

*Searching Cultural Practices of Consumer Citizens and Modernity through
Popular Local Movies as an Imagined Community*

Ying-Ying Chen, The National United University, Taiwan

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Exploring meanings of daily life from popular culture implies a possibility of resistance against representation structured by powerful elites. This study uses textual analysis to interpret public and social meanings of local movies listed as most popular movies in local markets. From perspectives of cultural studies, annual top 10 movies produced by Taiwanese in the recent decade are analyzed through concepts of subjectivity such as redefinition of tradition, history, memories, language, knowledge, and class. The results show that consumers search for new knowledge and ideas about their favorable identity and representation which might be ignored by movies produced by traditional social elites in Taiwan.

Keywords: consumer citizens, popular culture, Taiwan film market, cultural and creative industries

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

In the background of the dominant development of globalization and WTO, the world seems to be more connected. Citizens or consumers who cannot get supply or information from local idea market or market can learn or buy from foreign products. Consumers used to be as the opposite side of citizens who focus more local issues about public, moral or ethics; in contrast the former focus more on life style, entertaining or personal values. Consumer citizens are discussed academically since some scholars promote the idea that popular culture not only could empower people for their resistance but also can relate collective identity to political/social groups which further is related to cultural politics. Consumers create popular culture by participation and send messages to a society. This study applies a Robertson's model (1992), he uses self and humankind to connect national societies and international societies to explain globalization. Four kinds of relativization appear: Self-identities from selves to humankind or vice versa, societies from national to world system or vice versa, societal reference from selves to world system of societies or vice versa, citizenship from national societies to humankind or vice versa (Robertson, 1992, p.27). From this model, consciousness of self or ethnic could have a more open perspectives. In addition, problems of individual-societal level and political-humanity level can be identified in this model. Exploring meanings of daily life from popular culture implies a possibility of resistance against representation structured by powerful elites. This study uses textual analysis to interpret public and social meanings of local movies listed as annual Top 10 Box Office. From perspectives of cultural studies, annual top 10 movies produced by Taiwanese in the recent decade are analyzed through concepts of subjectivity such as redefinition of tradition, history, memories, language, knowledge, and class. The study explores what fans of Taiwan film will search as their new knowledge and ideas about their favorable identity and representation which might be ignored by movies produced by traditional social elites in Taiwan.

Literature Review

Taiwan is listed as the 16th International Box Office Market in 2016 (MPAA,2016) although its population only ranks number 56 in the world.¹ Generally speaking, Hollywood-movie-style storytelling is commonly accepted in Taiwan. However, while Taiwanese moviegoers enjoy and support Hollywood movies strongly (See Table 1), they fail to support movies produced locally. For example, there is no Taiwan-made movie listed as TOP 10 movies in 2017. In fact, for the worst year for Taiwan cinema, Taiwan-produced film could take away only 0.1 of year's box office in 2001, the year the Motion Picture law was revised to meet WTO demands (Lin, 2007).² Several nations' local film productions are impacted seriously by WTO demands; however, several nations such as Korea and Japan use strategies to put more investment to rebuild fundamental structure for their movie industries. Korea and

¹ Taiwan population. Retrieved from <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/taiwan-population/>

² 林文淇, 台灣電影 retrieved from http://www.comm.hkbu.edu.hk/cmr/Event/2071026_Linwenchi.html in 2012.

Japan successfully keep their local-made film market share above 50 percent of their film mark (Chen, 2014).

Table 1: 2016 TOP 20 International Box Office Market – All Films (US \$ Billions)

1.	China	\$6.6	11.	Italy	\$0.7
2.	Japan	\$2.0	12.	Russia	\$0.7
3.	India	\$1.9	13.	Spain	\$0.7
4.	U.K.	\$1.7	14.	Netherlands	\$0.3
5.	France	\$1.6	15.	Indonesia	\$0.3
6.	South Korea	\$1.5	16.	Taiwan	\$0.3
7.	Germany	\$1.1	17.	Argentina	\$0.3
8.	Australia	\$0.9	18.	Hong Kong	\$0.3
9.	Mexico	\$0.8	19.	Poland	\$0.2
10.	Brazil	\$0.7	20.	Turkey	\$0.2

From 2016 Theatrical Market Statistics Report - Motion Picture Association, p.7.
Retrieved from https://www.mpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MPAA-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2016_Final.pdf

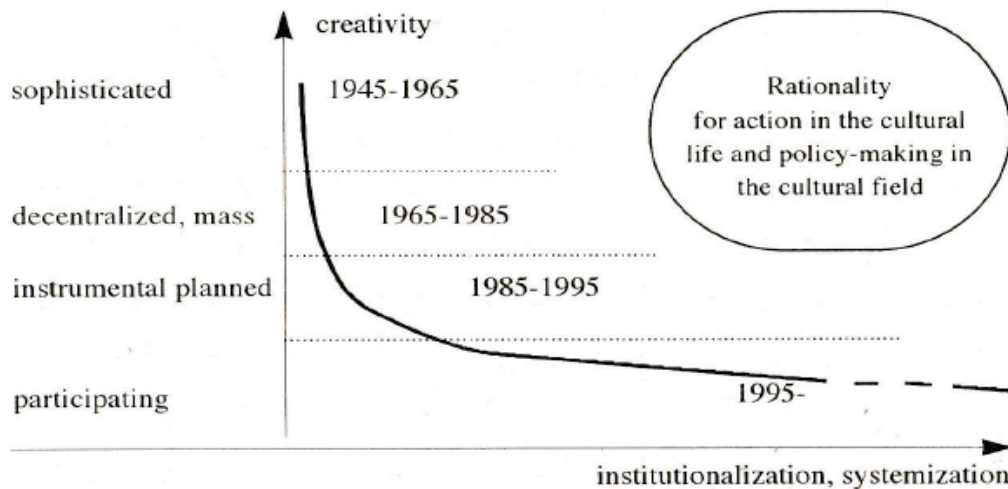
Taiwan-produced local movies rose to a new record in 2008 when Cape No. 7 miracally created a box office of 5.3 hundred million NTdollars. Taiwan-made movie made a comeback from 2008 and 2010 to 2015. This is a time period that Taiwanese movies can compete with foreign movies in its box office. This study argues that if culture is defined as a way of life, meaing production, signifying and mobilizig social meanings as Storey (1989) described, these popular Taiwan-made movies from 2008 to 2015 can be treated as consumers’s choices for their collective identity. Therefore, local popuar movies tuned into a medium through whih movie goers imagine their community and learn information from other nationals with ethnicities, background, historical encoutermnet, and historical knowledge. These movies are directed by 8 directors Te-Sheng Wei, Doze Niu, Giddens Ko, Kai Feng, Li-Kwan Chiu, Yu-Hsun Chen, Po-lin Chi, Yu Shan Chen. Te-Sheng Wei directed 4 movies among these 12 movies. Giddens Ko directed 2 movies among these 12 movies. Genre of these movies are either drama or comedy and only one is documentary.

Director Te-Sheng Wei is good at narratives about Taiwan history and his fans gave him a strong support for his genre production. Another director Giddens Ko, also a writer, is good at romance, comedy, and drama especially for campus love for college students. The other similar style about campus love is *Our Times* protagonists of which are high school students. Another genre is related to ganster relevance such as Monga, David Loman. One genre is related to specific jobs such as local chef or Din Tao. In fact, the two movie titles are the two job titles in the language of Taiwanese: Din Tao : Leader of the Parade and Zone Pro Site. Both genre is categoriezed as

comedy. Among these 12 movies, *Beyond Beauty - Taiwan from Above* is a documentary; however, its narratives are full of drama and brings retrospections to his fans about the issue of pollution in Taiwan.

When a strategy of CCI (Cultural Creativity Industry) is applied to develop cultural economy, this means cultural values will be utilized to develop the purpose of market and profits. While CCI is to serve both the purpose of culture and economy, markets need to be carefully designed for the values of culture. Throsby (2001) explains characteristics of cultural values: aesthetic value, spiritual value, social value, historical value, symbolic value, and authenticity value. The target audience of a movie should be aimed by connecting the values they care to them while they struggle and competition through modernity. Three kinds of audience: model of transmission, model of ritual, and model of attention are specified by McQuail (1997). For the model of ritual, he focuses on sharing and normative commitment and the idea that audience as participants to express common belief and values. As for the rational mode of cultural decision-making, Lin explains that rationality for action in the cultural life and policy-making now emphasizes participating (2002). Public sphere is a key theory which explains how possible citizens can engage each other by communication and express public opinion to give pressure to legitimation of government (Habermas, 1989).

Table 2: The Rational Mode of cultural Decision-Making



Original Table is from 文化政策新論: 建構台灣新社會, Hsin-hwa Lin, 2002 p.87. Lee (2004) explains public sphere by specifying six elements as forum, private people, coming together, public opinion, public authority, and legitimation. Lee explains that openness and equality are the keys to participate in the forum in a rational way. As for private persons, Lee emphasizes similar experience of intimate relations among family members and subjectivity coming from the experience of family caring; therefore, different demands of humanity can be explored. In addition, he explains that forums can be a coffee shop, a community center, or call-un radio talk show in which issues are discussed and penetrated into different levels of society; as a result, private persons held the idea that people are “intersubjective” to each other. When opinion is expressed in this way, these opinions turn into public opinion to ask the

government for response; however, if the government failed to respond public opinion to a certain degree, the legitimation of authority of a government will be examined and criticized (Lee, 2004. pp.3-12). This study argues that popular art as movies can be public sphere for citizens to discuss public issues through private experience in public. For example, Schudson (2008) has argued that the invention of the American newspaper as popular art to gain the independence of news content. Media as public forum reflects the idea that directors of local popular movies are willing to produce movie content about and for local people which the local audience rarely can get from foreign movies.

Method

Twelve movies are analyzed from 2008 to 2015. Twelve movies are selected because they listed as yearly top 10 box office and is produced by Taiwan. They are *Cape No. 7*, *Monga*, *Seediq Bale*, *Seediq Bale II*, *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, *Din Tao: Leader of the Parade*, *David Loman*, *Zone Pro Site*, *Beyond Beauty - Taiwan from Above*, *KANO*, *Café-Waiting-Love*, and *Our Times*.

Results

It's interesting to find that IMBD Users' ratings of these 12 local movies are from 4.1 to 8.0 (See Table 3). Top highest ratings accordingly are *Beyond Beauty - Taiwan from Above* (8.0), *KANO* (7.9), *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (7.8). The three movies with lowest ratings are *David Loman* (4.1), *Café-Waiting-Love* (6.6) and *Zone Pro Site* (6.6). The box office in Taiwan for these 12 movies range from 2.2-5.3 hundred million NT dollars.

This paper argues that citizens who watch popular local movies is an action to participate in an imagined community. Through this process, movie goers as consumers turn into citizens because they search for cultural practices by learning and sharing knowledge about their nationals and the problems they encounter. Comedy, romance, drama, and history are Taiwanese audience's favorite genre. This study finds that characteristics of these twelve movies which are special to Taiwanese.

Table 3: Taiwan-made Movies ranked as Top 1 Cape No. 70 in Yearly Box Office and analyzed in this Study

Year	Movie Titles	Genre	Director	IMBD Users' ratings	Box Office in Taiwan/ Hundred Millions
2008	<i>Cape No. 7</i>	Comedy, Drama, Music	Te-Sheng Wei	6.8	5.3
2010	<i>Monga</i>	Drama, Gangster	Doze Niu	6.9	2.6
2011	<i>Seediq Bale</i>	Action, Drama, History	Te-Sheng Wei	7.5	4.72
2011	<i>Seediq Bale II</i>	Action, Drama, History	Te-Sheng Wei	7.2	3.18
2011	<i>You Are the Apple of My Eye</i>	Comedy, Drama, Romance	Giddens Ko	7.7	4.25
2012	<i>Din Tao : Leader of the Parade</i>	Comedy, Drama	Kai Feng	6.7	3.17
2013	<i>David Loman</i>	Comedy	Li-Kwan Chiu	4.1	4.3
2013	<i>Zone Pro Site</i>	Comedy	Yu-Hsun Chen	6.6	3.1
2013	<i>Beyond Beauty - Taiwan from Above</i>	Documentary, Drama	Po-lin Chi	8.0	2.2
2014	<i>Kano</i>	Biography, Drama, History	Te-Sheng Wei	7.9	3.2
2014	<i>Café·Waiting·Love</i>	Comedy, Drama, Fantasy	Giddens Ko	6.6	2.6
2015	<i>Our Times</i>	Comedy, Romance	Yu-Shan Chen	7.4	4.1

Firstly, stereotypical images shaped by ideology are redefined. For example, in *Cape No. 7*, an old mailman turns to be a confident and smart person and completes his dream to perform his old-style music in a popular music concert. In addition, a

township representative who asks private favors from business to let his stepped son to perform in a music concert turns to be a positive strategy for local people.

Secondly, different languages are used in a way of challenging dominant ideology. Examples are in *Kano*, *Seediq Bale*, *Monga*, and *David Loman*. *Kano* uses Japanese as its major language which draws criticism as this is a foreign movie. This reminds local people what really happens in the Japan's colonial era when Japan bought the major modernity then to this island. For *David Loman*, the main protagonist who mainly speaks Taiwanese but often confuses Mandarin with Taiwanese is the main attraction of fans of this movie. It reminds how Taiwanese are bilingual to communicate in a funny perspectives when no plots show discrimination against the use of the language of Taiwanese.

Thirdly, knowledge influenced by power is challenged. In *Kano*, characters in this movies show a different story about what Taiwanese learn from their textbook. Several Japanese treat Taiwanese nice and bring science and technology such as agricultural farming and engineering to Taiwanese. The plots, showing that Taiwanese earned glory by cooperate together with Japanese, make locals angry who share the dominant background of Chinese ideology and later criticize this movie supporters as people of Japan Empire. Aesthetics, life style, happiness, and modernization in Taiwan are shown through plots in *Kano* during the time period ruled by Japan

Fourthly, Plots challenge the idea that Taipei as their dreamland. In *Cape No. 7*, *Din Tao : Leader of the Parade*, and *Zone Pro Site*, all protagonists in three movies are shown as losers trying to survive in Taipei, a metropolitan city, but ends to fail their dreams. In contrast, when they return to hometown and get parents' help, all three movies have good endings. This shows Taiwanese young people's bad experience when living expenses are too high for them but still expect a chance from their hometown.

Fifthly, challenges of ethnocentrism. In *Seediq Bale*, the plots show Taiwan indigenous people stood against Japan's occupation in the colonial time period by demonstrating their excellent fighting strategy and bravery.

Sixthly, signification of geological Taiwan with an aesthetic perspective. Taiwan has a nickname as Treasure Island; however, images of this beautiful islands are not usually seen as beautiful when compared to other developed nations. In *Taiwan from Above*, *Kano*, and *Seediq Bale*, rivers and mountains are shown a magnificent view and landscape as beautiful as sightseeing spots.

Sevently: Taiwan's local perspectives of love and caring. Three movies, *You Are the Apple of My Eye*, *Café-Waiting-Love*, and *Our Times*, remind local people about their youth love and caring. It's related to Taiwanese collective experience. Especially, in *Our Times*, the protagonist stood out against her instructors from military and that specifies a special time period when ideology was controlled and the school education was an experience of brain wash in Taiwan.

Discussion

The results show that movie fans as consumers search for new knowledge and ideas about their favorable identity and representation which might be ignored by movies produced by traditional social elites in Taiwan. Exploring meanings of daily life from popular culture implies a possibility of resistance against representation structured by powerful elites. Generally speaking, national narratives of Taiwan-produced movies in TOP 10 Box Office are different from other movies endorsed by government funding. Except for the analysis of the results, one perspective is not included and that is their production cost were extremely high compared to those of previous local film. The investment was usually collected by directors or producers who are willing to focus on the market of Taiwan. Therefore, the views of Taiwan-made movies are not influenced by values of mainland China. This demonstrates that values of cross-strait subjectivities are quite different.

References

Chen, Y. (2015). Exploring Local Movie Market as the Field of Cultural Democracy and Social Media Practice. Paper presented in The Asian Conference on Business & Public Policy, Kobe.

Crane, D. , (2002) "Culture and globalization," In *Global culture: Media, art, policy, and globalization*, edited by Diana Crane, Nobuko Kawashima, and Kenichi Kawasaki, 1-48, New York: Routledge.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

McQuail, D. (1997). *Audience analysis*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage

Miller, T., & Dice, G. (2002). *Cultural policy*. London: Sage Publications.

Robertson, R. (1992) *Globalization: social theory and global culture*, Sage Publications,

Starr, P. (2004). *The creation of the media: Political origins of modern communications*. New York: Basic Books.

Schudson, M. (2008). *Why democracies need an unlovable press*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Throsby, D. (2001). *Economy and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fiske, J. (1991). *Understanding popular culture*. 王曉珏等譯(2001)。《理解大眾文化》，北京: 中央編譯出版社。

Storey, J. (2001). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*.

李根芳譯(2003)。《文化理論與通俗文化導論》，台北:巨流出版社。

林信華，(2002)。《文化政策新論—建構台灣新社會》。台北，揚智文化事業股份有限公司。

陳盈盈，(2014)。《最受歡迎新聞與影視的公共意涵內文》，台北: 韋伯文化。

李丁讚，(2004)。《公共領域在台灣: 困境與契機》，桂冠圖書股份有限公司。