

*Investigation on Historical Representation by the
Case Study of Taiwan Historical Drama Films*

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Abstract

Under the discourse of “historiophoty”, historical drama films can be both entertainment and media of conveying history. Historical drama films not only have been taken as the material of history study by historians, but also affect viewers’ cognition of history. The main subjects in this research are the Taiwan historical drama films which depicted the history of Japanese colonial period in Taiwan (1895-1945). During Japanese colonial period, when Taiwan was transformed into a modern society, lots of modern facilities and architecture were constructed and had great impact on Taiwan cityscapes. Therefore, by looking into the relationship between the elements of history and film, this research aims to see how the films represented the history and what history they represented.

In this research, the selected films which conform to the definition of collective memory and depict the historical events in Japanese colonial period are categorized by the ways in which they recreated their movie scenes. The further investigation of this research has been taking these selected films as the bridge of the past and present to focus on how the films recall the memories of the citizens as well as strengthen the linkage between citizens and the past through the portraying of the fabric of cities.

Keywords: historiophoty, history, representation, film, collective memory

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Introduction

Taiwan film industry had been stagnant from since 1990 because of the competition of Hollywood film. However, recently more and more film makers have tried to show the life of Taiwanese in the past, present and future on the screen in an interesting way, such as Cape No.7(海角七號, 2008). Therefore, Taiwan film industry has come alive. The issue of historical representation form motion pictures and written words has been a hot topic for many years. Marc ferro (1977) pointed out that the historical drama films provided an interpretation in social and historical aspect. Hayden White (1988), a historian in the tradition of literary criticism, proposed the term “historiophoty”, and argued that whether films could be the materials of history study in his essay.

For many years, there have been lots of discussions on how the films interpret histories. In 2011 when one of the Taiwan historical film, Seediq Bale (賽德克·巴萊, 2011), was released, many people talked about its movie scenes. The representation of the historical scenes not only became the hot topic, but also the local people asked the film production team to leave the scenes as new tourist spots.

In the first half of 2014, there are two historical drama films were released, Twa-Tiu-Tiann (大稻埕, 2004) and Kano(2014). Both of them led to lots of discussion on the authenticity of history and created the vivid images to the places where they depicted. Moreover, there were lots of travel plans designed for tourists to experience the phenomenon of the films and the historical events.

In view of the above, historical drama films have its power to convey film makers' explanation of the history to the society. They also represent the distinctive spaces with vivid images, which have influences on the places to an extent. To investigate the representation of history and its space, this research focuses on the screenplays and the movie scene and tries to achieve the following goals: (1) to clarify how the films represented the history. (2) to analyze the histories and different typologies of historical scenes the films represented.

The research subjects are the films which depicted the stories of Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) in Taiwan. During Japanese colonial period, some of the Taiwanese had a difficult time under the suppression of Japanese government. However it is also when Taiwan was transformed into a modern society. Lots of modern facilities and architecture were constructed and had great impact on Taiwan

cityscapes. The controversy of the history makes the film makers have more room to have their own explanation of the history. Besides, because some of the buildings and facilities built during Japanese colonial periods still have the impact on Taiwan cityscapes, it is interesting to look into how the film makers represented the distinctive spaces on the screen. This research collected thirteen films which depicted the history of Japanese colonial period. To emphasize the representation of the space and cities, the criterion for selecting cases is “specific for a place/city”. Therefore, the research subjects are the four films which depicted certain historical events. They are *Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa in 1895* (一八九五, 2008); *Seediq Bale* (賽德克·巴萊, 2011); *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* (大稻埕, 2014); *KANO* (2014).

Collective Memory: the concept of history, representation and place

Collective Memory

Historical drama film is a medium to convey history, story and the memory shared by one group. Memory is the mental capacity to recall and recognize the events and experiences of the past. Memory may be either individual or collective. (Ardakani & Oloonabadi, 2011) When talking about collective memory, it often trace back to the works of French Scholar, Halbwachs (1887-1945). Halbwachs specifies that collective memory is individuals as group members who remember. There are many collective memories, as there are many groups in a society, such as families, associations, corporations, armies and trade unions. For each group, they all have their own memories which are constructed for a long time by the group members who located in a specific group context. The context is delimited in space and time. (Halbwachs, 1992)

After the discussion on collective memory from Halbwachs, it has raised more discussions and issues related to collective memory from other scholars. The definitions of collective memory from other scholars are quite the same. Steiner and Zelizer (1995) had some statements to tell the difference between personal memory and collective memory. Personal memory is an individual’s ability to conserve information; collective memory consists of the recollections of the past which is shared by a group of people. Another scholar, Wertsch (2008) pointed out that “Collective memory is a representation of the past that is shared by members as a generation or nation-state”. In his definition, as the statement of Halbwachs, collective memory is constructed and shared by a group of people who are in the same context of time and space.

Collective Memory and Place

Citizens who live in a certain region and under the same context are taken as one group. They contribute to the place's distinctiveness and continuity in time (Lewicka, 2008). They construct and share the same memories of the past, and this is also one of the reasons why collective memories are place-specific (Ardakani & Oloonabadi, 2011). Lewicka (2008) pointed out that collective past is the thing which people remembered and known, and it depends on many factors, including written, oral, and material sources. Memory contents which are shared by the residents are shaped by "official ideologies transmitted through media, history lessons in schools and the school textbooks, circulated legends and songs, architectural and urban traces, family stories". Besides, collective memory is the linkage of generations through the ceremonies and rituals which has been incorporated with collective memories.

Representation of Historical Drama Film

History and Historical Fact

Before introducing historical drama films, it is necessary to clarify what is history? "History is one of a series of discourses about the world. These discourses do not create the world but they do appropriate it and give it all the meanings it has. That bit of the world which is history's object of inquiry is the past." (Jenkins & Munslow, 2003) According to the definition above, the historical fact is about the past, and history is the explanation of historical fact. The truth of the past couldn't be gotten, and history would be the explanation by different people in different points of view. Mien Shih, Li (李冕世, 1989) also argued that history is the explanation of historical event, which is constructed by time, space, people and event. When having research on historical fact, it is necessary to make a comprehensive understanding about its space and geography.



Figure 1 Four Elements of History

Historical Drama Film

According to Rosenstone (1995), historical film can also be taken into three broad categories: history as drama, history as document and history as experiment. History as drama, the most common and popular form of historical film can be further divided into two categories: (1) Film which is based on documentable persons or events or movements; (2) Film whose central plot and characters are fictional, but whose historical setting is intrinsic to the story and meaning of the work. In this research, historical drama film is defined as history as drama.

Marc Ferro (1977), a French historian, thought the value of film is that it provides an interpretation in social and historical aspect. Therefore, apart from providing the evidence for the history, film is the way of showing individuals' own interpretation of history, or it is the way to make audience have their interpretation after watching films. However, not all historical drama films success. Marc Ferro pointed out that the successes of historical drama films are entirely attributed to imagination which must be based on historical data. Following is the four dimensions proposed by Marc Ferro to account for the characteristics of historical drama film.

For the first dimension, data-choosing, means that the director would choose the historical data he/she wants to give his/her interpretation of the history. The second dimension, principle of data organizing, shows the ways of arranging the historical data. For example, film makers can arrange the data in certain way to increase more tension in the film. The third dimension is the purpose of authors. Therefore, the position of the film would be decided by the director. It could be an advance guard movie, or a movie for children to understand history easily. The fourth dimension is invention and creativity. Invention and Creativity lie in what plots the director and the screenplay writer want to choose to add some imagination.

Table 1 Dimensions of Historical Drama Films

Data choosing	Principle of Data Organizing	The purpose of authors	Invention & Creativity
Interpretation	Logic, Aesthetic, Dramatic tension	Knowledge power, Popular film, Advance guard movie	Question Choosing & Pattern Forming

Historical Representation

To represent is to give back a society an image of itself, and to help people define and locate themselves with respect to those surroundings. Representation is one of the oldest functions of art and theater (Aitken & Zonn, 1994). From the above definition, historical representation is to give visual information of the past world, including the space, the clothes, the phenomena and etc. Film, as one of the ways to represent the distinctive spaces, life style and human conditions of the city, has the ability to capture and express the spatial complexity, diversity and social dynamism of the city through mise-en-scene, locating filming, lighting, cinematography, and editing (Shiel, 2001) which refer to the five elements of film: narrative, mise-en-scene, cinematography, sound and editing (Bordwell, Thompson, & Ashton, 1997).

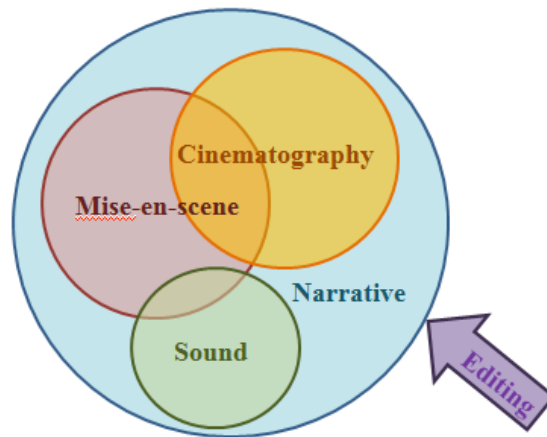


Figure 2 Five Elements of Film

The characteristic of historical representation through written discourse and image discourse has been discussed by many scholars. Hayden White (1988), proposed a new term in the essay – historiophoty, which is “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual and filmic discourse”. Hayden White mainly pointed out whether the visual-auditory where the given written account of history is translated without any significant loss of content is equivalent to the original contents. In the article Hayden White also argued that cinema and video are better than written discourse to actually represent landscape, scene, atmosphere and complex events, because images provide a reproduction of the scenes and atmosphere of the historical events. Many people would think that the written discourse could record the history more detailed because the written discourse does not have the limitation of time. However, Hayden White said that every written history is also the product of the process of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification, just like the film. Film, like written history, also focuses on representing the history.

Taiwan Historical Drama Films





This research has been taken Taiwan historical drama films as case studies. To narrow down the research scope, this research first collected thirteen films which depicted Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) in Taiwan. During Japanese colonial period, some of the Taiwanese had difficult times under the suppression of Japanese government. However it is also when Taiwan was transformed into a modern society. Lots of modern facilities and architecture were constructed and had great impact on Taiwan cityscapes. Also the controversy of the history makes it worth to investigate how the historical drama films gave representation of that history.

There are thirteen films which depicted the history of Japanese colonial period. They can be categorized into three categories: (1) films depicting the life of Taiwanese (2) autobiographic films (3) films depicting historical events. To emphasize the representation of the space and cities, other criteria for selecting cases is “specific for a place/city”. The thirteen films are place specific for the whole Taiwan, but the films which depict historical events are specific for the cities in Taiwan, which make the research more focus on the historical representation of the spaces. Therefore, the cases are the following four films: *Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa in 1895* (一八九五, 2008); *Seediq Bale* (賽德克·巴萊, 2011); *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* (大稻埕, 2014); *KANO* (2014).

This four films depicted different historical events respectively in Japanese colonial period. *Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa in 1895*, distributed by Green Film Production (青睞影視製作有限公司) in 2008, portrayed Japanese Invasion of Taiwan(乙未戰爭). In 1895, when the Japanese armies came to take over Taiwan after the first Sino-Japanese War (甲午戰爭), the Hakka (客家) people, some Holo (閩南) people and indigenous people were gathered to fight for their hometown and to resist the government of Japanese. The historical sites of Japanese Invasion in Taiwan covered from Hsinchu(新竹) to Changhua(彰化), but *Blue Brave* mainly depicted the story which happened in Hsinchu(新竹) and Miaoli(苗栗). *Seediq Bale*, distributed by ARS Film (果子電影有限公司) in 2011, depicted Wushe Incident (霧社事件), which happened in Nantou (南投) in 1930. Wushe Incident is a famous uprising staged by Taiwan indigenous people to react against Japanese colony. *Twa-Tiu-Tiann*, distributed by Green Film Production (青睞影視製作有限公司) in 2014, different from other three films, it showed Peace Act Incident (治警事件), which happened in Taipei (臺北) in 1923, through the time travel of a college student. *KANO*, distributed by ARS Film (果子電影有限公司) in 2014, portrayed how KANO, the baseball

team of Kagi Nourin (嘉義農林學校) in Chiayi (嘉義), strived for getting the opportunity to participate the baseball competition in Kosien (甲子園). Besides, KANO also depicted the establishment of Chia-Nan Canal (嘉南大圳) in the film.

Table 2 Basic information of the four films

	Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa in 1895	Seediq Bale	Twa-Tiu-Tiann	KANO
Poster				
Release	2008	2011	2014	2014
Distributor	Green Film Production (青睞影視製作有限公司)	ARS Film (果子電影有限公司)	Green Film Production (青睞影視製作有限公司)	ARS Film (果子電影有限公司)
Director	Zhi-Yu Hong (洪智育)	De-Shen Wei (魏德聖)	Tien-Lun Yeh (葉天倫)	Zhi-Xiang Ma (馬志翔)
Historical Event	Japanese Invasion of Taiwan (乙未戰爭) (1895)	Wushe Incident (霧社事件) (1895-1930)	Peace Act Incident (治警事件) (1923)	The establishment of Chia-Nan Canal (1930). KANO won the 2nd place in Koshien (1931).
Main Historical Site	Hsinchu, Miaoli (新竹,苗栗)	Nantou (南投)	Taipei (臺北)	Chiayi (嘉義)

Current findings

Historical Investigation of the four films

According to the data of the four films, to represent the histories, the film production teams would investigate the details of the stories and the phenomenon mainly from written records, pictures and oral histories.

From the interview of the director of Blue Brave on TV program, the film production team investigated the hair style, the clothes and every detail about the culture of Hakka people from historical documents and books. (民視交通電視台, 2008)

For Seediq Bale, to represent the appearance of Wu-She elementary school, because the pictures taken at that time were too unclear to identify the original appearance of the space, they compared the pictures taken one year before Wushe Incident. Besides, the film production team also cooperated with historians as their consultants of history and culture. The consultants would help the team to make the scene, the screenplay, the behavior of actors closer to the history. (王擎天, 2011)

For Twa-Tiu-Tiann, besides historical documents, they mainly represented Dadaocheng (大稻埕), a place in Taipei, according to the painting “南街殷賑 (郭雪湖, 1930)”, which portrayed Dadaocheng in 1920s. The painting is collected by Taipei Fine Art Museum (臺北市立美術館). The film production team also collected some information about the history from the descendants of Hsueh-Hu Kuo (郭雪湖) and Wei-Shui Jisn (蔣渭水), the leader of Peace Act Incident. (于珈, 2014)

KANO, different from the previous three films, the history is mainly about the story of the baseball team of Kagi Nourin (嘉義農林學校), the original school of National Chiayi University (國立嘉義大學), so the film production mainly collected the historical information from the school. They also collected some information from a few baseball players of KANO. (ARS Films, 2014)

Table 3 Ways of historical investigation of the four films

	Blue Brave	Seediq Bale	Twa-Tiu-Tiann	KANO
Historical Documents	V	V	V	V
Historians		V		
Institution			V	V

			(Taipei Art Museum)	(National Chiayi University)
Oral History		V	V	V
Interview		V		
Other	V (Books)			

The spatial representation of historical events

After the investigating of the scenes, the film production team has to decide how to represent the historical scenes. In the four films, there are four ways, including filming in the actual historical scenes, taking other spaces as the scenes, rebuilding scenes, as well as using animation to make the scenes better.

(1) Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa in 1895

To represent the environment and the phenomenon, the story of Jiang Shao-Zu (姜紹祖) was filmed in the original space, Tien-Shui-Tang. As for the story of Wu Tang-Xing (吳湯興), the film production team took Shuan-Tang-Wu(雙堂屋), Liou-Gu-Cih (劉家祠) as the house of Wu Tang-Xing in the film.



Figure 3 Film image of Tang-Xing Wu's (吳湯興) house
(Source: Green Film Production)



Figure 4 Film image Tien-Shui-Tang (天水堂) (Left figure);
Tien-Shui-Tang (天水堂) in 1920 (Right Figure)
(Source: Green Film Production; 客家文化數位典藏)

(2) Seediq Bale

To represent the original appearances of Wu-She Street and Mahebo in 1930, the film production team cooperated with the designers from Japan as the art team. In the film production team they also had Ming-Zheng Guo (郭明正) as their consultant of history and culture.

The film production team chose to rebuild Wu-She Street at Lin-Kou (林口) Mesa, Taiwan, and rebuilt Mahebo in the deep mountains in Fuxing (復興) Township, Taoyuan (桃園), Taiwan. First, the Japanese art team would design and have design drawings according to the old photos and the investigation of the specialists. The design drawings included the overview of Wu-She Street at Lin-Kou Mesa and the settings of each building. Second, the art team would make a model of the whole design, and the chief of art team would hold a mini camera to see what the scenes looked like after finishing. They would also discuss the details with director before starting to build the scene. Third, they did land grading and then build the wooden houses. After finishing the construction, the furnishing group and making-it-old group of art team would add some elements to make the scenes look like real spaces.



Figure 5 Rebuilt Mahebo (馬赫坡) (Left Figure); Mahebo in 1931 (Right Figure)
(Source: A R S Film; 台南大學日治時代日文珍本數位典藏計畫)

(3) Twa-Tiu-Tiann

For Twa-Tiu-Tiann, to represent the appearance of the place, Dadaocheng (大稻埕), in 1923, they borrowed “Folk Art Shop (民藝街坊)” from National Center for Traditional Art (國立傳統藝術中心), and do some adjustment in the borrowed scene according to the painting “南街殷賑 (郭雪湖, 1930)”



Figure 6 Rebuilt Dadocheng (大稻埕) (Left figure); Dadocheng in 1923 (Right Figure)

(Source: Green Film Production; 行起紀念寫真帖)

(4) KANO

Compared to Seediq Bale, to represent the history of KANO the film production team used lots of different ways, including rebuilding, animation, the original space of the historical events, borrowing other venues as the original space.

The scene of the celebration of Wu-Shan-Tou Reservoir was filmed at the original space in Tainan (台南), Taiwan. The downtown of Chia-Yi in 1903 and Koshien were both rebuilt according to the historical data and oral history survey. To represent the situation of the baseball competition in Koshien, the film production also used animation to make the rebuilt Koshien more realistic. The downtown of Chia-Yi was built in Liou Cho (劉厝) section in Chia-Yi, and Koshien was built in Nanzih (楠梓) Dist., Kaohsiung (高雄). The two scenes were demolished after the film was finished. (A R S Film, 2014)



Figure 7 Rebuilt fountain roundabout (Left Figure); Fountain roundabout in Japanese colonial period (Right figure)

(Source: A R S Film; Chia-Yi City Government)



Figure 8 Rebuilt cityscape of Chia-Yi City (嘉義市) (Left figure);
 Cityscape of Chia-Yi City in 1933 (Right figure)
 (Source: A R S Film; 典藏台灣棒球史)

Summary & Future Investigation

Historical Drama film can be seen as a way to convey the explanation of the past from film makers' point of view. However, unlike written history, historical drama film is more sequential and dramatic, which make film have the power to affect the audience. Therefore, there must be some inventions in the film, such as *Blue Brave: The Legend of Formosa*. Although it is a film mainly depicted how the Hakka fighters fight for their hometown and their culture when the Japanese were going to take over Taiwan, the director decided to focus on portraying the detail of the war scene but the love between the land and people, part of the which are the invention of the film maker.

For the ways how the four films interpreted the histories, historical document is the common way, especially "picture". With image, the film production team can represent the clothes, space and culture more delicate and realistic. For the screenplay, this research found that *Blue Brave*, *Seediq Bale* and *Twa-Tiu-Tiann* mainly depicted the resistances and the difficult time the Taiwanese had by portraying the culture and nationality of Taiwanese. Nevertheless, recently some other materials have come out such as *KANO*. *KANO* talked about the story of a school baseball team which consisted of Han (漢) people, Taiwan indigenous people and Japanese. There was no ethnic problem in the baseball team. The film mainly portrayed the baseball players' enthusiasm and the stories of the building of Chianan Canal, which was designed by Yoichi Hatta (1886-1942) and improved the agriculture in south Taiwan. After *KANO* was released, this different type of story soon triggered a heated debate in Taiwan.

Historical drama film not only is a way to convey interpretation of history, but its

movie scenes also could be another possibility to lead people feel the phenomenon. In further investigation, this research will focus on the residents who now live in the historical sites where the four films portrayed to investigate how the historical film play a role as the bridge of the past and present.

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