

*Exploration in the Mist of the History: Review of Blind Spots in Research on
History of Taiwanese Cinema*

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Abstract

Past discussion on the history of Taiwanese cinema rarely focused on the Japanese colonial period. By literature review and new findings of historical data, this study explores past arguments on the history of Taiwanese cinema from three dimensions in order to probe into the mist and perspective of the research on the history of Taiwanese cinema of the Japanese colonial period: 1. On the colony, the development of Taiwanese cinema as business was slower. They successively became the entertainment accepted by the Taiwanese. Therefore, before the films turned into regular form of entertainment, film playing and making have been applied by the colonial authorities. 2. In film history literatures of Japan, it lacks the discussion on film activities in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. Since Taiwanese cinema did not exist in the Japanese film history, it revealed the absent of the historical discussion and perspective on Taiwan as the colony. 3. Among Chinese literatures, the previous perspectives on the history of Taiwanese cinema mostly referred to the Chinese's perspectives of film history constructed by Shanghai's film industry from China. Such historical point of view tended to neglect development context of Taiwanese cinema under the Japanese governance. Thus, this study explores the blind spots in past research on the history of Taiwanese cinema through more macroscopic views of world film history, Chinese film history and Japanese film history in order to review the vision and new direction of research on the history of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period.

Keywords: Taiwanese cinema, Japanese Cinema, Chinese Cinema, Japanese Colonial Period, Film history, Indigenous Peoples study

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I. Introduction

The presentation of cinema to the public was well received and a fantastic invention, and it quickly became a new entertainment industry. Nevertheless, the process and speed of the development of movies around the world was not the same everywhere, meaning the countries that invented cinema, such as France and the U.S., took cinema as a global medium with global development and expansion. In different countries or regions, there are various international environments and local issues of politics, economy, and society. How are movies introduced in different countries and accepted by different societies, and how did they become universal social entertainment? The process and development reveals the interaction and exchange of the cinema, as a new medium, with local society and culture. Hence, it gradually resulted in unique cinema culture experiences in different countries.

In Taiwan, the introduction of cinema was based on its unique historical background. Due to the failure in the Sino-Japanese War, the government of the Qing dynasty of China signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, and ceded Taiwan to Japan. At that time, the cinema was presented to the public, thus, the introduction of cinema in Taiwan was highly associated with the Japanese colonial government. After World War II, Japan was defeated and withdrew from Taiwan. The National Government from China took over Taiwan, and the development of Taiwanese cinema was totally changed. In the political trend of the “elimination of Japan”, Taiwanese cinema were not fully discussed during the development of the Japanese colonial period. From the following three dimensions, this study attempts to review and elaborate on the blind spots in the history of Taiwanese cinema, in order to disclose the myth and vision of the research into the history of Taiwanese cinema in the Japanese colonial period.

II. Blind spots of historical discussion of Taiwanese cinema in Japanese colonial period

In previous national and foreign literature, the discussion of Taiwanese cinema in the Japanese colonial period was limited in terms of the number and quality of the literature or perspectives. Why are there blind spots in this historical discussion? This study attempts to examine the perspective research gaps of the history of Taiwanese cinema in the Japanese colonial period by data discovery and literature review from three dimensions.

1. Blind spots of permanent movie theaters and production of feature films as the core of historic discussion

In the discussion context of the world history of cinema, the presentation of movies to the public and construction of the industrial model were mostly based on the traditions of European and American research of movies. The mainstream discussion of movie history was originated from the development of the commercial cinema system and feature films, which has led to related research issues, such as industry, movie studios, directors, genres, and stars. When cinema was presented to the public in France and the U.S., which invented cinema, it was new entertainment and a media form that constantly tempted society at the time. Finally, after the 1910s, it successively developed the commercial film system, as based on permanent movie theaters and feature films. Therefore, the developments of feature films and

commercial cinema were successive. The review of the early phase of cinema development showed that, the running of regular permanent movie theaters cannot reveal the interaction between cinema, society, culture, and audiences in a social system, or the process of becoming a commercial activity. Particularly in countries that did not invent cinema, it takes time to develop permanent movie theaters and produce feature films; after this new invention and medium is gradually adopted and accepted by society, it becomes a common entertainment form, which leads to locally produced feature films and a national cinema.

In Taiwan, the development of cinema was very slow; in the first half century of cinema development, Taiwan was a colony of Japan. The cinema was introduced in Japan around 1896, and in 1903 the first permanent theater, Asakusa Theater, was founded (Hazumi, 1947, pp. 16) (Tanaka, 1993, pp. 110) (Iwasaki, 1961, pp. 13). In the early stage of cinema development, permanent theaters were founded one after another around Japan; however, at the time, the major running form of Japanese movies was film tours in crowded places, temple fairs and festivals, small theaters, and even in tents (Sato, 2006, pp. 111). Around 1910, a great number of foreign films were introduced to Japan, which stimulated film production industry in Japan. Movie studios and companies were founded in succession, which established the model of the Japanese film industry, and movie theaters gradually became the main show venue.

After 1895, when Taiwan was colonized by Japan, Taiwan's cinema development experience was almost dominated by this mother country. According to literature, the movies of Thomas Alva Edison of the U.S. were run for ten successive days from September 8, 1899 in the Shi Zi Guan of Taipei (*Taiwan Nichinichi Shimpō*, September 8, 1899, Fifth edition). The cinema invented by Auguste and Louis Lumière of France was run in Tanshui Guan and Taipei Zuo in late June 1900 by the introduction of Japanese Oshima Inoshi (*Taiwan Nichinichi Shimpō*, June 19, 1900, Fifth edition). Thus, the introduction of these two film running systems in Taiwan was behind Japan by several years and much more delayed, in comparison to countries that invented cinema, such as the U.S. and France.

As a colony, it was difficult for Taiwan to develop a commercial film system. The Japanese film companies neglected the market value of Taiwanese cinema and permitted film tour businesses around Taiwan (Ichikawa, Lee (trans.), 1993, pp. 109). In July 1911, the permanent movie theater, Fang Nai Ting, was founded in Taiwan. In 1914, "Xin Gao Guan" was established (Yeh, 1998, pp. 80-81). In 1916, Rong Zuo of Tainan was founded, and there were three permanent movie theaters in Taiwan (*Taiwan Nichinichi Shimpō*, February 20, 1916, Seventh edition). The Nan Zuo theater of Tainan was constructed in 1908 by Takamatsu Toyojirō, and the performances included dramas and movies. Nevertheless, the films played were factual documentaries at the time, as well as some European and American feature films. In the 1920s, movie circulation increased and showing feature films was more frequent, which successfully established the film tour system around Taiwan. However, operations were still based on various new and old programs, including dramas, Kino Dramas, and movies (Li, 2017, pp. 48-49). According to the information of Ichikawa, the running industry of Taiwanese cinema was vigorous in the mid-1930s. In particular, the "Taiwan Fair of the 40th Anniversary of Governance", as held by the colonial government in 1935, and the air transport connection between

Taipei and Fukuoka in 1936, enhanced the development of Taiwan's theater industry (Ichikawa, Lee (trans.), 1993, pp. 110). Among the films screened in the permanent theaters in 1935, 73% were from Japan, 19% were from the U.S., 6% were Chinese movies, and 2% were from Europe and other places. While there were 139 movie theaters in Taiwan, only 22 were permanent (Governor-General of Taiwan, 1936, pp. 86). Therefore, at the time, the films showing in the theaters were mostly derived from Japan for the Japanese in Taiwan.

The scale of Taiwan's theater industry was established in the 1930s. However, before this period, non-theater cinema activities were prevalent in Taiwan, particularly the irregular film tours. In addition to theaters, the colonial government, commercial organizations, and even cultural groups of Taiwan at the time were the active promoters of film tours. In the early governance of the Governor-General of Taiwan, the government introduced Takamatsu Toyojirō to present cinema in Taiwan. Furthermore, the official wives and Patriotic Women's Association, as formed by industrial and commercial groups, produced and screened films in order to raise military funds to suppress indigenous peoples. Subsequently, the government successively founded official units for the overall planning of film education. In 1917, cinema classes were established in an education committee subordinate to the social division of the cultural and educational bureau to plan social education for cinema around Taiwan, and they implemented propaganda in schools, the public halls of different places, and remote areas; in addition, regarding the governance of indigenous peoples, it cultivated indigenous peoples in the remote frontier guard system through tourism and cinema, and established cinema classes in 1921 in Ribanka in the police department. This led to a more systematic base for cinema tour education in the mountainous areas of indigenous peoples (Lee, 2019, pp. 211-244). After the Pacific War, in 1942, the Office of the Governor-General founded Taiwan's cinema association, and established cinema associations and alliances with different prefecture halls, which relied on the local tour system to enhance governance and Kominka Kyoiku during the war.

During the Japanese colonial period, The Taiwanese Cultural Association resisted colonial governance without an armed force, meaning Taiwan cultivated its people through seminars and lectures, and paid attention to the effect of cinema as public education. In 1926, the cultural association organized a film tour team and promoted cultural concepts around Taiwan. In 1927, the film tour organization was called the "Beautiful Taiwan Group" to arouse the humanistic consciousness of Taiwan (Lin, 1998, pp. 136-139) (Wang, 2000, pp. 38-52). In the 1920s, with the trend of film watching, the Taiwanese were engaged in the film tour industry, and the films were mostly imported from Shanghai, China, as these were popular films for the Taiwanese (Huang and Wang (ed.), 2004, pp. 50-51).

With Japanese governance, Taiwan, as a colony, developed its film exhibition industry based on the above, and in early stage of the exhibition industry, the most important exhibition form in Taiwan was the travelling exhibition; while permanent movie theaters were developed afterwards. After the introduction of cinema for more than a decade, people who lived in the cities of Taiwan could watch movies in the theaters with mixed operation modes. However, those who did not live in the cities, including indigenous peoples in the mountains and remote rural villages, mostly approached the new medium by the travelling exhibition. Therefore, in the study of

Taiwanese cinema in the Japanese colonial period, the exploration of cinema development through commercial exhibition in permanent movie theaters cannot show the overall experience of the cinema as one kind of cultural system, the detailed spread process in Taiwan, or its collective memory to interact with the public in the cities and remote areas of Taiwan. More importantly, the essence of cinema was a propaganda tool of colonial governance.

The production of Taiwanese cinema was launched in 1901, when Takamatsu Toyojirō arrived in Taiwan for the first time, and brought 10,000 meters of negatives. Supported by the Metropolitan Police Department at the time, and with five Alishan indigenous persons as guides, he shot indigenous peoples' living situations in the mountains by negatives (Tanikawa and Kobayashi, 1915, pp. 12-13), which launched the service of film production for colonial governors. When the cinema was introduced in Japan, with the trend of westernization and Meiji Restoration, movies were called cinemas, and meant the Japanese's longing and respect for this new western invention (Iwasaki, 1961, pp. 11). Japan, as the colonial mother country, undertook the modern and advanced westernized medium of cinema for Taiwan. In colonial governance, the Office of the Governor-General inherited cinema as modernity in Taiwan. The Taiwanese, as the secondary citizens of the colony, certainly could not express themselves by such a modern medium. Therefore, in the colonial period, the production of Taiwanese cinema was controlled by the governors, and as amateur film makers, the Taiwanese lacked experience in film production.

In 1935, according to *Affairs in Taiwan*, as published by the Governor-General of Taiwan, in Taiwan, 73% of screened films were from Japan, 19% were from the U.S., and few were from China and Europe, thus, the production industry was not vigorous. Except for a few news documentaries on situations at the time, as produced by official departments, public welfare groups, and news companies, locally produced feature films in Taiwan were extremely few (Governor-General of Taiwan, 1936, pp. 86). In the 50 years of the Japanese colonial period, Taiwan produced 16 feature films, and only two of them were produced by Taiwanese, including *Whose Fault* (1925) and *Bloodstain* (1930) (Misawa, 2002, pp. 366).

Thus, during the Japanese colonial period, the production of feature films in Taiwan mostly relied on the Japanese, while the Hans also produced a few films, which were mostly amateur. However, upon the past context of feature films as key for discussions of the history of movies, and from the perspective of national movies, without locally produced feature films or a local industry, directors, or works for discussion, the movie culture did not exist in Taiwan. Nevertheless, noticeably, in colonies such as Taiwan, before the development of production competence for feature films, the governors produced films related to news, documentary, and propaganda by negatives, and their films significantly recorded the local landscape of Taiwan at the time, as well as its humanistic and social characteristics. Moreover, these films precisely recorded the governors' attitude, and these images became the evidence of colonization in Taiwan.

2. Lack of discussion of Taiwanese cinema in history of the Japanese film

Japanese colonial governance in Taiwan lasted for more than 50 years, which surpassed all territories occupied before World War II. However, little literature or

books in the history of Japanese movies mention the development of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonization. Taking the *50-Year History of Movies* published by Tsuneo Hazumi in 1947 (Hazumi, 1947) and the *History of Movies* published by Akira Iwasaki in 1961 (Iwasaki, 1961) as examples, they were close to Taiwan in the Japanese colonial period; however, they hardly mentioned the movies made in Taiwan, as Taiwan was a colony at the time. In Section 47 of the *History of Japanese Movies 3: Liberation of Movies after the War*, Junichiro Tanaka described the work of filmmaking out of Japan, and in less than one page, he mentioned the construction of permanent movie theaters in Taiwan by the Taiwan Xing Hang Governance Company and the Taiwan cinema association. The space of the depiction regarding Taiwan was much less than Japanese movies in Korea, North China, and central China (Tanaka, 1984, pg. 101-114); likewise, in Chapter 5 of the *History of Japanese Movies (1896-1940): the Second Edition* published by Tadao Sato, when it depicted filmmaking in the colonies and occupied territories, it mentioned the cinema concept developments in Taiwan, Korea, Manchukuo, and China, where 3 pages were related to Taiwan (Sato, 2006, pp. 109-158) and the description on Taiwanese cinema was general and personal.

A review of film yearbooks and industry related information remaining from Japan shows a distinct lack of literature regarding Taiwan at the time. Using the *Yearbook of Japanese Movies* of 1924 as an example, the list of movies by Pian Su, and other musicians and screenwriters, did not include any Taiwanese cinema workers. Only in the “Introduction of National Movie Theaters”, in one section, it mentioned 9 movie theaters in Taiwan at the time, including the Xin Sheng theater in Keelung, Fang Ye Ting, World theater, New World theater, Taiwan Minema, Lung Guang Ting in Taipei; Dacheng theater and the second Taichung theater in Taichung; and Xin Chuan Zuo in Tainan (The Asahi Shimbun Company, edited by editing department of Asahi Graph, 1925, p. 479). At the time, Japanese governance in Taiwan had lasted for 30 years. The *Yearbook of Cinema* of 1942 listed 37 theaters around Taiwan, from Keelung to Hualien and Pingtung, and discussed the “cinema circle of Taiwan” in one chapter. It precisely recorded how the government of Taiwan at the time controlled cinema development to comply with military policy (Directors Guild of Japan ed., 1943, pp. 509-510; 578-594). However, in comparison to discussions of the film industry in Korea, Manchukuo, North China and Central China in “cinema circle of East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”, Taiwan was still behind. In addition, at the time, Japanese governance in Taiwan was nearly terminated, and with the constant bombing by American military force, both people’s livelihood in Taiwan and the film industry declined.

Kenji Iwamoto, a Japanese researcher of the history of movies, stated that Taiwan was a Japanese colony for 50 years; however, past discussions on the history of Japanese movies rarely included Taiwanese cinema (Iwamoto, 2006, p. 86). In early Japanese works, Ichikawa’s Chapter 3 “Historical Manuscripts of Taiwanese cinema” in the *Creation and Construction of Asian Movies* showed more detailed descriptions of the development of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period. The said article was considerably cited in Su-Shang Lu’s *A History of Cinema and Drama in Taiwan*, and became an extremely important start for Taiwan to discuss its film industry during the Japanese colonial period (Ichikawa, 1941) (Lu, 1961) (Lee, 1993, pp. 107). In recent years, history books regarding Japanese movies on cinema research of the colonies and territories occupied before World War II mostly focused

on the history of movies in territories in China, Manchukuo, or the colony of Korea. There were also books published in Taiwan, such as *Taiwanese cinema: Windows to Learn Taiwanese History and Society* (Koyama ed., 2008) and *Movies in Taiwan During the Japanese Colonial Period: Study of Discovery of Promotional Films* (Misawa ed., 2017), which generally introduced the development of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period. However, it was insufficient in terms of its historic scope and depth of Taiwan, which experienced colonial governance for half a century.

Taiwan was a colony of Japan before the introduction of cinema in Japan. However, in the mainstream discussion of the history of Japanese movies, the concern, quality, and quantity of discussions of Taiwan were significantly behind than those regarding the colony of Korea, which was a territory occupied by Manchukuo, central China, and North China before it failed in World War II. Regarding the industrial dimension, as previously suggested by Ichikawa, the Japanese cinema companies strongly degraded the market for Taiwanese cinema (Ichikawa, Lee (trans.), 1993, pp. 109). In addition, in terms of the political position of the colony in Japan, although the Governor-General of Taiwan was empowered exclusively in Taiwan, his position in Japan was highly inferior to the Governor-General of Korea, who was directly subordinate to the emperor of Japan and had an official ranking of sixth among the 10 levels in the palace. Thus, the Governor-General of Taiwan was not included in the palace hierarchy (Huang, 1994, pp. 206-207), which reveals that the position of Taiwan's colonial government in the whole Japanese political system was significantly inferior to that occupied by other colonies or territories; the development of the film industry of the colony revealed the subordinate relationship between the colony and mother country. Cinema was the symbol of westernized civilization and the modernization of Japan. Japan was the superior colonial governor, while Taiwan as a colony, was not qualified to engage in the cultural form. The governor, through historical writing, intended to neglect Taiwan in the history of Japanese movies during the Japanese colonial period, which reveals the ruler's degradation of Taiwan as a colony.

3. Current perspective of history of Taiwanese cinema based on the Chinese as the core discourse

Before the war, Taiwan was controlled by the colonialist, and the film industry was slowly developed with the progress of Japanese movies. After the war, the National Government took over Taiwan, and the research and writing of Taiwan's history were included in the "local history of Taiwan". Hence, the "historical perspective to resist Japan" became the base for Taiwan to review its Japanese colonial period (Hsu, 2015, pp. 154), and this historical perspective was extended to the discussion of the history of Taiwanese cinema; however, it lacked statements on the development of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period before 1945. Using *Chinese Movies in the Past Fifty Years*, as edited by Lei Chung, as an example, it completely neglected Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period (Chung ed., 1965). Regarding Yu Tu's books on the history of movies, using the *History of Movies of the Republic of China*, as published in 1988, as an example, it generally introduced the history of movies for more than 40 years in the Japanese colonial period in one section, while the "cinema industry of Taiwan before restoration" had around ten pages (Tu, 1988, pg. 439-450). When writing about the strategy of the cinema history of the National

Government, it intentionally eliminated the Japanese colonial experience of Taiwan, meaning it focused on depicting movie development in the governance period in China, but neglected the development record of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period.

In the past, research on the development of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period were mostly in Chinese, and were mostly based on *A History of Cinema and Drama in Taiwan*, by Su-Shang Lu and published in 1961. The said book became an important reference to explore Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period. However, as suggested by Tao-Ming Lee, in the book, part of the content on the development of Taiwan in the Japanese colonial period was derived from Ichikawa's original information (Lee, 1993). The book also revealed a discussion of the feature films and commercial exhibition of theaters from the perspective of historic discussion, as mentioned previously; while it neglected the colonial ruler's political manipulation of movies, and before the prevalence of theaters, how movies as a new media were spread in Taiwan by film tours, which finally led to its theater industry. In addition, noticeably, in the said literature, the author's historic perspective was based on the Chinese, which might be politically correct in the books published in Taiwan after the war. Nevertheless, in Taiwan's movie industry during the Japanese colonial period, the distribution, screening, or production industries were, in fact, the colonial film industry model was dominated by the Japanese. At the time, the Chinese in Taiwan were marginalized, thus, the movie writing strategy, as based upon Chinese influence from overseas, related the statements of Taiwanese cinema in the Japanese colonial period. For instance, the *History of Taiwanese cinema* of Fei-Bao Chen (Chen, 1988, pp. 1-30), which depicts Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period in *Chinese National Cinema*, is an English work of Ying-Chin Chang (Zhang, 2004, pp. 113-119), and the following studies of Taiwanese cinema are based on the conceptual framework of National Cinema, which all basically follow the perspective of Su-Shang Lu to treat the Chinese as the key development of cinema history. Although contemporary research on movies in Japanese colonial period are increasing, and various scholars, such as Yeh (1998), Lee (1993, 2019), and Misawa (2002), have actively explored film development during the period, there should be a gap of historical information in the film development process in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period for nearly half century, and there should be more topics for further exploration.

Regarding the Mediascope of movies in the Japanese colonial period, during Japanese colonial governance, movies were both a propaganda tool and commercial entertainment. Audiences of the medium were the Hans(Chinese), indigenous peoples, and the Japanese in Taiwan at the time, who watched films from Japan, the U.S., Europe, and China, and constructed the unique colonial film culture experience of Taiwan. Nowadays, when reviewing the history of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period, we should break through the ethnical vision and examine the cultural experience of Taiwanese cinema in the Japanese colonial period with a broader perspective. The perspective of this era should focus on Japanese governance and the Hans, which were the majority audience. Noticeably, regarding the indigenous peoples who were often the subjects in the movies at the time, past publications of movies in the Japanese colonial period rarely mentioned indigenous peoples in event recording and news reels. As the Japanese controlled the technique of filmmaking, at that time, the most important task of this medium was to govern indigenous peoples,

thus, the ruler cultivated indigenous peoples from the mountains of Taiwan through projectors. At the time, the indigenous peoples watched the civilized and modern images projected by the Japanese, and they must have had a response totally different from the Japanese and the Hans, thus, future researchers should continuously explore the history of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period, as it has not been completely disclosed.

III. Conclusion

Nowadays, with changeable media, in order to review the history of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period, it must pass through the historic mist to disclose the whole historical progress of Taiwanese cinema. First, it must eliminate the statements of historical development, as based on the theaters of commercial film systems and feature films, and focus on colonial film development through film tours and the production of news reel and propaganda movies at the time, in order to recognize the political and social essence of movies at the time. Secondly, it must realize that the historical discussion of the history of Japanese movies before the war intentionally neglected colonial film development in Taiwan, as it has only revealed the marginal and secondary position of Taiwan under Japanese governance. Finally, noticeably, in modern Chinese discussions and historic discussions of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial period, most of the writing perspectives were from the Hans or the Chinese. However, in the Japanese colonial period, the colonial government treated films as a kind of entertainment, and the Japanese in Taiwan were the priority of such service. When they adopted films as a propaganda tool, the most important governance subjects were the indigenous peoples of Taiwan. At the time, however, the Hans or the Chinese were marginal, while the movies served as entertainment and propaganda in the Japanese colonial period. Therefore, the film experience of indigenous peoples in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period is a research topic worthy of further exploration.

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