Jade Fox becomes a Chinese femme fatale who abandons rules and laws to pursue her personal career. In a cave, Jade Fox asks Jiao-Long to join her again, stating, “Your parents will never accept you again. But why go home? We’ve gone this far, we won’t stop now. You’ll always be my lady. At last, we’ll be our own masters. We’ll be happy. That’s the most important thing. All we have left is each other, right?” Again, for Jade-Fox, individual happiness does not come from fulfilling family obligations, but from pursuing personal goals outside family.
However, neither Shu-Lien nor Jade Fox gain what they want most. Shu-Lien wishes for an ordinary life with Li Mu Bai, but he dies before her wish comes true; Jade-Fox endeavors to become a martial art expert but is also killed. If Shu-Lien stands for the traditional Chinese family view and Jade Fox for a more radical view of individual freedom, then the film suggests that both sides fail to cope with society and Jianhu. Nonetheless, Jade Fox’s idea of individual freedom seems to root deeper in Jiao-Long. In the end, rather than returning to her parents, Jiao-Long goes to Wudan to meet Lo, her lover, and finally leaps from the bridge. Considering Jiao-Long’s exceptional martial arts skills and the wuxia genre’s fantastic mode, her leap can only be regarded as a metaphorical move to illustrate her determination to set herself free from family obligations and the promise of marriage (for she leaves Lo behind) in order to obtain individual freedom in Jianhu.

**Swordswomen, Swordsmen, and Compulsory Domesticity**

As shown in the previous section, the dilemma of the choice between the individual and family appears through the complicated relations between the three leading swordswomen. On top of that, Jiao-Long has been involved in the triangular relations with two swordsmen, Li and Lo. For both swordsmen, Jiao-Long appears as a subject for patriarchal subjugation. In the desert scene, Lo’s bandits rob Jiao-Long’s family escort and Jiao-Long follows Lo all the way to his cave. Though benevolent in nature, Lo treats Jiao-Long like a *father*. Lo’s statements such as, “She’s mine,” “you’re tired. You need rest,” “You need to eat. Understand?” illustrate his dominance over Jiao-Long. When she challenges his authority through giving similar orders back
to him, Lo is enraged by such defiance. Later, knowing Jiao-Long’s father is searching for her, Lo earnestly urges her to return home and says to her, “You might miss your family. If it were our daughter, we’d look for her too. She would miss us. Jen, I want you to be mine forever. I will make my mark on the world. I will earn your parents’ respect.” It is clear that Lo, albeit an outlaw, prioritizes filial piety and familial relations, and also shows an explicit desire to become a patriarch.

On the other hand, Li Mu Bai also wants to subordinate Jiao-Long. In the temple scene, without getting Jiao-Long’s approval first, Li begins to treat her as a disciple and gives a moral lesson, stating, “Real sharpness comes without effort. No growth. Without assistance. No action. Without reaction. No desire without restraint. Now give yourself up and find yourself again. There is a lesson for you.” In traditional Chinese culture, the relation between a master and his disciple is often seen as one between parent and son/daughter, as an old Chinese saying goes, “Teacher for one day, father for a lifetime.”89 Therefore, similar to Lo, Li stands as a patriarch, wishing to inflict the “shackle” of family roles and responsibility on the disobedient Jiao-Long. If Lo adopts a more violent and physical way to “tame the shrew” (for he defeats her in rounds of bodily combats), Li uses philosophical teachings and rules to discipline her. Both swordsmen exert their patriarchal authority to instill a sense of compulsory domesticity in Jiao-Long.

When Jiao-Long escapes from her marriage and wanders in Jianhu, she disguises herself as a noble man. Her swordsman identity is still ambivalent, wavering between imitating men and becoming a free swordsman. At the tea stand on the roadside, her conceited self-

89 The saying is originally from Shi Chi (史記). See National Central Library’s webpage. reffaq.ncl.edu.tw/hypage.cgi?HYPAGE=faq_detail.htm&idx=797.
introduction as “someone who defeats Li Mu Bai” successfully establishes her formidable identity that drives away the two evil-looking swordsmen. In the restaurant scene, she formally introduces herself again in poetry:

   LONG. Who am I? I am the Invincible Sword Goddess. Armed with the incredible Green Destiny. Be you Li or Southern Crane...lower your head and ask for mercy. I am the desert dragon. I leave no trace. Today I fly over Eu-Mei. Tomorrow I’ll kick over Wudan Mountain!

In both the tea stand and restaurant scenes, Jiao-Long’s charisma and martial arts skill obviously excel over all other swordsmen, proving that she became a good fighter. Jiao-Long’s poetry also demonstrates her desire to subvert male superiority and define herself as a “goddess” who surpasses and rules Jianhu. However, Jiao-Long’s identity is questionable since she is disguised as a man and is “armed with the incredible Green Destiny,” an embodiment of phallic order, to prove herself. In this way, Jiao-Long cannot separate herself from patriarchal order and her swordswoman identity is not the same as a truly free swordswoman’s.

   Nevertheless, the ending of Crouching Tiger suggests a different reading of female identity and agency. To probe further into the final scene on the bridge, before Jiao-Long leaps, she reminds Lo that “a faithful heart makes wishes come true,” and encourages Lo to make a wish too. What Jiao-Long leaves unsaid is that while Lo’s wish is to return to the desert with her, her wish is to roam freely in Jianhu. When she jumps, there is a slight smile on her face, signifying her victory over male manipulation, and her facial expression also poses a sharp contrast to Lo’s crying face as if to accentuate the frustrated patriarchy. With the demise of Li and Jiao-Long’s farewell to Lo, the film implies the decline of traditional patriarchal order and an exciting possibility of women’s liberation. Significantly, Crouching Tiger reflects Ang Lee’s wuxia fantasy, yet the gender relations and the quest for individual freedom presented are to
some degrees mediated and re-interpreted by the filmmaker. Through the treatment of the character of Jiao-Long, Lee shows sympathy for women in traditional Chinese society and an idea that women have the strength to resist the patriarchal order, a theme that he goes on to elaborate upon in *Lust, Caution*.

**National Identity, Nationality, and Nationalism in *Lust, Caution***

At “Ang Lee Comes Home: My Era and I,” a public forum held by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of China (ROC/Taiwan) in Taipei in 2013, Lee related his Taiwanese experience to *Lust, Caution*:

I often devote myself to and identify myself with the losing side. My family came to Taiwan because we lost the [Chinese civil] war. Taiwan is always on the losing side, so when I got the Oscars everyone was very happy about that…. Taiwan is underprivileged, and I am underprivileged in America too…. I grew up in an authoritarian society, and I dislike these authoritarian, simplified political symbols. I think life is very complicated, but politicians and Hollywood often use simplified slogans to gain popularity. They are straightforward and effective, but they are a far cry from life and art. I always sympathize with the losing side, such as *Lust Caution*’s Wang Chia-Chih. She actually is the one who lost. (Lee “My Era and I”)90

The title, “Ang Lee Comes Home,” explicitly indicates Taiwan as the legitimate home for Lee.

By stressing Lee’s returning to Taiwan, not the Mainland, the title claims him as an indisputable Taiwanese citizen rather than a confusing “second-generation Mainlander.” Furthermore, the venue of the forum carried a strong political message as well. It took place in Taipei’s Zhongshan Hall (中山堂)91, a historic building named after Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the founding father of the ROC.

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90 The forum is in Mandarin Chinese. The translation here is my own.

91 For the history of Zhongshan Hall, see
Zhongshan Hall served as the place for the official ceremony of Japan’s surrender to the ROC in 1945, and from 1946 to 2005, it was used as the meeting place for the National Assembly of the ROC. The history behind Zhongshan Hall thus signifies strong nationalism and KMT’s authority in the past. It is worth mentioning that the day before the forum, Lee received the National Award of Art in film, sponsored by The National Culture and Arts Foundation, a government-funded organization. With these national honors, Lee was made into a national symbol which the government capitalized on so as to advocate a national identity more attached to the ROC in Taiwan. However, ironically, Lee shows a suspicious attitude toward authoritarianism and politics in his statement. Incorporating Lee’s political ideology, *Lust, Caution* can be seen as a deconstructive film that not only aims to explore a more objective historical truth, but also parallels recent Taiwan Cinema in reflecting the island’s movements of democratization and shifting national identity in the post-martial law society.

Adapted from Eileen Chang’s historical novella of the same name, *Lust, Caution* takes place in Hong Kong and Shanghai during the Second Sino-Japanese War when the ROC was split into the pro-Japanese Reorganized National Government in Nanjing, led by former KMT member Wang Ching-Wei, and the anti-Japanese Nationalist Government in Chongqing, led by Chiang Kai-shek. Wang Chia-Chih (Wei Tang), a Lingnan University student, fleets to Hong Kong with her classmates and teachers. In Hong Kong, Wang joins the university’s drama club and becomes close to Kuang Yu-Ming (Leehom Wang), Lai Shu-Jin (Chih-ying Chu), Huang Lei (Ying-Hsuan Kao), Liang Jun-Sheng (Yu-Luen Ko), and Auyang Ling-Wen (Johnson Yuen).

[92 For more information about the National Cultural and Arts Foundation, see http://www.ncafroc.org.tw/en/about.aspx]
They plan to murder Mr. Yee (Tony Leung), the head of a secret agency for the Nanjing government. Wang and Auyang disguise themselves as a wealthy couple, and with the help of Tsao (Ka Lok Chin), Wang successfully befriends Yee and his wife (Joan Chen). Yet, the Yees return to the Mainland before the group executes their plan. What’s worse, Tsao discovers the truth and threatens the group. In a rage, Kuang, Huang, Liang, and Auyang brutally kill Tsao; Wang, stunned and terrified, runs away from the crime scene and her friends. After three years, in Shanghai, Wang meets Kuang, now a secret agent for the Chongqing government. Kuang introduces Wang to Old Wu (Tsung-hua Tuo), the head of a secret agency for the Chongqing government, and Wu trains her to be a government spy. Wang is assigned a mission to assassinate Yee, but gradually, she falls in love with him. Kuang, Wang and the other agents plan to kill Yee at a jewelry store. However, Yee escapes unharmed because Wang gives him a warning. In the end, Kuang, Wang, and the other agents are killed by Yee’s men in a dark quarry.

Many critics point out that Lust, Caution received very different responses in the United States, China, and Taiwan (Chang, 2009; Chi, 2009; Lee, 2008; Hamer, 2011). In the United States, the audience and critic responses were lukewarm; in China, Lee was seen as traitor since the film was believed to honor characters who fawn on Japan; nevertheless, in Taiwan, the film was highly praised. Generally speaking, the criticism of Lust, Caution touches on the issues of nationalism, feminism, and postmodernity. Shaoyan Ding argues that the film is “a recreation of postmodern cultural poetics,” with which Lee questions the existing notions of nationalism and national identity and “the objectification and victimization of women in patriarchal society” (98). Hsiao-hung Chang argues that for Ang Lee, “Shanghai in the 40s is…the affective routes with which to link family, the political party and the nation through which the filial son might regain
the cultural legitimacy lost and reclaimed not in a place…but in a kind of affect” (45). Chang further explains that “this affective assemblage of the patriotic and the diasporic created by Lust, Caution that gives Ang Lee not a real identity but a real feeling to reclaim the homeland and to love the country undauntedly” (46). Both Yanhong Zhu and Robert Chi position Lust, Caution into the spectrum of Chinese national cinema and the Mainland’s film industry. Zhu compares Lust, Caution with other Chinese spy films and finds that Lust, Caution does not contain political propaganda like the others. Chi indicates several objections from Chinese critics, such as “meihua (glorification) of hanjian (wartime Chinese traitors)” (181), omitting Chinese Communist heroes, and negative representations of Chinese women. This kind of rhetoric, as Chi suggests, “criticizes Chinese people and things for displaying or visualizing a fantasmatic China” (181). As Zhu’s findings show, Lee’s film is obviously different from all the other Chinese-made films. And as Chi’s article indicates, the film’s interpretation of history is against the pro-Communist-anti-Japanese political ideology that Chinese audiences are familiar with. This is the main reason why the film did not receive positive feedback in China. Zhu and Chi are both insightful in their analyses of the lack of popularity of Lust, Caution in China.

Zhu and Chi’s findings illustrate the fact that Lust, Caution neither fits nor belongs to Chinese national cinema. On the contrary, as I argued earlier in this chapter, Lust, Caution salutes the 1960s and 1970s Taiwanese-made spy thriller and anti-Japanese war films by adopting a similar historical setting, emphasizing female agents, and stressing themes of a contesting national identity. Wenchi Lin argues that these 70s spy films reflect the island’s particular postcolonial situations and a contested national identity since “the drama of a ‘Chinese’ having difficulty in telling either other Chinese are on the Chinese side or the Japanese
side may have provided the Taiwanese audience, whose national identity was still problematic…in their own minds…with a kind of pleasure of mimicry” (“Of Female Spies and National Heroes in Taiwan” 48). This postcolonial mindset and a quest for a clearly-defined national identity persist today, and Lee makes sure that Lust, Caution represents these collective Taiwanese political ideologies through questioning the established ideas of family, home and nation.

Broken Family, Betraying Fathers

From his Taiwanese father trilogy to later American-made films, the extended family and the nuclear family have always been at the center of Lee’s cinematic aesthetic. Yet, in Lust, Caution, Lee elevates the notion of family to the level of nation: nation becomes the symbolic home, and the government becomes the symbolic father. The parent-child relations that traditional Chinese filial piety normalizes are transformed into the relation between the individual and the nation. Lee does not honor such intensified patriarchy and nationalism; instead, he critiques them by depicting a dysfunctional familial relation between the betraying father and the daughter.

During the staging of a patriotic play, Wang’s character reveals her family history to Kuang’s soldier:

CHIA-CHIH. You’ve given everything to save China! Every time you kill an enemy, you are avenging my brother! I am only sorry that I am a girl. I need to take care of my mother, and I promised my brother he would never have to worry. (...) Let me bow to you on behalf of our country, my dead brother, and our nation for generations and generations to come! China will not fall.

The patriotic play, with its shabby props, weak plot and actors’ exaggerated performances,
paradoxically reveals its staged nature and the absurdity of blind patriotism. It also significantly suggests that the issues of gender and nationalism are far more complicated and contested than the monotonous representation in the coherent, fabricated world in the play. In this sense, the arrangement of the play within the film reiterates Lee’s anti-authoritarian ideas. Furthermore, Wang’s lines manifest the gendered familial responsibilities in a patriarchal society: while men stay on the battlefield, women are left at home. This patriarchal rhetoric explicitly sets forth women’s subordinate status and submission in the expressions of “only [be] sorry that I am a girl” and “bow to” men. The play thus signals women’s underprivileged social status where they are forced to accept an apologetic mentality that they never help men enough during the war.

Throughout the film, there are three moments of betrayal when Wang is deceived, pushed, or abandoned by the men she trusts. First, Wang’s father immigrates to England with her brother after her mother dies. Leaving Wang alone in China, her father later remarries and refuses to let her join him in England. The unreliable and absent father thus directly causes her apologetic mentality. This first betrayal then becomes a painful trauma that she attempts to get over while negotiating with other men as well as her country. Kuang is the second man to betray Wang. In the scene when he tries to kiss her, she refuses him, inquiring, “three years ago you could have. Why didn’t you?” Wang’s question refers to an earlier scene when, in Hong Kong, the entire drama group decides to let Liang “teach” Wang, still a virgin, how to have sex. Believing that she has no other choice, Wang agrees to take such “sex lessons” with Liang. Wang’s suggestion that Kuang “could have” can be interpreted into two ways: Kuang could have volunteered to do the sex lessons since they liked each other; or, Kuang could have intervened and stopped the lessons. But, instead, he passively witnessed Wang suffer sexual exploitation.
Ironically, Lai, Wang’s female companion, assists the men in these sex lessons. Whether Lai helps the boys out of her jealousy (she is fond of Kuang as well) or her inability to oppose such male violence, the involvement of Lai further strengthens Wang’s position as a helpless victim prosecuted and betrayed by both men and women in the name of patriotism.

The third betrayal takes place with Old Wu and Wang’s first meeting. Wu promises to deliver her letter and send her to her father in England, but he destroys it instead. Kuang maintains silence about the truth. Wu deceives Wang in order to bind her loyalty to the Chongqing government and Kuang is complicit in the deception. Both men betray her trust in friendship and the government. Wu is also a father, whose children and wife were killed by Yee’s men earlier. For Wang, Wu represents the combined threat of males (father and nation) that attempt to oppress her. It is worth mentioning that Tsun-Hua Tuo, the actor playing Wu, is famous for his portrayal of loyal and patriotic military officials in the military education movie series *Yes, Sir* (1987-2016) and the war-history film *A Home Too Far* (1990) in Taiwan. To a great extent, Tuo’s image is linked closely to the KMT government and the nation of the ROC. In this way, the casting of Tuo reinforces Wu’s representation of Chiang Kai-shek’s anti-Japanese government and a masculine conception of nationalism. Therefore, in the film, neither the real father (Wang’s father) nor the symbolic fathers (Wu and the nation) treat Wang justly.

The portrayal of the father-daughter relation in *Lust, Caution* thus poses a sharp contrast to father-daughter relations in Lee’s other films. In *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*, the old, widowed father takes care of his three daughters; in *Brokeback Mountain*, Ennis financially supports and regularly visits his daughters; in *The Ice Storm*, Ben and Wendy are close. Those characters more
or less abide by filial piety and the five Confucian cardinal relations,\textsuperscript{93} which not only ask parents to be close and loving to their children, but also suggest the nation (kings) to be righteous and respectful of its people. Nevertheless, \textit{Lust, Caution} devalues such Confucian teachings with its representations of unreliable fathers and dysfunctional families. The film becomes Lee’s darkest family tragedy in which the mutual trust between parents and children no longer exists.

\textbf{The Individual, Gender and Nationalism}

Similar to many of Lee’s films, \textit{Lust, Caution} contemplates the individual’s difficulty of making decisions between familial obligations and personal freedom. But in \textit{Lust, Caution}, such individual choices take on a different form. Filial piety to one’s family is converted into an absolute and gendered loyalty to the government, which is entangled with extreme Chinese nationalism and the patriarchy. These factors are further complicated by the political context—two warring KMT governments both claiming the legitimacy of the ROC. While the drama group and Wu are defined as masculine since they only recognize the anti-Japanese Chongqing government and Chinese culture, Wang, Lai, and Yee are portrayed as feminine for their acceptance of foreign cultures.

During the three years in Hong Kong, Wang takes classes in Japanese. While it is regarded as the enemy’s language, receiving this knowledge helps her survive her father’s and

\textsuperscript{93} The five Confucian cardinal relations are: parents and children should be close to each other; kings should be righteous and treat their people with respect; husbands and wives take on different domestic responsibilities; younger people should respect older people; friends should be honest and trustworthy to one another. For more detailed explanations, see reading_classics.cl.ntu.edu.tw/key/article\_35f5ba25ff90f03d6ba335d370119ec1 and tsoidug.org/papers\_lun\_comp.php.
the group’s betrayal. Lai suggests to Kuang that they produce Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* for a fundraising performance, yet Kuang rejects the play as a “bourgeois drama” and produces a patriotic play instead. Lai complains about Kuang’s self-centeredness, stating, “[Kuang] never listens to anyone else. But since it’s for the resistance, I suppose we women really shouldn’t fall behind—but we’ll probably just have to do what he says.” *A Doll’s House* is notable for its celebration of female awareness, the resistance to the patriarchal system, and the quest for self-identity. Ibsen’s famous play is also a story that doubts the rigid gender roles of family.94 Lai’s familiarity with and intention of producing the play show her openness to gender equality and reconsiderations of familial duties. Her line, “women really shouldn’t fall behind,” also supplements her Westernized feminist thought. Nevertheless, Lai’s feminist voice is harshly repressed by Kuang’s version of chauvinist and authoritarian patriotism. Lai helplessly surrenders to such male hegemony by “just hav[ing] to do what he says.” Both Wang and Lai are oppressed and rejected in patriarchal society due to not only their gender but their cultural tolerance. Being loyal and patriotic to the country, as the film suggests, means being subjugated by and assimilated into the dominating patriarchal system, which is based upon women’s sacrifices.

However, Wang and Lai are not the only victims of this chauvinist-nationalist conception of loyalty. Yee possesses great power as the head of the spy agency, but his masculinity is also ironically undermined and feminized by the same conception. In a later scene, Yee asks Wang to meet him at a Japanese club. Wang is mistaken for a hostess by a Japanese military officer but the owner comes to help and bring her to Yee, who just finishes a meeting with some Japanese

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94 See Terry Siu-han Yip’s “Gender Roles and Female Identity in Chinese and Western Literature,” pp. 141-150.
YEE. These Japanese devils kill people like flies, yet deep down they’re scared as hell. They know their days are numbered, since they got the Americans on their case. Yet they still hang around with their painted puppets, and keep singing their off-tune songs—just listen to them!

WANG. I know why you brought me here.
YEE. Why?
WANG. You want me to be your whore.
YEE. Whore? It is I who was brought here….so you see, I know better than you how to be a whore [for the Japanese].

Yee works with Japanese military officers for the Nanjing government. However, he despises himself for such treachery to China since he fails to be culturally loyal. Yee’s mentality thereby resembles Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon’s Shu Lien. They are both influenced by the prevalent Chinese saying, “A chaste woman never marries twice, and a loyal courtier never serves two kings,”95 which defines standards of morals and virtues for the individual. Shu-Lien does not dare to marry Li Mu Bai, and Yee is guilty of his service to two countries. Significantly, Yee’s word choice of “whore” can be seen as an act of castrating himself as punishment. In this way, Wang, Lai, and Yee are blamed for their embraces of foreign cultures and they are stigmatized as the female other (as opposed to the masculine self of Chinese nationalism). The inclusion of Yee further indicates that the status of the female other is not defined by biological sex, but by the degrees of the individual’s compliance with the national authority.

Nevertheless, toward the end of the film, Wang begins to shift her loyalty not to the government but to herself. In a scene where Wang reports information to Wu, Wang bravely confronts Wu’s authority:

WU. As an agent there is only one thing, loyalty. Loyalty to the party, to our leader, and to our country! Am I making myself clear?
WANG. Don’t worry. I will do what you say!
WU. Good! Keep him in your trap. And if you need anything…

95 See note 29.
WANG. You think I have him in a trap? Between my legs, maybe? You think he can’t smell the spy in me when he opens up my legs? Who do you think he is? He knows better than you how to act the part. He not only gets inside me, but he worms his way into my heart. I take him in like a slave. I play my part loyally, so I too can get inside him. And every time, he hurts me until I bleed and scream before he comes, before he feels alive. In the dark only he knows it’s all true.

WU. Okay, stop it!

WANG. That’s why I can torture him until he can’t take it any longer, and I will keep going until I can’t anymore.

WU. That’s enough.

Wang. Every time when he finally collapses on me, I think, maybe this is it, maybe this is the moment you’ll come and shoot him, right in the back of the head, and his blood and brains will cover me!

WU. Shut up!

While Wu demands unconditional submission from Wang, she defies his orders for silence three times. To Wu’s dismay, Wang forces him to listen to the inconvenient truth—that the government’s win is based on women’s sacrifice. Therefore, this scene contradicts the national rhetoric and counters women’s forced apologetic mentality since it proves they are useful enough to make a great impact on men.

Wang’s frank descriptions of the sexual intercourse shows that the body is also a place for power and competition. In their lovemaking, both without their weapons, Wang and Yee can only engage themselves into exchanges of corporeal moves while attempting to break each other’s mental resistance. In this way, in correspondence to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the sexual intercourse is not much different from martial arts combat, since they both visually display the relations between the conqueror and the conquered, and between the powerful and the weak. In addition, Wang’s linking of blood and pain to sex further symbolizes the pleasure of sexual masochism, which offers an emotional outlet for the mentally oppressed Wang and the guilty Yee. Wang’s imagery of red blood also signifies sins and pain. For Wang, inflicting pain on Yee becomes a desperate resistance to his sexual aggression and a way to redeem her sin of giving her body to an enemy. Lee also uses the imagery of blood in the sex scene in *Crouching Tiger,*
Hidden Dragon to visualize Jiao-Long’s resistance to Lo and the forbidden and sinful love between them (due to their different social ranks). In both films, the female body serves as a terrain for showing female subjectivity or male subjugation. Jiao-Long’s noble social status as aristocrat and her great martial arts skills enable her to fully control her body, and in the sex scene, she shows her female agency and individual will through actively being engaged in the sexual intercourse with Lo. Yet, Wang does not have such abundant assets like Jiao-Long, and the sexualized body becomes Wang’s only way to resist and to survive in a male-dominated world.

In a scene at a jewelry store, upon seeing the diamond ring, a token for Yee’s feelings for her, Wang is moved and decides to warn Yee of the upcoming danger. With Lee’s use of close-up of Wang and Yee’s facial expressions and their intimate bodily interactions, Wang’s decision appears complicated. On the one hand, Wang’s sudden change of mind demonstrates her strong individual will to defy government authority. Between national loyalty/filial piety and individual freedom, she chooses the latter, similar to Jiao-Long’s climatic decision in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. After Wang leaves the store, she refuses to take the poison given to her by Wu. Her disobedience declares that she is the master of her destiny. Though she knows sooner or later she might be caught and killed by Yee’s men, it is her own choice. On the other hand, Wang saves Yee out of her sympathy toward him for they share, in a nationalistic sense, “the female other” status. Compared to Kuang, Wu, and Wang’s father, Yee proves the sincerest male, one who does not betray her but returns with good intentions. Ironically, Yee is able to experience and understand Wang’s feelings because he is also victimized by Chinese nationalism and the ideology of cultural loyalty.
Considering its structure, *Lust, Caution* can be divided into two sections: in the first half, Lee’s representation of gender and nationalism seems to confirm that women are helpless victims in the Chinese patriarchal society; however, in the second half, Lee offers a counter discourse that challenges gender relations and the dominant narrative of history. Referring back to Lee’s interview, the director’s self-proclaimed “loser” status helps him to sympathize with Wang and relate to her. In this way, by granting her an agency not to cooperate in sustaining patriarchal nationalism, Lee deconstructs prevalent gender misconceptions. In casting Tuo as the villain Old Wu, in some sense, Lee also deconstructs the righteous image and the national history established by Chiang’s KMT party Taiwan. Furthermore, in making Yee, a pro-Japanese KMT member the protagonist, Lee converts *Lust, Caution* into a revisionist war-history film which justifies another version of the Sino-Japanese war that is long repressed and forgotten to Taiwanese people.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the themes of family and the individual’s choice between familial obligation and personal freedom in Lee’s two Chinese-themed films: *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution*. The former is Lee’s boyhood fantasy of classic Chinese culture and his parents’ homeland, while the latter is his pursuit of a more unbiased history of his own country. Both films fittingly echo Lee’s remarks that he constantly keeps the thought of home and nation in mind. Moreover, though the two films’ genres, plots, and historical settings are very much different, their leading female characters, Jiao-Long and Wang, both choose personal
freedom over oppression, a considerably untraditional decision in terms of Chinese filial piety. Rather than being merely Chinese-themed, the two films are more cinematically influenced by Lee’s Taiwanese experiences in their genres and subjects. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution* thus reaffirm the director’s cultural umbilical cord to Taiwan, which remains an inseparable and recurring part in his cinematic aesthetic.
CONCLUSION: A TRANSNATIONAL TAIWANESE IDENTITY

Now living and primarily working in New York City, Ang Lee is still much concerned with Taiwan. In an interview in 2013, the director talks about Taiwan’s film industry and the country’s competitiveness:

Regarding Taiwan’s marginal status in the world, I have experienced that a lot. Taiwan has a lot of nice “Soft Power”: we were nurtured by the Chinese culture, and we absorbed much of the Western and Japanese culture. In addition, I think the Taiwanese are very friendly. Perhaps because I am Taiwanese, I truly think so. Taiwanese people have high qualities and that’s our advantages, but Taiwan does not gain much attention in the world. So I brought the team to Taiwan to film Life of Pi (2012). Now everybody knows that Life of Pi was filmed there. I thought there were not any fundamental equipment to support such a huge film industry in Taiwan. Yet, actually Taiwan did have the basis, but was lacking a systematic organization. So we should improve our film industry; on the other hand, Taiwanese people must have a self-awareness. Young Taiwanese people should be cautious and work harder since the current advantages we have won’t last long.96 (Ang Lee “I Think Storytelling is a Pursuit of the Meaning of Life”)

This interview appropriately illustrates Ang Lee’s status as a Taiwanese transnational filmmaker.

Echoing earlier interviews covered in this dissertation in which Lee mentions the thought of home and country,97 here he exemplifies the same thoughts by explaining how he brought Taiwan into the attention of the world through making a major Hollywood film on the island. Also, he suggests the ways to strengthen Taiwan’s film industry and its competitiveness. Lee refers to himself as a Taiwanese and relates with Taiwanese people through using the first person plural “we” and “our.” In showing such comradeship, Lee affirms his Taiwanese citizenship and

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96 The interview is in Mandarin Chinese. The translation here is my own.
97 See in particular the first quoted interview in chapter 4.
upholds a nation in need of national confidence. To be more specific, as an unofficial “spokesperson,” or a cultural ambassador for Taiwan, he designates to himself a national mission of utilizing his personal influence for the country’s diplomatic purposes. If, for Lee, Taiwan is the ultimate embodiment of family, what he tries to achieve can be seen as a fulfillment of filial piety. For him, giving back to one’s family is the equivalent of serving one’s country. As Lee’s films often discuss filial piety, his national identity significantly conforms to the family ethics he develops for his film characters.

Lee’s national identity and patriotism parallel many recurring themes in his cinema. In the eight films discussed in this dissertation, there are three central leitmotifs: family, the view of cultural outsiders, and a sympathy for the losing side. For the theme of family, Lee discusses the fulfillment of filial piety in different situations. No matter if it is his American-made films, Taiwanese-made films or Chinese-themed films (such as Ennis’s childcare in *Brokeback Mountain*; Elliot’s assistance in paying the mortgage for his parents in *Taking Woodstock*; Alex’s offer of living together with his old father in *Pushing Hands*; and Jiao-Long’s arranged marriage in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*), filial piety (or a resistance to it) is at the center of the parent-child relations. Highly relevant to filial piety is the individual’s dilemma between personal freedom (such as career, marriage, and happiness) and familial obligations (such as childcare). For the issue of cultural distance, because of his immigrant status in America, Lee often reveals a sense of cultural alienation since he is an outsider. Yet such cultural distance aids him in making more insightful observations on American society (such as *The Ice Storm* and *Taking Woodstock*). Concerning his sympathy for the losing side, the filmmaker is particularly interested in representing women and the oppressed in a patriarchal society (such as *Lust,
Caution’s Wang Chia-Chih and Brokeback Mountain’s gay couple). Lee experiences Taiwan’s marginality and understands the feeling of being oppressed and underprivileged and this clearly appears in his work.

After all, more than others, these three themes are closely related to Lee’s Taiwanese identity. Raised in a Mainlander family and having a traditional Chinese father, his domestic philosophy is greatly influenced by Confucianism and traditional Chinese family values. However, growing up in Taiwan, the island’s colonial past and the phenomenon of Americanization made Lee more Westernized than his parents, and his later American education further transformed him into an artist who broke with tradition. This is seen in his treatment of same-sex marriage (as in The Wedding Banquet, when Mr. Gao and Mrs. Gao finally accept Wei-Tung and Simon’s relationship), women’s status (in Eat Drink Man Woman, as Old Chu lets his daughters decide their own marriages, and in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, when Jiao-Long has the autonomy to roam freely in jianhu), gender and LGBTQ issues (in Brokeback Mountain, as Lee makes the gay cowboy couple less stereotypical and more sympathetic), and the formation of family (in Pushing Hands, as Chu chooses to live alone rather than having an extended family with his son, daughter-in-law, and grandson). Moreover, different from the traditional Chinese view of family that sees parents as superior to children, in Lee’s films, parents are not always the heroes of the family. In Pushing Hands, the old father is sent to the police office twice: the first time, when he gets lost and the police escorts him back to the house; the second time, when he fights with the restaurant owner and the police takes him into custody. In a more traditional view, the old father loses his dignity after these two incidents and thus cannot be seen as superior anymore. In Eat Drink Man Woman, Chu was a chef who lost his
taste. This poses the question of how a hero can remain heroic when being bereft of the ability that defines his identity? In *Taking Woodstock*, Elliot helps his parents make a fortune to pay-off their mortgage while in *The Ice Storm*, Paul and Michael bring the possibility of redemption to their fathers. In both films, it is the children that serve as the family heroes, saving their parents from an economic or moral crisis. In *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution*, the audience is presented with betraying or absent parents: Jiao-Long’s parents arrange a marriage for her mostly for the benefit of the father’s career, while Wang Chia-Chih is abandoned by her father. Hence, in his films, Lee tries to represent an archetypal family that is based on filial piety, but at the same time, he also gives possible challenges for such a family in our modern era when equal rights, liberalism, and individualism confront traditional Chinese family views.

To consider Lee’s Taiwanese national and cultural identity and the impact of Taiwan cinema on his films, this dissertation placed each of the four chapters into different dimensions of Taiwanese sociopolitical and cultural contexts: chapter one considered the development of women’s statuses and the difference between traditional and modern women in Taiwan; chapter two offered a brief history of Taiwan’s LGBTQ movements and how those movements are influenced transnationally by Western culture as well as other East Asian countries; chapter three probed into the diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the United States, American military involvement and the phenomenon of Americanization in Taiwan; chapter four provided a trajectory of Taiwan Cinema’s evolution since the 1950s. As all these national considerations show, Lee’s films are better understood through this direct reference to Taiwan’s history, politics, and society. This cultural and national contextualization proves that Lee uses his cinema to express a strong sense of Taiwanese identity. This shows a deficit in previous Ang Lee studies
that see him merely as a transnational Taiwanese-American or diasporic Chinese filmmaker. This problem is one of “identity confusion”—in particular, the confusing of cultural and political connotations of the term “Chinese.” As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, such studies fail to distinguish between nationally Chinese (Chinese as a nation state) and culturally Chinese (Chinese culture and language) from Taiwanese. Incorporating many of Lee’s important Taiwanese interviews that underscore the nationalistic essences of his films, this dissertation suggests that Lee’s reference to Taiwan denotes a triple-fold significance: as homeland, as the nurturing place where he began his enthusiasm for cinema, and as the country to which he still dedicates himself.

In the process of conducting research on Lee, I located two major challenges. The first challenge is Lee’s popularity in the Chinese-speaking world (such as China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) and in Hollywood. His global career and reputation make him a predominant filmmaker for studies of transnationality, Chinese diaspora, and Asian-American culture. Moreover, Lee’s mass popularity with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) has elicited a horde of critical responses and therefore it becomes much more difficult to meticulously comb through all the criticism. However, most of the criticism shares a trend—reading the films separately and, thereby, overlooking Lee’s Taiwanese identity as a constant influence. This dissertation responded to the first challenge by redirecting the study of Lee toward national identity so as to generate a more diverse discussion of his film career. The second challenge is Lee’s productivity as an artist. Since his first motion picture *Pushing Hands* in 1992, he has made fifteen films [including a short film, *Chosen* (2001)] as director, has written four screenplays [*Pushing Hands, The Wedding Banquet* (1993), *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994),]
Siao Yu (1995) and has produced ten films and TV series [Pushing Hands, The Wedding Banquet, Siao Yu, The Ice Storm (1997), Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000), One Last Ride (2004), Lust, Caution (2007), Taking Woodstock (2009), Life of Pi (2012), Tyrant (TV series, 2014-present), Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk (2016)]. Lee’s cinema also takes on different film genres and time periods in film after film. Therefore, considering the scope and length of this dissertation, it is very difficult to include all of the films from Pushing Hands to Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk. So instead of being a comprehensive Lee study, I selected eight representative films that best explain his Taiwanese national and cultural identity across genres and nations. In addition, in terms of structure, the eight films stand-out because they share the same cultural issues and can be grouped together for comparison: Pushing Hands and Eat Drink Man Woman are about maternity; The Wedding Banquet and Brokeback Mountain are about homosexuality; The Ice Storm and Taking Woodstock are about the collective Taiwanese view of America; and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and Lust, Caution are about Taiwan Cinema.

However, making the selection does not mean that the films left-out are not important in the trajectory of Lee’s career or growth as an artist. The period film Sense and Sensibility (1995) is adapted from Jane Austen’s novel of the same name. It tells the story of the Dashwood sisters, and each of them has a different attitude toward love, marriage, and family. Sense and Sensibility shares several common traits of Lee’s cinema. For example, the main characters are sisters and presented in a manner similar to the characters in Lee’s Eat Drink Man Woman. Produced by Taiwan’s major film production company, Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), Eat Drink Man Woman casts many of Taiwan’s A-list actors and actresses, such as Sihung Lung, Kuei-Mei Yang, Chien-Lien Wu, Winston Chao, Ya-Lei Kuei, and Sylvia Chang. Produced by
Columbia Pictures Corporation and Mirage Productions, *Sense and Sensibility* features many of England’s most acclaimed performers, such as Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Hugh Grant, Alan Rickman, and Tom Wilkinson. Both films, in terms of their production modes, can be seen as Lee’s early forays into major market-oriented films. Regarding the themes, the English-made film and the Taiwanese-made film appear not so different from each other since they both discuss issues of marriage, family, and women’s statuses in the society.

In another example, *Ride with the Devil* is a historical film based on Daniel Woodrell’s novel *Woe to Live On* (1987) about the American Civil War. The film is set in Missouri with the main characters fighting for the Confederate States. Similar to *The Ice Storm*, *Ride with the Devil* deals with a crucial moment of American history and American families. In both films, Lee interprets history from the perspective of a cultural outsider who is not blinded by preconceived cultural viewpoints. Furthermore, in *Ride with the Devil*, Lee shows his sympathy for the losing side as he later does in *Lust, Caution*. In this way, *Ride with the Devil* serves as an important transitional film that helps shape Lee’s two major themes: the cultural outsider and a sympathy for the losing side.

The superhero film *Hulk* is the story of the Marvel Comics character, the Incredible Hulk, based on the creation of the popular comic-book writer Stan Lee. The main character, Bruce Banner (Eric Bana), is exposed to radiation which gives him a super ability—once he gets angry, he turns into the Hulk, a green, powerful giant who aims for destruction. Like many other superheroes (such as Iron Man, Captain America, and Spiderman) in the Marvel universe, Hulk possesses a super power but has to deal with his past. Notably, in Lee’s filmic interpretation, he highlights the relationship between Banner and his father, and how Banner negotiates his double
identity under the influence of his family. With an emphasis on father and son relations, the director renders this superhero film less comic-book-like than other Marvel superhero films and more aligned to a family drama like *Pushing Hands*. Intriguingly, Lee’s *Hulk* also reminds audiences of *The Ice Storm*, which opens and ends with Paul Wood (Tobey Maguire) reading *The Fantastic Four* on the train. If the Marvel Comics “shared cinematic universe” is made of superheroes who often appear in one another’s films to fight against the villains together, Lee’s “cinematic universe” consists of cross-references (such as comics), frequent appearances of certain actors and actress (Sihung Lung, Ya-Lei Kuei, Tobey Maguire, and Winston Chao are among the performers who have collaborated with Lee more than once), and recurring themes. In this way, *Hulk* proves that even though it is a superhero film, it does not stand outside of Lee’s cinematic universe because it relates back to the director’s thematic preoccupation with father-and-son relations and the issue of self-identity.

Based on Yann Mantel’s 2001 novel of the same name, the fantasy film *Life of Pi* won Lee another Best Director Oscar in 2013. It tells the extraordinary life of Piscine Patel (played by Suraj Sharma and Irrfan Khan), who loses his family when a storm destroys the cargo ship that sets out to carry them to Canada. Pi (as he calls himself) spends weeks on a lifeboat with a tiger and finally safely reaches Mexico. *Life of Pi* continues *Hulk*’s theme of identity-building and aligns itself with Lee’s other films to examine the meaning of family. The film gives its audience much to marvel at with its abundant use of colors, animals, and special visual effects (like the leaping whale and the man-eating islet). It also surprises audiences when the film ends with questioning the reliability of the story-telling. *Life of Pi* is special among Lee’s films since it is the first film so far where Lee visualizes the nature of storytelling as it is a personal way to
negotiate one’s self-identity. Making films is, of course, a form of story-telling, and therefore, like Pi, Lee is constantly negotiating his national and cultural identity through a career of narrative filmmaking.

Lee’s most recent work, *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*, is adapted from Ben Fountain’s 2012 novel of the same name. The film is about the homecoming of an Iraq war hero, Billy Lynn (Joe Alwyn) and his thoughts, transformed by the war, of home and nation, family and comrades, and life and death. Because of Lynn and his squad’s achievements in Iraq, they are invited to make appearance at the halftime show of a Dallas Cowboy’s game during Thanksgiving. After the game, they are to return to Iraq. In *The Ice Storm* and *Lust, Caution*, Lee holds a suspicious attitude toward blind nationalism and patriotism. In *Billy Lynn*, he further shows how war and nationalism are tied together and become commercialized and de-politicized as a kind of dazzling but superficial entertainment. Lee casts doubt on nation and government and goes further to represent a nation that does not work for the citizens’ benefits but capitalizes on nationalism and patriotism for political purposes. Once again, Lee’s cultural outsider status renders him more insightful when looking into such social phenomena as national identity and patriotism.

In short, these five films are by no means less important and are worthy of further research into their role in Lee’s cinematic universe. As the director continues to challenge new genres and visual effects (as he has done with *Life of Pi* and *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*), his cinematic aesthetics and domestic philosophy keep evolving as well. My goal for this dissertation was to open up more space for discussion of Lee’s cinema from the angle of national identity. Certainly, this project leads to many questions anticipating future research. For example,
after making family dramas, historical films, gay films, a costume martial arts film, a spy thriller film, and a fantasy film, what is Lee going to make next and how is it related to his Taiwanese national identity? In the near future, will audiences see a Lee musical, a Lee horror film, or an adventure film like the *Indiana Jones* film series? Recently, the media has reported that Lee resumed a film project on the iconic boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier in 1975.98 It seems that Lee now primarily focuses on American popular culture and mass entertainment. Yet it is reasonable to ask what kind of film does Lee wish to create now that he has already had a broad range in his filmography? Does he still wish to explore the theme of family and filial piety? What does Lee intend to achieve next after receiving two Academy Awards for Best Directing and widespread global recognition?

All in all, still a prolific filmmaker in his early sixties, Lee will surely continue to seek new directions and possibilities in filmmaking, ranging in genres, special effects, themes, and styles. Yet it is highly possible that he will still retain his cultural distance in America because he once said that his worldview and character were established in Taiwan and these Taiwanese perspectives will stay with him.99 That being said, as Taiwan gradually becomes more liberal and democratic and more Taiwanese people reach a distinctive national and cultural identity, Lee’s claim of his Taiwanese identity not only reflects a trend of thought, but also serves as the root that helps him to retain a sense of belonging and home when he (to echo his *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) roams in the *jianhu* of transnational cinema.

98 See Ahmed’s “Exclusive: Ang Lee’s ‘Thrilla in Manila’ Movie is Moving Ahead, Says Screenwriter.”

99 See the “I am Taiwanese” interview in the introduction.
“Ang Lee Acceptance Speech.” Youtube, 8 December 2007. www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nD_uLFppHE.


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