Passionately Documenting: Taiwan's Latest Cinematic Revival

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IN HIS OPENING TALK FOR THE 2011 Conference on Literature, Cinema, and Landscape, Taiwanese writer and film critic Lee Yuan (also known as Xiao Ye) remarked on the decentering disposition of Taiwan's latest cinematic revival.[1] He notes that these films in similar ways forgo Taiwan's national and metropolitan center, Taipei, in favor of other localities. Lee's observation on decentering also opens up more complex discussions regarding the popular success of recent Taiwanese small-budget blockbusters' combination of feature-film qualities with documentary-style realism. This article offers a case study on recent Taiwanese film productions that not only decenter Taiwanese cinema's internationally renowned image as primarily producing auteur films portraying postcolonial and postmodern ethos, but that also hybridize Taiwan's diasporic Chinese image with Taiwan's local dialect, culture, and landscape. Debuting films featuring passionate road trips around the beautiful island of Taiwan, such as Chen Huai-En's *Island Etude* (2007) and Fung Kai's *Din Tao: Leader of the Parade* (2012), stimulated public interest in local Taiwanese landscapes and cultures. Personally inspired memorial stories by young directors, such as Lin Yu-Hsien's *Jump Ashin!* (2011), also became box office hits. During these past few years, Taiwanese cinema has gradually overcome its late-twentieth-century "city of sadness" image created by Hou Hsio-Hsian's *A City of Sadness* (1989), which has greatly influenced Taiwanese cinema's national and international representation.[2] This article argues that these new-millennium films reconstruct and activate a sense of Taiwanese nationalism through the fluid intermix of documentary style with entertainment qualities as well as local with global appeal. Their highlighting of passion rather than pathos proposes a new turn and possibility for the revival of Taiwanese cinema and nationalism in the age of transcultural globalization.

Different from the canonized Taiwanese films that put Taiwanese cinema on the international map over two decades ago, the new-millennium films discussed in this article approach Taiwanese culture and nationalism by experimenting with possibilities of flexible creativity. In *Sentimental Fabulations*, Rey Chow raises the importance of cinematic identification by opening with the question "Where is the movie about me?" (1). Chow's question points to the contemporary Chinese-speaking subject's simultaneous need and desire for individual uniqueness and collective belonging. Her concern also relates to Taiwanese people, who face problems such as recovering from Japanese colonialism, reinterpreting "Chineseness" through peripheral conditions, reincorporating local cultural diversity, and distinguishing themselves from Western standards. Recent films such as *Island Etude*, *Din Tao*, and *Jump Ashin!* continue to tackle these questions; however, they do so in a more lighthearted and aspiring manner.

In a country with a history of negotiating with international and domestic challenges to na-

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tional identity determinants, the development of Taiwanese cinema reflects continuous efforts at national reconstruction. With the end of Japanese rule in 1945 and the official establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in mainland China in 1949, Taiwanese cinema turned to localism during the 1950s. Having a status different from Hong Kong's as the inheritor of Shanghai's cinema, and hence in the position of having a better-developed film industry environment that represented the legacy of "authentic" Chinese cinema as opposed to the communist mainland, Taiwan's film productions at the time were mostly localized, low-budget *taiyu pian* (Taiwanese dialect films) affairs.[3] Apart from propaganda films of healthy realism and social realism supported by the KMT nationalist government, melodramas and martial arts films became the ruling genres along with productions of Taiwan *xiangtu dianying* (native-soil films) during the 1960s and early 1970s. The popularity of these utopian melodramas reflected the Taiwanese people's anxiety toward and rejection of the rigid efforts by Taiwan's ROC (Republic of China) to construct national consciousness through political propaganda films.

The gap between domestic box office sales and Taiwan's onscreen identity further widened with the international success of Taiwan New Cinema. With the lifting of martial law in 1987, ending almost forty years of strict and extreme political censorship enforced by the government, Taiwan began to develop toward democracy and diversity. Among the various liberation movements that emerged at the time, Taiwan New Cinema films began producing works exposing the traumatic scars of Taiwan's postwar and postcolonial histories. In reconstructing Taiwan's national identity, representative Taiwan New Cinema film directors, such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien, recovered the period of Japanese colonization as a characterizing feature that marked Taiwan's difference from other Chinese-speaking communities. Chiu Kuei-Fen argues, "If in the decades after the war the Taiwanese enacted a negation of their association with the Japanese culture so as to have their Chinese identity validated, the move to reclaim the island's Japanese colonial heritages can be an attempt to distinguish the Taiwan identity from the Chinese identity" (29–30). Into the 1990s and early 2000, Taiwanese films with postwar and postcolonial narratives became less about exposing devastating historical pathos and more about haunting pasts that continue to disturb present lives. Films by representative diasporic directors such as Ang Lee and Tsai Ming-Liang also featured more complicated sentiments of outsideness and loneliness.[4] Many second- and third-wave films "explore[d] into the private scopes of painful, ambivalent, and absurd contemporary life" (Wu 78). With the rising influence of Taiwan New Cinema and New Wave directors, Taiwanese films attracted international attention through their exemplary participation in postcolonial and postmodern narratives popularized in academic criticism at the time.

From the debut of Taiwan New Cinema in the 1980s to the second and third wave of Taiwan New Cinema from the mid-1990s onward, Taiwan continued to produce winners at worldwide film festivals while domestic support dropped drastically. Eventually, after over a decade of domestic cinematic depression, noted Taiwanese cinematographer Chen Huai-En's directorial debut *Island Etude* miraculously created nationwide box office sensations. Chen was best known for being the cinematographer for Taiwan New Cinema Hou Hsiao-Hsien's classics such as *A City of Sadness* (1989) and *Good Men, Good Women* (1995); however, different from Hou, Chen's first directorial attempt approaches Taiwan's colonial past through the lighthearted creativity of storytelling reconstructions. This furthers Darrell William Davis's observation that "Taiwan [is no longer] just an anti-communist rampart" (Davis and Chen 3), for the twenty-first century also witnesses Taiwan as no longer just a victimized postcolonial island. For the newer generation, 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 as in the 1960s and 1970s, nor is there a re-emergence of traumatic colonial/postcolonial

pathos or haunting ghosts as featured in Taiwan New Cinema and New Wave films. Chen's *Island Etude* marks Taiwan's progress out of postcolonial traumas by telling stories memorializing postcolonial scars rather than detailing processes of healing wounds.

Chen's first feature-length film is a semi-documentary feature film based on the experience of a hearing-impaired young man, Ming-Hsiang, who circles Taiwan on his bicycle. The camera follows the protagonist as he meets and hears the stories of different people he encounters on his trip. This tight-budget film became a popular hit and broke the record as the most-screened domestic film and the domestic film screened for the longest duration in the history of *guopian* (national film) up until then. Its influence went beyond movie theaters as many Taiwanese people also started bicycle tours circling the island and visiting various local sceneries from the film. The film seeks neither to look to the past nor to stress gaping disconnections between the past and present; instead, the film relocates the past in the present through recreations of past memories into new stories by the contemporary Taiwan subject eager to learn about his or her homeland.

As a semi-documentary feature film, *Island Etude* highlights the storytelling aspect of interviews by intermixing fact with fiction, memory with narration. Rather than composing a documentary with interviews, *Island Etude* collects twelve self-narrated life stories. In one of Chen Huai-En's interviews, he explains choosing to compose the film through storytelling.[5] He says that since films are fundamentally about telling stories, he wished to go back to the basis of narration, which he regards as oral speech, to emphasize the significance of saying and listening. He sought to highlight these aspects by choosing a hearing-impaired youth as his actor and protagonist. Ming-Hsiang's hearing condition propels him to be more observant with his eyes and receptive with his ears in a gentle and nonjudgmental way. His travels bring together multifarious stories from different ethnicities, genders, ages, and social backgrounds. Although some have critiqued the film's lack of narrative tension typical of feature films, it is in fact the fragmentary lightness of these documented stories that more verily reflects Taiwan's current progression toward more flexibly hybridized identity performances. Through his travels, Ming-Hsiang gathers stories of and by different people spanning across the nation of Taiwan. With the exception of the story his grandfather tells him of his youth, all the other stories are from strangers Ming-Hsiang meets on the road. The stories are not forced into relation or union, for Ming-Hsiang always only visits and never settles down in any of the traveled destinations, nor does he ever attempt to make any definite connections between the stories.

As a film composed of various stories, *Island Etude* creates ambiguities in spectator identification. In theories on film spectatorship, a film generally bestows on its viewers the coexistence of identification both with the perfect knowledge (omniscient spectator) and with the characters in the film. However, for *Island Etude*, identification appears more ambiguously fragmented because of the film's lack of an overall narrative line as well as the spectator's lack of insight into the mind of the film's main protagonist. If Ming-Hsiang plays the role of collecting the twelve stories on the road, he himself represents the thirteenth story for the audience. Through the film, viewers experience Taiwan in the manner of Ming-Hsiang, rather than the character of Ming-Hsiang. The stories are not ambiguous in their contents but are ambiguous in their partiality. Each story is just one story told by one character. Just as the actor playing the hearing-impaired protagonist Ming-Hsiang in the film is in reality hearing-impaired and called Ming-Hsiang, this postmodern fact-fiction intermix suggests that the film's multiple stories and characters also have their possible continued lives offscreen reflexively interacting with narratives onscreen. Ambiguous spaces are purposely opened to discourage judgmental assertions as well as to generate future investigations with diverse people and stories of Taiwan. *Island Etude*'s storytelling method underscores diversity in its amalgamative reconstruction of Taiwan's nationhood and national identity.

In "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," Walter Benjamin regards storytelling as incorporating the past and the present as well as the personal and the communal.[6] Storytelling also involves the intermixing of fact and fiction, memories and myth. In *Island Etude*, the film's first story foregrounds stories as combining fantasy with fact, present with past. The story is part of a music video about a girl with a dream to open a café on the east coast of Taiwan. She meets a musician with a pigeon that has forgotten how to fly and a clown riding a one-wheel unicycle searching for his lost wheel. Both the pigeon and the clown rely on the Pacific Ocean's wind to continue moving. The story's postmodern fairytale-like quality evokes childhood memories and fantasies not through fears of loss but through dreams of liberation and progress. *Island Etude* references Taiwan's colonial past differently from previous Taiwanese films that reexamined Taiwan's past through either critical historiography or nostalgic imagination.[7]

In Chen's film, there are three stories regarding Japanese colonization memories. The first is told by a tourist guide introducing Sayun's Bell. He says that the bell was made and hung by the Taiwanese government in memory of a Taiya indigenous girl named Sayun who accidently fell off a bridge and got carried away by a flood when helping to carry the luggage of a Japanese teacher called back by the Japanese army.[8] The tour guide continues to reveal that the bell now hanging in Yilan is actually not the original bell from the past. The film then cuts to a scene showing the indigenous students reluctantly sending away their Japanese teacher. This scene appears not as a presentation of the real past but as a remaking of the legend because the teacher and Sayun are played by the same actors who were filming the music video when Ming-Hsiang met them near the beginning of the film.

In the second story relating to colonization, Ming-Hsiang sits eating in a shop and overhears staff members of the prospective Geelong Maritime Museum talking about the history of the northern thermal power plant. One person tells the rumor of some Japanese workers who performed Japanese ritualistic disembowelments because they were reluctant to leave Taiwan. His story corresponds with camera shots of the chef chopping liver and intestines before delivering their order and saying, "Here are your livers and intestines" (translation mine). In this episode, characters romanticize colonizer-colonized relationships and address colonial histories through more lighthearted humor. The final narrative referencing colonization features a sculptor telling Ming-Hsiang the different stories behind his art pieces, one of which is a sculpture of a Tianjin man who flew his plane into the chimney pipe of a Japanese vessel during the War of Resistance, killing himself while blowing up the vessel. This violent colonial past ended with sacrificial deaths on both sides, and what remains is the beautiful sculpture now sitting silently on a shelf.

Island Etude shows colonial traumas slowly healing as memories gradually become narratable stories. More than sixty years after the end of Japanese colonization, *Island Etude* gently re-envisions Taiwan's postcolonial scars through affectionate stories gathered from multiple corners of the island. The stories' interpretative quality acknowledges the existing crack of the postcolonial wound still present, yet the focus on the scar rather than the wound rereads the past as a mark of identity rather than a painful injury still disturbing the everyday life of present survivors. In *Island Etude*, living traces of colonial histories are no longer suppressed memories that threaten to resurrect; they have developed into memorial scars that have gradually healed through the passing of time and the growing of new skin along with fading of the old. This is the story of the newer Taiwanese generation that can no longer tell the story of the wound but can only tell stories of memorialized scars. In carving out new routes for Taiwan's film industry, *Island Etude* envisions reviving Taiwanese consciousness through encompassing passions of love, hope, and forgiveness toward the land and its residents.

By crossing over and joining together different regions and residents, Ming-Hsiang's journey draws out a geographical Taiwanese nationalism shaped through topographical and cultural diversity. Fran Martin describes Taiwanese cinema as currently negotiating between "the local and the global, the particular and the general, minority and mainstream audiences, and cultural deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (131). Rather than being strained by "in-betweenness," Chen's film regards ambiguity and diversity as representing new locations for travel. Ming-Hsiang may be a local Taiwanese, but he is also a learning traveler and visitor to the island's different places. The film applies many sea imageries to symbolize Taiwanese culture's fluidity. In the film, Ming-Hsiang mostly rides his bicycle along the borders of Taiwan. The sea is always right beside him. The encircling sea serves as a symbol of protection and separation, carving out the national space for the flourishing of Taiwanese culture. The episode on the annual pilgrimage escort of Ma Zu, who is the goddess and patron saint of the sea in Taiwan's local religious cultures, represents the significance of the sea to Taiwanese people and their beliefs. Shots of waves curling toward the land also suggest the import of the external. Near the end of the film, Ming-Hsiang meets another biker who mentions the invasion of the sea, which kills the casuarinas by the shore and shrinks the national territory of Taiwan. Considering also the scene where Ming-Hsiang puts the fish dropped onto his map by a bird back into the sea, the film suggests that although the local figure cannot but participate in conversations with global currents, one can, nevertheless, actively decide how one wishes to respond to influences of the global. If the separating sea symbolizes both protection and isolation, connections with the sea also presuppose not only fears of being assimilated but also desires to join in contact with the international community. Images of surrounding sea waters mark the uniqueness of Taiwan as an island nation, while at the same time, images of flowing waters such as the pouring rain, running rivers, and traveling tides also denote the fluid quality of such demarcations.

Similar to sensations experienced in nature, music is another more universal language that offers possibilities for crossing boundaries without linguistic borderlines. The title of the film, *Island Etude*, denotes the musical disposition of the practice. In the film, music refers not just to the melody of songs and instruments but also to the harmonies of nature and humans. All is brought into chorus, embraced into the practice of singing in and as a chorus. Although Ming-Hsiang may not be able hear well, he travels with his guitar on his back. After one of the strings breaks, he meets two youths drawing graffiti on dikes by the sea, one of whom takes the guitar and starts playing, saying, "Just play. So what if there's a broken string?" (translation mine).

In its attempt to mark and market Taiwan, *Island Etude* appears ambitious in its objective but humble in its approach. The film is not just about Taiwan and its people; more importantly, it is about love for Taiwan and its people. Into the twenty-first century, the national status of Taiwan continues to be in crisis both domestically and internationally. From internal conflicts between different political parties and ethnicity groups to ongoing struggles for international recognition both politically and economically, Taiwan does seem to be in the difficult position characterized by Chris Berry and Feii Lu as an "island on the edge."[9] Focusing instead on culture and landscape, *Island Etude* underscores the encompassing and consoling quality of Taiwan and its residents. Recent Taiwanese films follow this newer line of thought by complicating the definition of "Taiwaneseness" through a higher awareness to cultural heterogeneity and hybridity.

After years of increased estrangement between Taiwan's postcolonial, developing-country generation and its younger generation raised primarily through transnational popular culture, many post–*Island Etude* box office winners have been films that reconnect contemporary audiences to Taiwanese cultures through documentary-inspired feature films that are

as passionately inspiring as they are cinematically entertaining. Television director Fung Kai's debut film, *Din Tao: Leader of the Parade*, is among the small-budget films that have spread their influence among younger people who were initially unfamiliar with and uninterested in traditional religious performance cultures.

Din Tao is based on the true story of Taiwan's Chio-Tian Folk Drums and Arts Troupe and their tour around the island inspiring reconfigurations of traditional Taiwanese culture. The film features Taiwanese pop star Alan Ko as its leading protagonist, A-Tai, who returns home from Taipei to try to make money to fulfill his rock band dream in America but ends up becoming the leader of his father's *dintao* troupe instead. As an important component of traditional Taiwanese religious culture, *dintao* refers to the group of performers who lead local religious parades. In the film, A-Tai coaches a group of school dropouts, attempting to regenerate Taiwan's declining *dintao* traditions with inspirations from his rock culture background and from local stimulations gathered on their training tour.

Like *Island Etude*, *Din Tao* follows a young Taiwanese subject on his journey to learn about the island's local cultures. Through communicative interactions between younger and older generations, both films set out to reconcile gaps between Taiwan's past and present, rural and city, tradition and change. In *Din Tao*, A-Tai was initially sent to Taipei to get a better education and has mostly stayed away from home since his childhood. The film opens with A-Tai's brief account of past arguments with his father before jumping to his present return to his hometown in the rural areas of Taichung. After making a rash bet to prove himself, A-Tai temporarily becomes the new leader of his father's *dintao* troupe. As he tries to revive his family business, A-Tai reconnects with his family's local roots through new input from his pop culture practices. The film documents the rebirth of Taiwanese culture and people through examples of compassionate reconciliation and innovative recreations. Whereas *Island Etude* envisions overcoming Taiwan's postcolonial pathos through memory re-storying, *Din Tao* features recovering traditional culture's decline through integrative revivals. Both films emphasize the younger generation's passionate devotion to relearning about and reconnecting to the multifarious cultures and localities of Taiwan.

Din Tao records the physical and spiritual difficulty of the troupe members' quest as they put on an oversized Third Prince puppet costume and strap on their heavy drums to visit temples around the country on foot. Once a prevalent folk tradition in Taiwan, *dintao* performances have receded to cultural outskirts, with gang members and homeless youths as their prime participants. The earliest records of *dintao* groups in Taiwan can be traced back to Gao Gong-Qian's *Taiwan fu zhi* (*Taiwan Prefecture Gazetteer*) in 1694. Other Qing dynasty reports such as *Fengshan xian zhi*, *Gamalan ting zhi*, and *An-Ping zaji* also documented south Fujian immigrants' import of *dintao* traditions to Taiwan from the southeast coastal regions of China.[10] After the Qing dynasty officially claimed Taiwan as part of its domain in 1684, south Fujian immigrants soon overtook Taiwanese aboriginals as the island's dominant population. During the Qing dynasty's ending years and Japan's colonization, *dintao* traditions continued to flourish and diversify through local adaptations. At the time, the annual pilgrimage escort of sea goddess Ma Zu was one of the major events across the island. More than fifty *dintao* troupes participated in welcoming the goddess from the Bei-Kang Chao-Tian Temple every year.[11] However, with postwar transformations such as the ROC government's sinicization policy as well as the impact of Western globalization, *dintao* traditions gradually declined in cultural popularity and significance. Feng's film depicts this critical condition, highlighting the anticipated renewal of *dintao* culture through Taiwan's younger generations. In the end, after many trials and errors, A-Tai successfully revives *dintao*'s popularity by attracting public attention through youthful persistence in cultural regeneration.

Many critics brand the film as simplifying *dintao* traditions and cultural revivals in an

overtly optimistic manner; however, the film's national success is precisely due to its intermix of popular entertainment qualities with documentary realism styles. The film builds up affective appeal by combining dramatically heightened plotlines and camera shots with down-to-earth local dialect jokes. Also, *Din Tao* sparks conversations between different generations to evoke innovative communications between them. On the one hand, the film strategically narrates from the perspective of the younger Taiwanese population more familiar with popular culture and transnational trends. On the other hand, it also pays tribute to Taiwanese conventions and local cultures. *Din Tao* not only created box office sensations; it also contributed to promoting *dintao* puppets to become Taiwan's new characterizing representative. When Taiwan's national flag was removed from London's Regent Street before the Olympic opening that same year, Taiwanese student Wu Chien-Heng appeared on the international media lines when he joined three hundred overseas Taiwanese while wearing his Third Prince puppet costume to parade Taiwan's national flag.[12] Continuing the film's craze, *dintao* puppets have since become one of Taiwan's latest local-turned-national signatures.

In addition to reviving the old through the young and the local through the popular, *Din Tao*'s storyline centers primarily on the strengthening union of group members as well as competing troupes through their mutual passion to prove themselves through *dintao* performance recreations. As a young leader unfamiliar to the troupe, A-Tai does not have a strategic training program. Instead, he leads his group through blunt devotions to drum practices and team cooperation. As a group, they endure bleeding hands and bruised legs together as they continue their drumming parades under the blazing sun. The film depicts these school dropouts and young gangsters letting off their personal agonies and grudges to the strong beating of their drums. As their skills improve, they gradually move beyond their past failures and into their reformative futures together as a family of friends.

As they tour around the island, their enthusiastic persistence becomes the troupe's prime marking and marketing factor. The media and the public become drawn to the troupe's devotion as they circle the nation with their heavy drums and Third Prince puppet. Completing this challenge symbolizes the triumph of human determination, the solidification of comradeship, and the uniting of local enthusiasm. In the end, A-Tai's group's vigorous dedication and team spirit prompt their competing troupe to forget their past animosity and join them. The two troupes unite their specialties and stage a groundbreaking performance in an urban park by combining pop rock and special effects with *dintao* drumming and dancing moves. During their performance, the camera shows A-Tai's conventional father smiling in the cheering audience, along with other proud family members. With the increasing intensity of the performance along with the heightened emotions of performers and audience, the film ends at the height of climaxing passions and spectacular aspirations for Taiwanese cultural revivals.

The closing film credits continue the ending's inspirational effect with a real documentary clip of actual Chio-Tian troupe members carrying the deity Nezha and completing their 250-kilometer marathon across the Sahara Desert in October 2011. This clip accentuates the film's realistic aspect and seeks to extend the ending's enthusiasm to offscreen real-life considerations. Additionally, the film combines fact and fiction by employing actual Chio-Tian members in the film, such as the hefty but sensitive character Maria.

Like *Island Etude*, *Din Tao* drew box office acclaim from audiences eager to experience and evoke revivals of Taiwanese culture and nationhood. Both films premiered with little attention before quickly accumulating many supportive reviews through the Internet. Compared with their film protagonists, Chen and Fung are of a relatively older age. The content of their films exhibits concerns for traditional pasts; yet since their previous experiences are in photography and television drama, their film styles are not burdened by conventions and histories of Tai-

wanese cinema. As a result, both films seek to use old materials to tell new stories through new manners and perspectives.

In comparison to Chen and Fung, *Jump Ashin!*'s director, Lin Yu-Hsien, is part of a relatively younger generation. After the box office failure of his first feature film, *Exit No. 6* (2007), on youth culture in cosmopolitan Taipei, Lin Yu-Hsien returned to his breakthrough documentary *Jump! Boys* (2005) and found the inspiration to turn his brother's life story into a feature film. Whereas *Island Etude* re-stories postcolonial Taiwan, and *Din Tao* recreates local *dintao* traditions, Lin's film memorializes his brother's gymnastic pursuit through references to 1990s cultural symbols such as B. B. Call culture, Andy Lau's trendsetting film *Dream Chaser*, and pop icons such as singer Dave Wang and kung fu star Jackie Chan. By combining documentary materials with popular culture elements, *Jump Ashin!* presents Ashin as a laborious Taiwanese gymnast with transnational pop idol charm.

During the post–martial law era, the Taiwanese people were immersed in liberating waves of cultural and economic exchange. At the time, Taiwan rapidly prospered as one of the "Four Asian Tigers" whose social economy changed from agriculture-based domestic trade to technological industrialization exports.[13] Set in these transitional years, *Jump Ashin!* features intergenerational conflict between parent and child as well contrasting mores in the city and the country. In the film, Ashin's love for gymnastics begins from an early age. However, his mother disapproves and wants him to take a reliable job like running her fruit stand, and eventually she convinces Ashin's coach to take him off the team. After this, Ashin becomes delinquent and wanders around the town creating trouble with his best friend, Pickles. The situation turns dire when Pickles becomes addicted to drugs, and the two flee to Taipei after Pickles severely injures the local gang boss's son, Papaya. Going to Taipei leads to tragic consequences, and city gangsters eventually kill Pickles, who had become a hardcore addict by then. After the death of his friend, Ashin returns to his hometown, Yilan, only to find out that Papaya is still alive. The two former antagonists reconcile, and Ashin resumes his gymnastic practice once more, this time with the support of his family and former enemies, and eventually jumps his way to success. In this final scene, Ashin's performance of a perfect routine is shown from different angles. The closing clip does not reveal Ashin's score but intermixes shots of the cheering crowd with Ashin's glowing countenance against bright backdrops. The film ends, and dated photos of the real-life Ashin appear on the black screen. Similar to *Din Tao*, the ending of *Jump Ashin!* also seeks to continue the film's passionate ending into real life.

Lin's film takes audiences back to youthful sentiments of dream chasing and identity transformation characteristic of 1980s and 90s Taiwan in hope of reviving similar passions in present society. During those years, Taiwan underwent rapid changes such as modernization, sociopolitical liberation, and cultural diversification. These developments took shape as a result of accumulative movements from the 1970s onward. During the 1970s, the ROC government experienced increasing diplomatic setbacks, which evoked quests for redefinitions of Taiwan's national identity. Because of the PRC's incremental authority, Taiwan eventually withdrew from the United Nations in 1971 and encountered heightening diplomatic difficulties. Facing Taiwan's identity crisis, Taiwanese intellectuals started advocating indigenous movements.[14] These movements encouraged local cultures to construct identifications of Taiwanese consciousness and set the foundation for the second wave of sociocultural transformation in the 1980s. Into the 1980s, sociocultural forces matured amid new developments of economic reform and globalizing trends. Because of the economic bloom and lifting of martial law, local Taiwanese cultures flourished through creative collaborations with Hong Kong popular culture and Western influences.

In *Jump Ashin!*, Ashin's and Pickles's costumes and motorcycles showcase *taike* culture trends popular among Taiwanese youths at the time, prominently iconized in Hong Kong

star Andy Lau's film, *Dream Chaser* (1990).[15] To balance charisma and seriousness as well as past and present, the character Ashin unites the charms of a trendy ruffian and hardworking gymnast to re-present the 1990s dream-chaser through millennium interests in Taiwan's sport achievements and national pride. As a poliomyelitis patient, Ashin has slightly uneven legs. Yet he overcomes both his inborn deficiency and environmental obstacles to continue his gymnast dreams. Lin's film is not a nostalgic reminiscence of the past, but a retrospection into past memories to advocate for the present and future of athletic training in Taiwan.

For the Taiwanese public, international sport competitions are among the significant instances when national consciousness reaches new heights. Although the government has increased sports funding annually, professional sports training remains critically marginalized because of Taiwanese society's prioritization of academic achievements and the younger generation's unwillingness to endure physical hardship. To overcome these conventions, Lin's film spotlights the impressive beauty and challenging conquest of gymnasts. Through intimate close-up shots and uplifting low-angle takes, the camera follows Ashin with love, compassion, and respect. The film also emphasizes the protagonist's domestic background and time period through dialects and props. By combining star quality with local characteristics, Ashin recreates Taiwanese gymnast culture through glocalized nationalism.

In the face of Taiwan's current plight in foreign affairs, Taiwanese people have turned to sociocultural domains to reconstruct nationhood recognition. For Taiwanese cinema, recent small-budget blockbusters have been films that excite more positive revivals of Taiwanese consciousness through the younger generation's creative reconnection with Taiwan's various cultures and localities. These films reference past histories, traditions, or memories to inspire passionate enthusiasm toward newer forms of Taiwanese consciousness. All three films illustrate Taiwan's cultural diversity and hybridity through intermixing Mandarin Chinese with dialectic languages, rural with urban areas, global with local cultures, and transnational popular cinema with Taiwan New Cinema's observational documentary realism. The films detail the difficult process of changing but conclude with rewarding possibilities for transformations. Each film has its own specific cultural focus, but all of them aim to revive Taiwanese cinema and nationhood by passionately documenting Taiwan through a self-loving lens accompanied by reconstructive prospects.

Yet as films by newer or younger film directors and actors, the three films display much potential for directorial and acting refinement and sophistication. Although most film reviewers responded well to *Island Etude*, the film did not get nominated for the Golden Horse Film Festival held annually in Taiwan.[16] *Din Tao* and *Jump Ashin!* both received nominations, but *Jump Ashin!* won the award only for best original film song, whereas *Din Tao* left empty-handed. Public tensions grew even higher after the 2012 Golden Horse ceremony, when many awards were granted to films from Hong Kong or mainland China. Taiwanese audiences and media expressed dissatisfaction and exasperation at these results. Many voices accused the judges of not supporting Taiwan's own films and lamented the quick demise of Taiwan's cinematic revival. However, like Taiwan's former minister of culture, Lung Ying-Tai, gravely reminds Taiwanese audiences, the Golden Horse award is an eminent Chinese-language film festival and therefore should not be constrained by nationalistic interventions. She says, "Who says Taiwanese have to get the award? The Nobel Prize is not awarded only to Swedish people, nor the Venice [film festival] awards only given to Italians" (qtd. in Lin). Her remark points to Taiwanese films' next challenge of advancing national cinemas to international levels.

Nevertheless, critical and external marketing setbacks need not disqualify the films' efforts and impacts; rather, their national box office successes should encourage and shed light on prospective enhancements for furthering this latest revitalizing transformation in

Taiwanese filmmaking. Now that Taiwanese audiences have begun to watch and discuss domestic films, Taiwanese cinema promises to gradually strengthen in quantity and quality. Revivals are miraculous, but nourishment and development require more practical determinants such as time and money. Evoking patriotic love is only the first step to rebuilding Taiwan's film industry.

Entering the new millennium, Taiwanese film directors have taken new steps to overcome the nation's film industry crisis. The three films discussed in this article all seek to reinvigorate Taiwanese filmmaking through passionate films derived from real-life inspirations. A significant difference between the discussed films and their predecessors is that these recent films embrace Taiwan's insular geographic location and cultural hybridity as creative potentials rather than problematic concerns. Currently, many Taiwanese films are progressing toward recovering film's ability to narrate and generate love. By reviving cinephilia through life-inspired film narratives, these films influentially propose new routes for Taiwanese nationhood identity reconstructions.

NOTES

1. See Lee Yuan, *Proceedings of the Conference on Literature, Cinema, and Landscape*. Lee's discussion includes films such as *Island Etude* (2007), *Cape No. 7* (2008), *Seven Days in Heaven* (2010), *Jump Ashin!* (2011), and *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (2011).

2. Hou Hsiao-Hsien is a leading representative of Taiwan New Cinema and one of the most prestigious film directors of Taiwan. Some of his well-known works include *A City of Sadness* (1989), The *Puppetmaster* (1993), *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996), *Millennium Mambo* (2001), and *Café Lumière* (2003).

3. In the realm of diasporic Chinese-language films, the era of the Shaw Brothers is perhaps the most representative of the diasporic communities' desires for a transnational imagined Chinese community. Initially founded in Shanghai in 1925 with the network support of the British, Shaw Brothers Ltd. soon moved to Singapore-Malay and transferred its focus to South Asia. By the 1930s, the Shaw Brothers had linked British Hong Kong, China, and South Asia into a transnational network of entertainment business. Into the 1950s, the company developed into a trans-Asia empire of mass entertainment business, which included theme parks, dance halls, film studios of Chinese and Malay languages, and a massive distribution network importing films from Hong Kong, India, Europe, and the United States, with a circuit of more than 130 theaters throughout Southeast Asia (Fu 1–3). In the mid-1960s, the Shaw Brothers became inspired by the international success of Japanese directors, such as Ozu and Mizoguchi, who promoted Oriental flavor for the Western audience. With business calculations and cultural nationalism in mind, the Shaw Brothers took to creating a global Chinese cinema through producing Mandarin films that centered on displaying Chineseness. For a decade, the Shaw Brothers' big-budget films, which featured popular themes such as romances and martial arts set in dehistoricized times and spaces, achieved pan-Asian commercial success and also success in the Chinatowns of the United States. Since China was ruled by the PRC, with its distinct socialist agendas and policies, the diasporic cinema of the Shaw Brothers became the transnational representation of Chineseness, bringing pleasure and comfort to the Chinese people living outside of China through romanticized reimaginings of the motherland and nostalgic recreations of the time before the PRC.

4. Tsai Ming-Liang is a Chinese Malaysian independent film director who developed his film career chiefly in Taiwan. Ang Lee is a Taiwanese director who produces films primarily in the United States. Both directors have won numerous international film awards.

5. See Chen Huai-En, Interview.

6. In "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," Benjamin compares the storyteller with the novelist. Different from the novelist, who isolates himself as the solitary individual who "carries the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life" (87), the storyteller's concern with life is to narrate past lives and experiences that have accumulated and that continue to live through the present subject. Stories do not set out on the quest for the ultimate universal meaning of life as do novels; rather, the storyteller seeks to "relate his life . . . to be able to tell his entire life" (108).

7. For more information on the history of Taiwan cinema in the earlier period of colonialism and postcolonialism, see Lee Tian-Dow's *Taiwan Cinema, Society and History* (1997).

8. Taiya is one of the Taiwanese aboriginal tribes. Taiwanese aborigines are Austronesian people who came to Taiwan approximately eight thousand years prior to Han Chinese immigration in the seventeenth century.

9. See *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*, coedited by Chris Berry and Feii Lu.

10. See Tsai Tsung-Shin's presentation at the Sixth Cross-Strait Conference on Chinese Culture held at Longshan in 2010.

11. See Wang Di's "The Origin and Transformation of Popular Culture in Taiwan," p. 100.

12. Since Taiwan lost its seat at the United Nations to China in 1971, the PRC has blocked the use

of Taiwan's national flag. During international sport events such as the Olympics, Taiwanese athletes are required to compete under the name Chinese Taipei and fly the Chinese Taipei Olympic flag.

13. The "Four Asian Tigers" refers to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea.

14. In "Social Transformation in Taiwan since the 1980s," Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao mentions four major indigenous movements during the 1970s. The first was a literature based in local conditions, with a strong emphasis on social realism. The second was a folk music movement, as opposed to Western and Mandarin pop music. The third movement involves dance, such as the Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan founded in 1973. The last movement focused on pursuing the indigenization of social sciences by promoting a self-reflective approach (Hsiao 157).

15. The term *taike* initially started off as a derisive name mainlander immigrants called native Taiwanese, which directly translates as "Taiwanese guest." Into the 1980s, *taike* referred to gangster youths who rode around on their modified scooters, wearing flip-flops and flowery shirts.

16. The Golden Horse Film Festival is one of the most prestigious Chinese-language film festivals, held annually in Taiwan.

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