

***Pushing Ethnoscape Identity Through Taiwanese
Movie Box Office after the Popularity of Cape No. 7***

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Abstract

New Media offer Taiwanese as an alternative to explore their ethnic group identity when other mainstream media fail to present their image and imagined community as the way they want to be presented. After the popularity of Cape No. 7, Taiwanese Movie Box Office shows that almost only movies with good production which can present daily lives, collective memories, community issues, dreams or shared social emotions of majority Taiwanese can beat Hollywood movies in Annual Taiwanese Top 10 Movie Box Office or Top 1 in Lunar New Year's film schedules from 2010 to 2014. This article treats popular local movie text as a new way to present Taiwanese ethnic group identity. How and why online fans as cultural agents to push ethnoscape identity through Taiwanese Movie Box Office after the popularity of Cape No. 7 are explored. This article argues that the concept of consumers' rights of cultural sovereignty is helpful to explain these movie fans' online behavior which pushes box office of local movies with lower production budget to lead that of Hollywood movies.

Keywords: ethnoscape, Taiwanese Cinema, imagined community, identity/difference, consumers' rights of cultural sovereignty

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Introduction

Appadurai (1996) analyzes ethnoscapes and finds a growing number of diasporic public spheres when media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay. He describes a central fact of ethnography that the social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity is changing in the 20th century as groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects (p.48). Taiwanese identity has also been changing drastically. In a public opinion survey report published in July 2014 by the *National Cheng-chi University Election Study Center*, when people in Taiwan were asked about their identity, 60.4 percent reported seeing themselves as Taiwanese, with only 3.5 percent regarding themselves as Chinese and 32.7 percent thinking of themselves as both, the lowest percentages on record¹.

Appadurai (1990) uses the concept of “here and now” to explore image and the issue of locality and nation-state, their history, crisis and prospects in the context of globalization. Castells (2010^a) distinguishes three kinds of collective identity: legitimizing identity, resistance identity, and project identity to explain the flow of identity in the context of post-modern style and globalization. Chen (2013^a) applies the concept of consumers’ rights of cultural sovereignty and asserts that the public and nationals in a state have the need for consolidating their collective identity through consuming popular mass media as vehicles for their cultural practices of everyday life. Chen argues that in the process of the globalization, the public as consumers of local film industries can pursue their resistance and create their special interpretation of their experience of modernization by building up momentum of local culture. She explores why Taiwanese government should focus on enlarging the local market of its local film industry rather than focus majorly on Chinese film market.

Under the influence of cultural discount or cultural relevance consumers may choose the domestic products they like as their first choice but choose the foreign products if those domestic products could not meet their needs (Straubhaar, 2000) and through the context of globalization and glocalization, consumers can seek their different levels of identity such as identities of personal, social groups, communities, and nations. However, these observations cannot explain how and why some nations can dominate their domestic movie market and deter the invasion of Hollywood movies. Through the experience of film markets in Japan and Korea we can find that the two domestic markets have significant changes when their film makers target their local audiences’ preference and their local film distributors regain top 3 titles in their local movie markets (Chen, 2013^a). Based on these observation this article argues that consumers might create a momentum to pursue their national identity as the need to pursue their collective memories and production of their collective cultural symbols through media consumption behavior. The governments need to maintain and build media system to make sure their nationals as consumers have available cultural products to satisfy their needs for collective consumption. This concept is defined as consumers’ rights of cultural sovereignty which is different from protection of culture right of minorities. Chen (2013^b) uses both social and cultural perspectives to argue how

order is formed by solidarity/attachment from a social perspective and by autonomy/authenticity from a cultural perspective. She explains that based on McQuail model, concepts related to order include public order, consensus, national/subgroup identity, empathy, quality (improved by education and science, aesthetics) and bad taste (facing the uncultural facts by exploring social reality). Global industries produce cultural products that makes nations worried about their cultural invasion. In contrast, several nations such as Japan and South Korea have shown that emphasizing their national cultural characteristics help develop their national brand and national pride which increase the heterogeneous characteristics of globalization(Chen, 2013^a).

Chen (2012) explains that a paradigm shift of cultural consumption indicates that a nation's domestic cultural products have a bigger market share than foreign competing products after that nation had failed to do it for many years. She demonstrates what we can learn from these nations' strategies of winning a cultural paradigm shift and provides evidence to argue that cultural negotiation in local market is important to both glocalization and globalization. In addition, protecting domestic cultural products without a deadline to avoid market competence may hurt a culture if local cultural products no longer attract locals and their market share shrinks. The scenario of protecting local products without an aim to expand their competence is not the practice of consumers' right of culture sovereignty.

Movie Images Representing Ethnoscape in Taiwan

Ethnoscape in Taiwan changes when different groups settle down and dominate this island. Since the second half of the sixteenth century, Chinese, living Fukien a southeastern province of China, migrated into Taiwan, before that several groups of aborigines of Southeast Asian had inhabited Taiwan and it was not until the end of the seventeenth century that Han Chinese settlers dominated the island (Ch'en [1966] 1979a:452-453, cited by Hsiau, 2004). During Ming Dynasty and Ch'ing Empire, people in Taiwan only had the local consciousness as "Changchou people," "Chuanchou people" who speak Hoklo and "the Hakka" who migrated primarily from Kwangtung and spoke the Hakka language (Hsiau, 2004, p.5; 黃俊傑, 2006). Taiwanese consciousness appeared the first time during Japanese ruling period because of confrontation between the colonized and the colonizer; the categories of tai-gu (Taiwanese people in Hoklo) and tai-oan-oe (Taiwanese language in Hoklo) were created (Hsiau, 2004, p.4). Taiwanese consciousness (1895-1945) then were considered as struggling not only for nationalism but also for equal right of class (黃俊傑, 2006). After 1945, Taiwan turned to be under the KMT's ruling and members of KMT became new settlers from mainland China. After that, Taiwan turned to be four great ethic groups in Taiwan: Taiwanese, Waishengren (Mainland Chinese), the Hakka, and the aborigines. Taiwanese consciousness then developed as against KMT's authoritarian regime (p.4, 黃俊傑, 2006). After Martial Law in Taiwan was abolished in 1987 and new democratic systems have been adopted, Taiwanese consciousness turns "New Taiwanese" identity discourse against the political regime of Communist China (p.4, 黃俊傑, 2006). Anderson's *Imagined Communities* argues that all communities larger than promordial viliagers of face-to-face contact are imagined

and communities are to be distinguished, “not by their falsity/genineness but by the style in which they are imagined” (1983:6). Billig’s banal nationalism (1995) explains nationalism as an endemic condition rather than just intermittent mood; Fox and Miller—Idriss indicate processes of building everyday nationhood as talking the nation, choosing the nation, performing the nation, and consuming the nation (cited by 高奇琦, 2012). Movie images of ethnoscapes usually reflect official dominant culture such as top-down control and solidarity or peoples’ choices such as bottom-up resistance, attachment and pleasure. For example, after analyzing two popular movies *Victory* (1976) and *A City of Sadness* (1989), Lo (2002) finds differences between the two movie texts when the former describes “the other” as Japanese but the latter refers to “the other” as Chinese mainlanders; in addition, languages the former used are Mandarin and Japanese while the latter also uses Hoklo, Cantonese. Lo indicates that *Victory* appeals to “assimilation” with a strategy to construct national sameness; in contrast, *A City of Sadness* applies the strategy of “dissimilation” to construct intranational differences (p.22). Taiwanese and Chinese identities coexist harmony in *Victory* but in *A City of Sadness* conflict and difference exist between the two identities. He also examines TV dramas in Taiwan from 1971 to 1996 and finds that Mainland China turns to be “absent presence” but Taiwan turns to be “present absence” in the programs he analyzes; therefore, Taiwan turned to be a place where lacked the in-depth history then. Lo (2002) explores the identity/difference of Taiwan as hybrid nationhood and finds a hybrid yet Taiwan based identity. A commonly shared ‘structure of feeling’ emerges to sustain this peculiar form of hybrid nationhood by way of conjunctural mediation process through audio-visual media to negotiate an “imaginary homeland” (China) and the “inhabited home” (Taiwan) (Lo, 2002, p.21).

However, when globalization makes progress, more ethnoscapes in Taiwan turned global and identity in movie texts developed toward private perspective. Castells (2010²) describes about Taiwan around 1990s that consumption and the search for identity increasingly shift from the public to the private, from nation to family and the individual, from the impossible Taiwanese cultural identity to the daily personal identity of Chinese people struggling in the island (p.307). Another development is that scholar (林文淇, 1998) indicates that the difference of identities depicted in Taiwan movies are changing: in city movies the national identity of Chinese disappears and turns into a post-modern style in 1990s. Phenomena of portable nationality is related to postmodern hazy spaces with an unclear meaning of rupturing historical landscape, Lin observes (林文淇, 1998). Storey (1999) states how characteristics of traditional identity are different from postmodern identity—the former self as fixed/limited, unfolding without change, singular, centered, complete, constituted outside culture, and universal; the latter self as performative self, self as powers of change, multiple self, decentered, incomplete, constituted in culture, historical (1999, p.135) (cited by Lee, 2003). As electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project, Appadurai (1990) indicates that the global flow of images, news, and opinion now provides part of the engaged cultural and political literacy that diasporic persons bring to their spatial neighborhoods. He uses ethnoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes to stress different streams or flows along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across national

boundaries. He indicates that “today's ethnoscapes interact irregularly with finance, media, and technological imaginaries” (1996, p.198). To explore ethnoscapes, images and narratives of different ethnic groups represented in media are important to the concept of ethnoscapes. By comparing film industries of the Republic of Korea, Japan with that of Taiwan, Chen found that the Republic of Korea and Japan persist in their local cultural practices and connect them to globalization is the key for their success. As a result, their domestic film markets that were dominated by Hollywood movies in the past are changing now after their nationals shape their nation's collective imagination through their own film industry.

National identity and Popularity of Local Media Production

Greenfeld (1992) explains that nationalism “locates the source of individual identity with a “people”, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity.’ Yoshino (1992) explains that “the common denominators of nationalism are the belief among a people that it comprises a distinct community with distinctive characteristic and the will to maintain and enhance that distinctiveness within an autonomous state” (p.6 , cited by Hsiau, 2004). Although narrowly-defined ethnic nationalism is commonly criticized by the fact of historical mistakes such as racial cleansing, war or discrimination against ethnic groups, this paper argues that nationalism with characteristics of multicultural, syncretistic, and civic perspectives should not be considered as a negative way of connecting nationals together for cultural economy. Throsby (2001) explains culture economy that the cultural impulse can be seen as “a desire for group experience of collective production or consumption” that cannot be fully factored out to the individuals comprising the group (P.13). Ethnoscapes interact with media which implies whether local media products are popular is important. A similar idea discussed by Silj about how media, market, cultural values can work together (1992): national public broadcasters' maintaining enough market shares to claim the impact in local market (over 50% ratings) ; their locally produced programs helpful to their nations to compete with programs imported from other nations; local programs good enough to deepen audiences' nation identity or cultural identity when programs were produced locally and themes of these dramas relevant audiences' daily life or historically collective memories in their nations; programs to be exported with a purpose of economical meanings and culture values because a nation's image, values and belief were sent to regional or global audiences. Straubhaar (2003) found that there was an increasing trend for the percentage of prime time television occupied by nationally-produced programs from 1962 to 2001 in East Asia such as Japan, South Korean and Taiwan; in contrast, there was a decreasing trend for the percentages of prime television occupied by US-produced programs in the same period. In contrast, low budgets and competition in a low-profit market has been leading to a bad production cycle for TV programs in Taiwan and TV markets recently are gradually taken over by Chinese-made TV programs which imply high budgets and better quality. However, Taiwan's cinema market is in a different condition. After the popularity of *Cape No. 7*, Taiwanese Movie Box Office shows that almost only movies with higher budgets which represent Taiwanese daily lives, collective memories, community issues, dreams or shared social emotions of majority Taiwanese can beat Hollywood movies in Annual

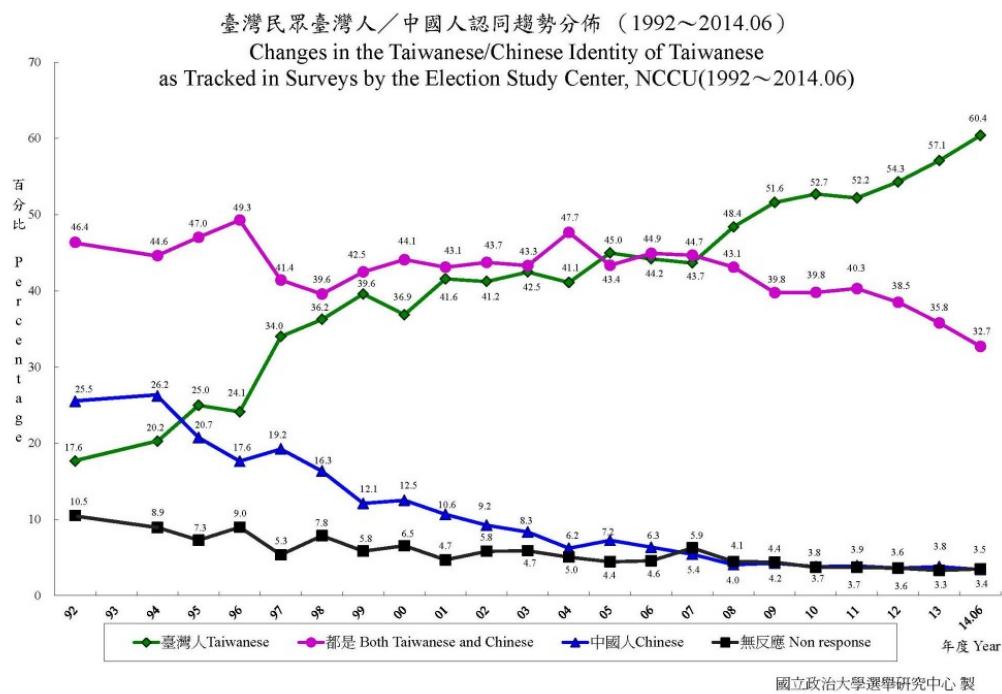
Taiwanese Top 10 Movie Box Office or in Lunar New Year's film schedules from 2010 to 2014. Chen (2012) explores how directors, managers of art direction, and financial control in movie production for three movies - *Monga*、*Zone Pro Site*、*Twa-Tiu-Tiann* - create new Taiwanese cultural aesthetic experience and represent Taiwan's subjectivity.

When the majority of Taiwanese movies are produced with lower budgets or careless about their audience's responses, they fail to represent Taiwanese images to maintain their imagined community as the way Taiwanese want to be presented. To many Taiwanese, these popular movies offer them as alternative media to explore their Taiwanese identity. This article explores how fans as movie push hands can achieve that goal through local Movie Box Office after popular movie professionals create Taiwanese-center paradigm symbols to call for their fans' reaction for Taiwanese narratives.

Collective Identities in Taiwanese Popular Movies and their Fans

There is changing trend of Taiwanese collective identity of when 60.4 percent of Taiwanese consider themselves as Taiwanese this year, a huge jump from only 17.6 of Taiwanese saying this in 1992. In contrast, 25.5 of respondents saying they are Chinese in 1992 but dropped to 3.5 percent in 2014.

Table 1: Changes in the Taiwanese/Chinese identity of Taiwanese



Retrieved on July 2014 from Election Study Center of National Chengchi University,
<http://esc.nccu.edu.tw/course/news.php?Sn=167>

In terms of collective identity, there are major differences regarding Taiwan's history. The conflict between these two ideologies is called China-centered or Taiwan-centered paradigm (Hsiau, 2005). One of the China-centered basic assumptions is that Taiwan's history should be viewed from a China-centered perspective; in contrast, the latter emphasized the idea that Taiwan's history should be viewed from a Taiwan-centered perspective (Hsiau, 2004). Hsiau explains that based on a Taiwan-centered paradigm, all foreign rulers left some legacies, for better or for worse, and are in indelible feature of Taiwan's unique history and culture (p.75). Taiwanese most popular movies seems to reflect what Taiwanese think about themselves. This study choose three movies *Twa-Tiu-Tian*, *Kano*, and *David Loman* to explore how and why their online fans support them for their Taiwan-centered paradigm plots. All three movies list as Annual Taiwanese Top 10 Movie Box Office or Top 1 Movie Box Office in Lunar New Year's film schedules from 2013 to 2014. This study explains these movies are popular for they are of Taiwan-centered paradigm, explore Taiwanese subjectivity, and connect Taiwanese with their local languages, moods, issues, culture, and modern consumption experience such as life style and aesthetic experience. Fans of the three movies show a strong motivation to persuade other Taiwanese to watch them by asserting how many times they have been watching the movie. They show a determination of pushing "cultural paradigm shift" (Chen, 2012) to help the movie win the best box office at its first opening week.

Twa-Tiu-Tiann and *Kano* represent two stories Taiwanese rarely experience in locally-produced movies. Although the background is both under Japanese rule around 1920's to 1930's and Taiwanese then were discriminated by Japanese, both directors in the two movies mention that it was a "golden" or "wonderful" time period in Taiwan. At that time, more Taiwanese started to experience the spirit and products of modernity such as western art, music, movies, department stores, coffee shops, and sports as a result that they develop their pride and confidence in different ways such as challenging famous baseball games or participating public reform. In *Kano*, an underdog baseball team from the south performed beyond all expectation by advancing to the championship game and won Japanese respect because three ethnicities- Han people, Taiwanese aborigines and Japanese- worked together when social inequality then made it hard for them to co-play. However, earning the respect of Japanese is also criticized by some as enslavement and this movie is called as an evidence that some Taiwanese still miss Japanese colonial era. Wei Te-Sheng, co-producer and co-screenwriter of the movie, explains that good things should not be ignored and denied just because it happened during the colonial era. Based on Jian Nan's description (Hsiau, 2004, p.63), the textbooks in Taiwan for a long time was largely ignored the Dutch rule of Taiwan and the Japanese era except for some local uprisings against Japanese. Therefore, most Taiwanese still have not enough knowledge about how Taiwan contacted modernity before the KMT's ruling. In *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, rich, beautiful, educated, and young Taiwanese are seen in Japanese colonial era to struggle for their prides in a comedian and upbeat way. For example, its trailer sets the happy mood with a confident style by saying "everyone is taking efforts to earn big money by starting business." In fact, scholars and professionals have been online debating these two movies. For *Kano*, a scholar with a China-centered paradigm in mind argues that this movie erodes Taiwan's subjectivity² while another defends it by emphasizing the director's

humane approach with a characteristic of public subjectivity rather than ethnic subjectivity³. The Taiwan Historical Association claimed that Taiwan as a sovereign country must maintain their subjectivity, devoting itself to promoting a historical view that embodies Taiwanese subjectivity in 1995 (Hsiau, 2004, p.165). *Kano* is heavily criticized as flattering Japanese because it is presented almost all in the language of Japanese and treat Japanese baseball games as “ours” rather than enemies’ creation. However, fans search historical evidence to prove that it is right for the players to speak Japanese then and confirm that Japan helped Taiwanese to learn modernity then. For *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, this movie describes a college boy’s time travel, back to Japanese colonial era, and he turns from an absent-minded young man to a brave, determined, and responsible adult after he helps organize a colonial protest and saves Dr. Chiang Wei-shui who piloted the modern thought of Taiwanese, opened up their world view and new cultural movements.⁴ This movie also encounters disputes about whether history is presented accurately⁵ and how stereotypical it is to present Japanese official. However, fans are trying to promote the film by arguing against these criticism and saying it is more important to let more Taiwanese know about Dr. Chiang Wei-shui and his spirit than explore all the historical details in this movie. In the movie scenes, crowds are shouting “We are Taiwanese.” “We are from *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*.” The movie has a strong historical view of Taiwan-centered paradigm. Another popular movie *David Loman* beats Hollywood movies by narrating a comedy about a gangster and the actor who playing him is good at using homophones to present funny but wrong meanings especially implying obscenities or curses as a result of showing a comedian Taiwanese versus Chinese bi-lingual environment. Scholars and art movie critics criticize this movie greets low taste of movie market but the fans of movie support the funny plots by admitting curses are the way their friends to greet each other. While series critics focus on curses in a movie should be presented in a meaningful way and grass roots is not equal to low taste⁶, the movie fans counter back that how they use Taiwanese curses in their daily life⁷ is similar to what the movie describe⁸ and they enjoy this movie a lot. Scholar Chen Fang-ming said that he believed that the language of Taiwanese is still deeply rooted in Taiwan and he believes that Gou-liang Chu, actor playing that gangster, finds a way out for this language; in fact, his program has been popular with a background that the language of Taiwanese have long been repressed⁹.

The three movies explore new possibilities of describing Taiwan-center paradigm history, ethnic groups’ relationship, and fun of using bi-lingual languages as multicultural background in Taiwanese daily life and all of which connect the idea of imaginative collective identity originated from movies. Applying the concept of consumers’ rights of cultural sovereignty, for Taiwanese hybridization sometimes is not good enough for locals’ cultural needs because “we the people” want to share with “our” national identity by telling “our” own version of history and truth (Chen, 2013^a). This research recommends future studies to explore the fundamental issues about how this approach may not be good enough to explain local movie production and movie box office based on movie genre, collective identities as movie audience’ needs, and the scale of market.

Notes:

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