Taiwanese Cinema

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Taiwanese Cinema

Abstract
Like the island itself, the cinema of Taiwan has always been in a perpetual state of liminality. Taiwan was a Japanese colony for fifty years (1895–1945) and during that time no cinema that could be labeled as distinctively “Taiwanese” emerged. After World War II, Taiwanese cinema was still caught between a political rock and an economic hard place. Despite allowing some low-budget films to be made in the Taiwanese dialect, the Kuomintang (KMT, aka “Nationalist”) government made sure its cinema did not violate its core ideological tenets of a “Greater China.” This came largely at the expense of anything specifically “Taiwanese,” something the KMT saw as a threat to the legitimacy of its one-party rule over the island. Even when a commercial industry did slowly emerge in Taiwan in the 1960s, it still operated under the twin shadows of the government’s strict policies and the exporting prowess of Hong Kong, which dominated Taiwan’s Mandarin-language market. Moreover, Taiwan’s own private industry was in many ways an offshoot of that in Hong Kong, so much so that even in the late 1970s the annual *International Film Guide* continued to couple Hong Kong and Taiwan under a single entry. Only with the emergence of the Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s, with directors winning prizes at international film festivals, did a distinctively “Taiwanese” cinema begin to appear. Nevertheless, numerous ambiguities have persisted. Since the 1980s much of the literature outside of Taiwan tends to focus on this unexpected newcomer now making waves at film festivals across the globe. Within Taiwan, however, much of the literature often downplays such success when not denigrating it. Instead, much of the focus has been on why Taiwan—despite its economic prowess in other areas—could not match the commercial success enjoyed by Hong Kong and, more recently, South Korea. As a result, the literature on this subject is often Janus-faced, reflecting both the continued triumphs and the ongoing failures of Taiwanese cinema. [excerpt]

Keywords
Taiwan, Cinema, New Cinema, Film Industry

Disciplines
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Introduction

Like the island itself, the cinema of Taiwan has always been in a perpetual state of liminality. Taiwan was a Japanese colony for fifty years (1895–1945) and during that time no cinema that could be labeled as distinctively “Taiwanese” emerged. After World War II, Taiwanese cinema was still caught between a political rock and an economic hard place. Despite allowing some low-budget films to be made in the Taiwanese dialect, the Kuomintang (KMT, aka “Nationalist”) government made sure its cinema did not violate its core ideological tenets of a “Greater China.” This came largely at the expense of anything specifically “Taiwanese,” something the KMT saw as a threat to the legitimacy of its one-party rule over the island. Even when a commercial industry did slowly emerge in Taiwan in the 1960s, it still operated under the twin shadows of the government’s strict policies and the exporting prowess of Hong Kong, which dominated Taiwan’s Mandarin-language market. Moreover, Taiwan’s own private industry was in many ways an offshoot of that in Hong Kong, so much so that even in the late 1970s the annual International Film Guide continued to couple Hong Kong and Taiwan under a single entry. Only with the emergence of the Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s, with directors winning prizes at international film festivals, did a distinctively “Taiwanese” cinema begin to appear. Nevertheless, numerous ambiguities have persisted. Since the 1980s much of the literature outside of Taiwan tends to focus on this unexpected newcomer now making waves at film festivals across the globe. Within Taiwan, however, much of the literature often downplays such success when not denigrating it. Instead, much of the focus has been on why Taiwan—despite its economic prowess in other areas—could not match the commercial success enjoyed by Hong Kong and, more recently, South Korea. As a result, the literature on this subject is often Janus-faced, reflecting both the continued triumphs and the ongoing failures of Taiwanese cinema.

Overviews

Several single-authored, book-length studies on Taiwanese cinema cover topics other than Taiwan’s most famous directors or the New Cinema (both of which warrant individual sections, Historical Overviews and Economic and/or Policy Analyses). Nearly all of these general overviews come from Taiwan, none of which has been translated into English as of yet. While nearly all of these are historical in nature, some overviews can be placed under two further subsections: those that engage in more Economic and/or Policy Analyses and those that entail critical analyses of films and their filmmakers.

Historical Overviews

Most of the historical studies tend to come from Taiwan itself and they are available only in traditional Chinese. Lu 1998 offers the most in-depth study of Taiwanese cinema under the Japanese and immediately afterward. The definitive history of postwar Taiwanese cinema remains Lu 1998, although it covers Taiwanese cinema only up to 1994. Combined, many of the works listed in this section give a strong sense of Taiwanese cinema before the New Cinema emerged in the 1980s. Other studies here cover particular parts of Taiwan’s cinematic history that help piece together the overall development of Taiwanese cinema to the present day. Chiao 1993 covers a short-lived studio with ties to Hong Kong that played a key role in launching a commercial industry in Taiwan. Huang 1994 is a key insider source about both Hong Kong and Taiwan and the connections between them. Lin 2003 provides insight into the technical side of the film industry in Taiwan. Particularly noteworthy are Liu 1998, Liu 1994, and Wicks 2014, all of which cover eras less frequently covered (i.e., the Japanese colonial era, the period from 1945 to 1949, the 1960s, and the 1970s, respectively).
Definitive historical study of the Grand Motion Picture Studio that emerged in Taiwan in the 1960s and lasted only for five years. This study reveals the degree to which the beginning of a stable commercial film industry in Taiwan occurred because of the input of considerable financial muscle and talent originating from Hong Kong.

The most complete account of an insider who traversed the film industries of both Hong Kong and Taiwan before the 1980s. Provides key behind-the-scenes information of not only how these two film industries interacted, but also the crucial role played by the KMT government in facilitating these interactions.

An unusual and in-depth study of the development of cinematography in Taiwan from the end of World War II up to 1970. Particularly revealing is the impact in the mid-1960s that the Hollywood production in Taiwan of *The Sand Pebbles* had on the burgeoning commercial film industry on the island.

An in-depth history of Taiwanese cinema during the transitional years 1945–1949, complete with several appendixes based on numerous primary documents. The overriding theme is of the unrealized potential in Taiwan for a thriving film industry, one that would be to the eventual advantage of Hong Kong and Hollywood.

A history of Taiwanese cinema during the Japanese colonial era that focuses primarily on the dependency on Taiwan’s colonial masters. Special attention is also given to the local differences of the Taiwanese *benshi* compared to their Japanese counterparts.

Indisputably the leading and most in-depth historical study of Taiwanese cinema published to date. This could be a model history of any “national” cinema should an English-language translation ever materialize since it covers economics, government policies, and aesthetics in equal measure.

A study of Taiwanese cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, an era not often explored by scholars in the West. The author argues that Taiwanese cinema at this time struggled with issues of both migration and Taiwanese identity in the world while its film industry was more interlocked with that of China than previously believed.

**Economic and/or Policy Analyses**

Several studies set out to analyze how Taiwanese cinema became the cinema it is today by focusing primarily on the inseparable roles played by economics and government policies. Curtin 2007 provides the best overview of the current economic climate for Taiwanese cinema, although it does predate the recent small wave of lower budgeted commercial works that have had a modicum of success. Li 1997 and Liu 1997 provide the best overviews of the role of government policies in Taiwanese cinema. Both Curtin 2007 and Davis and Yeh
2008 place these issues in a larger Asian context. All of these studies involve a degree of historical analysis as well, but none covers much that has occurred in the last ten years. Huang 1994 and Liang 1998 are two works by established critics in Taiwan, both of which explore the key role played by the Republic of China (ROC) government.


While focusing on Greater China (including the diaspora) and on the economics behind both film and television, this study includes two insightful chapters that focus on Taiwan, including one describing how Hollywood took over the Taiwanese market. Relies heavily on interviews with principal players involved.


Although no chapters are devoted exclusively to Taiwan, this comprehensive study of East Asian screen industries does provide some useful information about Taiwanese cinema within a regional context. Special attention is given to Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon as a new benchmark for co-productions in East Asia.


An in-depth overview of propaganda films, including a brief synopsis and critique of every propaganda film made in Taiwan up to 1987, broken down into various genres. Also notable is an interview with CMPC head Ming Ji at the end.


Although a historical overview in general, the real strength of this study is its ability to focus on government policies in Taiwan. This study puts the rise of the New Cinema in a more proper perspective while also explaining why Taiwan never matched the commercial success of Hong Kong.


A collection of essays, most of which had been previously published in journals and newspapers, broken up into three sections for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The section on Taiwan includes key articles about why local audiences fail to see Taiwanese films and about the fu dao jing assistance program by the ROC government in Taiwan.


A solid study of the role of various government policies and the effect they have on Taiwanese cinema. Particularly noteworthy is the information provided in a chapter on taxation and cinema.

Journals

Journals are among the best “primary” sources on Taiwanese cinema, since several journals within Taiwan were not merely reporting on Taiwanese cinema, but were active participants in the developments as they were occurring. This was especially true in the 1980s, when the heated debates regarding the New Cinema were fought not only among various daily newspapers, but also among film journals. Together they reveal a vibrant and active film culture in Taiwan that was crucial for the survival of the New Cinema before the core members firmly established themselves as fixtures on the global network of film festivals. These debates were foreshadowed by journals such as Ying Xiang in the 1970s. Since the 1980s, however, Dian ying xin shang, still published by the Chinese Taipei Film Archive (the
institutional center of Taiwan's small film culture), has been the leading journal bar none. Other journals, including some short-lived ones, have also played a role in the development of Taiwanese cinema. The following list is merely of journals of note. While short lived, both Chang pai jing tou and Si bai ji demonstrate the vibrancy of Taiwan's film culture in the 1980s. While neither is a film journal per se, both Dang dai and Chung-wai Literary Monthly have published numerous significant articles on Taiwanese cinema over the years. Most of these journals are in Chinese, and they are collected and cataloged at the Film Archive in Taipei. The two notable exceptions are Asian Cinema and the Journal of Chinese Cinemas, both published in English.

**Asian Cinema. 1995–.**
One of two journals in English that has frequently published on Taiwanese cinema. It has been published regularly since 1995 by John Lent and the Asian Cinema Studies Society. Since 2012 it has been published in the United Kingdom by Intellect Books.

**Chang pai jing tou. 1987–1988.**
Translated as "Long Take." An attempt at an independent film journal by notables such as Peggy Chiao, Edmond Wong, Xiao Ye, Wu Nian-jen, and Zhan Hongzhi. A total of fourteen issues were produced until September 1988. The third issue contains a key account by Edward Yang at the Locarno International Film Festival.

**Dang dai. 1986–2010.**
Translated as "Contemporary." Prominent monthly journal in Taiwan that covered a wide range of issues including cinema. Published a total of 245 issues.

**Dian ying xin shang. 1983–.**
The film journal of note in Taiwan since its first issue in January 1983. Best barometer of core issues for Taiwanese cinema over the years and includes translations of several articles originally published in other languages as well. Published by the National Film Archive, now the Chinese Taipei Film Archive.

**Journal of Chinese Cinemas 2006–.**
The other journal in English that has also published multiple articles on Taiwanese cinema since its first volume in 2006–2007. Two volumes (Vol. 1.2 and Vol. 5.2) focus primarily on Tsai Ming-liang, and another (Vol. 4.1) focuses on Taiwanese cinema before 1982.

**Si bai ji. 1985–1986.**
Translated as "400 Blows." Short-lived yet significant film journal of the 1980s with many articles by Peggy Chiao, Edmond Wong, and other critics. First issue in March 1985 includes a Chinese translation of Olivier Assayas's article on Cahiers du Cinéma on Taiwan that played a pivotal role in the West. Only published eight issues until February 1986.

**Ying Xiang. 1971–1977.**
Translated as "Influence." Famed film journal of the 1970s that picked up on the "Nativist-Modernist" controversies in literature. Included articles by famed nativist author Hong Chunming, whose works would be adapted into several early New Cinema films. Only produced sixteen issues in total.

**Ying Xiang. 1989–1998.**
Translated as “Influence.” An attempt to revive the famous journal from the 1970s, but with slightly more commercial trappings than the original. A total of ninety-one issues were produced before ceasing publication in 1997.

Zhong wai wen xue. 1972–
Translated as “Chung-wai Literary Monthly.” Published by the National Taiwan University since 1972, this is a literary journal that has published several issues on Taiwanese cinema. Number 310 (March 1998) includes a key academic defense of Hou Hsiao-hsien.

Reference Works

No encyclopedia of Taiwanese cinema per se is available. There are a fair number of bibliographies and filmographies on Taiwanese cinema, most of which can be found at the Chinese Taipei Film Archive (National Film Archive). The annotated bibliography Cheng, et al. 2016 provides a complete listing of all such sources. Nevertheless, the greatest reference sources on Taiwanese cinema are the annual yearbooks Zhong hua min guo dian ying nian jian (Chinese Taipei Film Archive [National Film Archive] 1979–), published by the Chinese Taipei Film Archive since 1979. These include a complete listing of every major event and publication (including every periodical and academic article) about Taiwanese cinema produced during the previous year. Moreover, every volume includes several reprints or original articles about key events during the same year, making this an even more vital source on Taiwanese cinema than Dian ying xin shang (cited under Journals).

An exhaustive resource on everything published on Taiwanese cinema short of newspaper and journal articles.

Chinese Taipei Film Archive (National Film Archive). Zhong hua min guo dian ying nian jian. Taipei: National Film Archive, 1979–
The most indispensable source in Chinese for the study of Taiwanese cinema. Includes listing of every article published in Taiwan and several reprints and original articles of key events. Also market information, analysis, statistics, etc. Only the first edition in 1979 is bilingual Chinese and English. Since then published only in Chinese.

Chinese Taipei Film Archive (National Film Archive). Dian ying ci dian. Taipei: National Film Archive, 1996.
While not a source on Taiwanese cinema per se, this is a useful dictionary of film terms that find the best Chinese equivalents for mostly English terms regarding cinema.

Critical Studies

Several single-authored critical studies are noteworthy, both in English and in Chinese. Some of these are general critical studies. In Chinese, Chiao 1998 and Chiao 2002 offer numerous writings by a key figure in Taiwanese film culture in the 1980s when the New Cinema began; Lan 2002 covers mostly Taiwanese cinema before the New Cinema; Wu 1993 offers a more political critique of Taiwanese cinema, especially of Hou Hsiao-hsien. Tweedie 2013 offers a unique perspective in English on Taiwanese cinema in terms of globalization. Both Lim 2006 and Martin 2003 (both in English) provide the most in-depth studies on Taiwanese cinema in relation to gender and sexuality. Lan 2002 and Yeh 2000 offer in-depth studies in Chinese about music in Taiwanese cinema.

A collection of critical essays that include sections on China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, among other topics. Included in the section in Taiwan are essays regarding cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, how China is depicted in Taiwanese films, the role of the market and film festivals, and Taiwanese cinema in the 1990s.

A must-have companion piece for Taiwanese cinema of the 1990s. This is a virtual critical catalogue of nearly every film made in Taiwan in the 1990s. Included are brief overviews of various directors, screenwriters, producers, and other key personnel.

A collection of interviews of twenty key film composers conducted by a well-known Taiwanese author. Most are composers who worked with Taiwan's famed festival directors (e.g., Zhang Hongyi, Chen Mingzhang, Lim Giong, etc.), but key composers form the 1970s, including the director/composer, Liu Jiachang, are also listed.

Using the rise of Chinese-language cinemas from the 1980s onward, Lim challenges established discourses about both homosexuality and what it means to be Chinese. Included are chapters on *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee) and on Tsai Ming-liang.

An extensive collection of critical essays on a wide range of topics and filmmakers, including famed Chinese director Fei Mu. Numerous essays are about King Hu, Li Hanxiang, and Li Xing, ending with an essay about *In Our Times*, often considered the first official film of the New Cinema in 1982.

This is the definitive study about queer representations in Taiwanese cinema and other art forms. Martin problematizes generalizations about homosexuality in favor of local specificity. Special focus is placed on Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* and Tsai Ming-liang’s *The River*.

A three-part study that looks at New Waves from a global view focusing on the representation of youth and urban locales. Part 2 deals with Taiwan in three chapters that focus on the East Asian economic boom, globalization, and urban Taipei.

A collection of politically oriented essays as indicated by the book’s title, “Memories of Underdevelopment.” Only the first two sections are critical essays about Taiwanese cinema, with the first about Taiwanese cinema in general and the second about Hou Hsiao-hsien in particular.


**Taiwanese Cinema and National Identity**

Not surprisingly, the issue of national identity is central to many critical studies on Taiwanese cinema. The following four works are among the most extensive on this issue, all published in English. Yip 2004 and Hong 2011 represent the most in-depth critical studies about the relationship of Taiwanese cinema and the thorny question of national identity. Lin 2007 is an in-depth study of how the defining moment in Taiwan’s history (the 228 incident of 1947) has been represented in cinema and other media. Lu 2002 deals with the issue of national identity more indirectly by focusing on issues of modernization, yet doing so in comparison with mainland China.


A must-read study of Taiwanese cinema and national identity through both a colonial and a postcolonial lens that extends well beyond the New Cinema to include popular genre films as well.


A nuanced study of how the atrocities and oppression committed by the KMT have been represented in both fiction and films in Taiwan. This is largely a defense of films such as *City of Sadness, March of Happiness*, and *Super Citizen Ko* for not more directly representing historical traumas on the screen.


A critical study that explores themes of modernization in the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien in Taiwan, plus Cheng Kaige and Zhang Yimou of 5th Generation on the mainland. The primary focus is on how differently Taiwan and China deal with tradition in the face of modernity.


A study of both literature and cinema in Taiwan and the difficulties of defining a national identity on the island. One chapter is devoted to the Taiwanese New Cinema, while another is devoted to the historical trilogy directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien. “Nativist” author Huang Chunming is also discussed.

**Anthologies**

Compared to single-authored works, more anthologies have been published outside of Taiwan in other languages. Nevertheless, these anthologies as a whole reflect an additional ambiguity regarding Taiwanese cinema: where does this cinema fit among the larger sphere of “Chinese-language cinema” or what is known as the cinema of the “Three Chinas,” namely Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan? Furthermore, where does Taiwanese cinema fit in the even larger contexts of Asian or world cinema? Ciecko 2006, Hjort and Petrie 2007, and Tan 2011, cited under Tsai Ming-liang all offer examples of larger anthologies in which only a chapter or two place Taiwan in a larger global context. By contrast, the two subsections here (Anthologies on Chinese Cinema and Anthologies on Taiwanese Cinema) place Taiwan “closer to home,” either among the “Three Chinas” or strictly as its own category of “Taiwanese cinema.” Law 1997 remains a definitive source on a key factor for Taiwanese cinema in relation to Hong Kong, namely how Hong Kong dominated Taiwan’s Mandarin-language market.
Among fifteen chapters about fifteen different Asian markets, one is a contribution by Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh about the fate of Taiwan’s commercial cinema and how it succumbed to a Hollywood takeover. Special focus is placed on *Double Vision* and collaboration with Hollywood.

A collection of twelve essays about smaller national cinemas such as Denmark, Singapore, and Burkina Faso, to name a few. Included is a chapter by James Udden on Taiwan that explores why cinema in the country missed out on the “Economic Miracle” as a direct result of government policies dating back to 1949.

Induded in this festival catalogue is a revealing bilingual article about how profoundly Taiwan was affected by Hong Kong and vice versa. The article in Chinese, by Liang Liang, is on the “Taiwan Factor” for Hong Kong; the English translation is by Liang Hai-chang.

**Anthologies on Chinese Cinema**

The placement of Taiwan among the cinemas of the so-called Three Chinas is understandable as this is a much broader and more marketable path for publishers to take. Yet it hardly resolves the political ambiguities when it comes to Taiwan, which technically is not separate from China, despite the de facto history now lasting well over a century that says otherwise. Even here Taiwan can sometimes appear marginalized. Several of these volumes, such as Browne, et al. 1994; Lim and Ward 2011; Yeh, et al. 1999; and Zhang 2012, have only one to two articles each devoted strictly to Taiwanese cinema among the dozens of articles included. Berry 2003, Bettinson 2012, and Bettinson 2015, however, cover Taiwanese cinema more extensively. Both Lu 1997 and Lu and Yeh 2005 offer no less than three articles in English in each volume in which the central focus is Taiwan. In most of these anthologies Taiwanese cinema is further discussed elsewhere, often in a more regional or global context.

Six of the twenty-five films discussed can be considered Taiwanese. Contributions are on *Couching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Felicia Chan); *Flowers of Shanghai* (Gary Xu); *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (Corrado Neri); *A Touch of Zen* (Mary Farquhar); *Vive L’Amour* (Fran Martin); and *Wedding Banquet* (Chris Berry).

A collection of reviews and short articles on Chinese cinema as a whole. In addition to a short article on documentaries in Taiwan by Ming-yeh Rawnsley, there are also three short articles on Chu Yen-ping, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Tsai Ming-liang.

Similar in structure to the above volume, there are also brief articles on Ang Lee and Edward Yang. Of particular note are two short articles on the recent “mini-revival” of commercial cinema in Taiwan, with James Udden offering some economic caveats and Chen Yun-hua discussing the question of identify formation in these recent works.

Among the nine articles about Chinese cinema are two on Taiwan, including the often cited postmodernist take on *The Terrorizers* by Fredric Jameson (‘Remapping Taipei’) and an article by William Tay about indirect criticism in the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien.


A wide-ranging collection of scholarship on Chinese-language cinema, divided into four historical periods plus a fifth section on stars, auteurs, and genres. Included are insightful chapters by Guo-Juin Hong on the “Healthy Realism” of the 1960s and the legacy of the New Cinema by Tonglin Lu.


An anthology on Chinese cinema of fourteen chapters divided into three thematic sections. Part 2 is about the politics of cultural and national identity in Hong Kong and Taiwan, including a chapter on Hou Hsiao-hsien by June Yip, a chapter on Stan Lai (in part) by Jon Kowallis, and one on Ang Lee by Wei Ming Dariottis and Eileen Fung.


Also broken up into three thematic sections as the above, included are articles about Tsai Ming-liang and Lin Cheng-sheng by Meiling Wu, an impassioned defense of the poetics of Hou Hsiao-hsien by Emilie Yeh, and an article about the often overlooked Wu Nianzhen by Darrell Davis.


Three useful articles about Taiwan are include among wide-ranging chapters in Chinese about the cinemas of the “Three Chinas.” Ye Longyan analyzes the conditions of the 1980s, while Liao Jinfeng looks at the industry by the mid-1990s. Li Tai duo analyzes Taiwanese cinema as a social institution.


Two of thirty scholarly articles focus on Taiwan. James Wicks analyzes gender in the early 1970s film, *Story of Mother*, relating it to Taiwan’s geopolitical climate. Darrell Davis explores the legacy of the New Cinema, including in relation to the popular success of *Cape No. 7*.

Anthologies on Taiwanese Cinema

Although hardly as voluminous as the sources found under Anthologies on Chinese Cinema, Berry and Lu 2005 and Davis and Chen 2007 do offer proof that Taiwanese cinema does have enough cachet as a stand-alone category among scholars writing in English, even when not focusing exclusively on the New Cinema or internationally famed directors. Within Taiwan there is less of a tendency toward edited anthologies, with the collection on Taiwanese dialect cinema edited by the National Film Archive (Chinese Taipei Film Archive) in 1994 being a notable exception. Huang and Wei 2004 is the only anthology that attempts to cover more than one hundred years of Taiwanese cinema.

Berry, Chris, and Feii Lu, eds. *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005.
A collection of critical essays about key films, mostly those directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang. Also covered are *A Borrowed Life*, *Banana Paradise*, and *Darkness and Light*.


A more cohesive collection insofar as most of these scholarly articles do reflect the three categories under which each is placed. The section on politics includes one of the few attempts to explore how Taiwanese cinema penetrated international film festivals (by Wu Chia-chi). Peter Rist explores King Hu under the section “State of the Arts.”


A collectively authored, two-volume study of one hundred years of Taiwanese cinema that includes several handsome color images. Serves better for its sheer breadth than its depth on any particular topic or time period of Taiwanese cinema.


Impressive early collection of scholarship on Taiwanese dialect films in Taiwan made mostly in the 1950s and 1960s. Included are sections on Hua Xing Company and on Hsin Chi, the leading director of Taiwanese dialect films.

**Taiwanese New Cinema**

Given how central the New Cinema of the 1980s is for defining Taiwanese cinema to this day, it is surprising how few published volumes are devoted to this topic alone. On the other hand, the few that do exist are among the most significant volumes about Taiwanese cinema ever published. Xiao 1993 is a definitive firsthand account of the odd birth of the New Cinema in Taiwan. Chiao 1988 comprises the single best collection of journalistic writing during the time of the New Cinema. Mi and Liang 1991 is credited with a major shift away from journalistic debates to academic ones regarding Taiwanese cinema. Chen 1997, which is based on a dissertation first written in English, represents the most significant scholarly attempt to define the New Cinema. Wilson 2014 represents the most updated study of this movement in English.


Based on a dissertation written in English, this is the most complete monograph to date about the Taiwanese New Cinema. Chen attempts to define the movement in terms of economics, culture, and aesthetics, including two chapters on the style of Taiwanese cinema in general versus the New Cinema.


A definitive source on the New Cinema, a vast collection of articles that first appeared mostly in newspapers in Taiwan in the 1980s when the New Cinema first emerged. Includes some written by key insiders, such as Zhan Hongzhi, and includes translations of Western articles about the New Cinema. Currently not in print.


A lightning rod when it first appeared in 1991, this is the definitive critique of the New Cinema by politically oriented scholars who argue the movement was eventually betrayed by films such as *City of Sadness* in 1989. Ever since one of the most often cited and critiqued studies
of Taiwanese cinema that sparked more academic work thereafter.


An in-depth study that explores the problematic of defining a Taiwanese cinematic “tradition.” With primary focus on Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, and Ang Lee (plus a chapter on Taipei) the author argues for a hybrid tradition that is transtextual, transnational, and transcultural in nature.


A true insider’s account of the birth of the New Cinema in Taiwan. This is a diary of the famed screenwriter in the CMPC, who, along with Wu Nianzhen, managed to convince the head, Ming Ji, to take a chance on young new talent, sparking by accident the most definitive cinematic movement in Taiwan’s history.

Recent Taiwanese Cinema

In just the last decade, some notable shifts have occurred for Taiwanese cinema. Starting with the unexpected box office success of Wei Desheng’s *Cape No. 7* (2008) Taiwanese films have occasionally performed remarkably well at the Taiwanese box office, something not seen for almost two decades. Moreover, these films often display a decidedly Taiwanese consciousness and/or flavor that is wedded to their more commercial trappings compared to the works by cinematic masters such as Hou, Yang, and Tsai. The main question that remains is: how much does this development indicate an actual “Taiwanese” identity? The issue is addressed in Ma 2015. Likewise, the degree to which this constitutes truly a renaissance of a commercial film industry remains unclear; the issues are touched on in Yeh 2014. While certainly a cause for hope, it remains unclear how much this is a transitory phenomenon or a more permanent change for Taiwanese cinema. *Hai jiao qi hao he ta men de gu shi: yi duan cong kuan jing zou xiang meng xiang de lu cheng* is the most complete source on the making of a key breakthrough for recent Taiwanese cinema, while Wei 2011 explores the next film by Wei De-sheng that was made as a direct result of the success of *Cape No. 7*. Ko 2009 is a book by Giddens Ko about the film he made before the unexpected success of *You Are the Apple of My Eye* in 2011. Mon 2016 is a new study that offers insights into the vagaries of marketing in the current climate in Taiwan.

*Hai jiao qi hao he ta men de gu shi: yi duan cong kuan jing zou xiang meng xiang de lu cheng*. Taipei: Da guan, 2008.

Translated as “Cape no. 7: The making of dreams.” A Chinese-language collection of stories about the making of *Cape No. 7*.


A book by the director about the making of his debut feature, *Doubles* (aka “L-O-V-E” 2009), which was Giddens Ko film made before his box office smash, *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (2011).


An unusual study of Taiwanese culture that contains sections on recent Taiwanese cinema, including *Cape No. 7*. This study mixes the personal with the scholarly, using trauma theory to explore the tentative status of Taiwan in the world today.

One of the few studies that actually looks at the current relationships between the film industry and audiences in Taiwan. Using queer romance films as the focal point, the author argues that while the film industry attempts to steer things in particular directions when it comes to marketing, the actual results are unpredictable.

Translated as “Director: Bale.” Commentary by the director of *Seediq Bale*, the most expensive film in Taiwan’s history.

An analysis of the recent resurgence of recent Taiwanese cinema with a more local and commercial flavor.

**Directors**

Like many smaller “national” cinemas around the world, Taiwan ends up being defined by its directors. Yet Taiwan’s ability to produce multiple internationally renowned directors is nothing short of remarkable when considering how few films are actually produced there. In fact, since the 1980s the number of Taiwanese directors winning prizes at the world’s leading film festivals, compared to actual domestic production, is arguably equaled only by Iran during the same time period. Yeh and Davis 2005 aptly calls Taiwan a “treasure island” when it comes to the directors it has produced. Berry 2005 offers the best collection of interviews in English. Huang 1994, Chen 2000, and Zhang 2004 all provide overviews of several directors in Chinese. Ma offers an in-depth study of two of the most famous Taiwanese directors and how they treat time in their films. Four directors—Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Tsai Ming-liang, and Ang Lee—each warrant a subsection given the volumes that have been written on each. Huang 1994, Wu 1994, Hu 1998, Yu 1997 (on Ku Hanxiang), and Huang 1999 (on Li Xing) offer in-depth studies of other notable directors.

Most complete collection in English of interviews with Chinese-language filmmakers. The section on Taiwan includes six interviews: Hou Hsiao-hsien and Chu Tian-wen, Edward Yang, Wu Nian-jen; Ang Lee, Tsai Ming-liang, and Chang Tso-chi.

A study of more than twenty directors throughout Taiwan’s history, including several figures predating the New Cinema, such as Bai Jingrui, Song Kunshou, Li Xing, Ding Shanxi, among others.


Published script and essays by Huang Mingchuan, arguably the most overlooked director in Taiwan who deserves more notice. This is about his second film, *Bao dao da meng.* (1993).

A large collection of essays on arguably the most definitive director from Taiwan before the New Cinema, Li Xing, who, by the 1970s, directed everything from Taiwanese dialect films to Healthy Realist films to Qiong Yao films.


Besides Wong Kar-wai from Hong Kong, this significant study also focuses on Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tsai Ming-liang from Taiwan. The central focus is on how they depict time in a melancholy fashion that relates to a globalized modernity.


Essays and script of *A Borrowed Life* (1994) by Wu Nian-jen, famed screenwriter of the New Cinema and now a notable television and theater personality in Taiwan.


The definitive study of what Taiwanese cinema has always done best: producing an inordinate number of world-renowned directors. Primary focus on Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang.


Heavily illustrated study of the famed director from Hong Kong who came over to the island and established the Grand Motion Picture Studio in the 1960s, which helped to launch a commercial industry in Taiwan. Covers his entire career in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China.


Critical studies of ten Chinese directors, five of whom are strongly tied to Taiwan, including King Hu, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang.

**Hou Hsiao-Hsien**

Hou is arguably the most definitive of all Taiwanese directors. Not only is he the most indigenous in terms of educational and professional background, but also the traits associated with his films are most often used to define the New Cinema and Taiwanese cinema in general. Nevertheless, as his career progressed, Hou became less and less a “Taiwanese” director and more and more a global one who relies on outside sources for both financing and even thematic material. Much of the literature on Hou reflects both these core topics as well as these changes over time, plus numerous other issues. Assayas 1999 offers one of the best collections in French and Chinese; Lin, et al. 2000 offers the most complete anthology in Chinese; Maeno, et al. 2012 provides the same in Chinese; and Suchenski 2014 does so in English. Reynaud 2002 and Udden 2009 provide two in-depth, single-authored monographs in English. Nornes and Yeh 2015 is a pioneering study in English found only online, while Reynaud 2002 and Udden 2009 provide two in-depth, single-authored monographs in English.


A key publication on Hou in French that includes essays by Assayas, Jean-Michel Frodon, Charles Tesson, Peggy Chiao, Shiguehiko Hasumi, Kent Jones, and others. Includes an extend interview of Hou by Emmanuel Burdeau. Chinese translation published by the National Film Archives in 2000.

The most in-depth analysis of Hou’s handling of staging and composition in comparison to other directors such as Mizoguchi or Angelopoulos. Argues Hou does this in a rarified fashion that has few historical precedents but who has spawned several imitators throughout East Asia.


A vast collection of writings by Hou’s most trusted screenwriter and confidant. Includes several articles about the entire process of making a Hou film and reprints of several essays previously published with scripts of various films, representing some of the most thoughtful critiques of Hou’s work.


A dense and impressive collection of essays by mostly Taiwanese scholars and critics, but also includes two essays by June Yip and Nick Browne translated from English.


Collection of essays on Hou in Japanese, based on papers delivered at a bilingual Chinese-Japanese conference held at the University of Nagoya in June 2011, with Hou and Chu Tian-wen in attendance.


A new paper book based on the website that began in 1993 that was a pioneering hypertext study of Hou Hsiao-hsien in English. Included is a discussion that calls into question comparisons often made between Hou and Ozu from Japan.


The first book-length monograph in English devoted to what is commonly considered Hou’s most significant film from 1989.


By far the most complete anthology on Hou in English that includes no less than ten critical essays by scholars, three more by other filmmakers with a strong affinity for Hou, and interviews with nearly every key collaborator who has worked with him.


First book-length monograph on Hou in English. Largely a contextual analysis that argues that Hou could have emerged in Taiwan only during the particular time that he did. Has been translated into simplified Chinese by Fu Dan University Press in 2014.


By far the most complete collection of essays and other materials on City of Sadness, largely looking back at the film twenty years after the fact. Includes interviews with every imaginable player involved, including Qiu Fusheng, the head of Era International.
Edward Yang

The late Edward Yang is often described as the “modernist/Western” counterpart to Hou’s supposedly more “traditionalist/nativist” tendencies. As such, Yang played almost as much a role in defining the New Cinema and Taiwanese cinema as Hou did. A fair amount has been written about Yang, but to date no definitive study in English has appeared, the brief monograph Anderson 2005 notwithstanding. Yang himself authors two of the Chinese titles below (Yang 1991 and Yang 1994), and Lao 1991 provides a brief introduction in Chinese to Yang’s work. Huang 1995 offers an in-depth analysis in Chinese by a famed critic in Taiwan, and Wang 2012 is the definitive volume in Chinese published after Yang’s untimely death, offering reflections from many who knew and worked with him.


An introductory study of Edward Yang that offers good criticisms of his films but still leaves something to be desired in terms of larger contextual factors.


Excellent critical study of Yang’s films by one of the leading film critics in Taiwan from the 1980s, Edmond Wong, who later became director of the National Film Archive. Included are two solid background chapters on Yang and the New Cinema.


Translated as: “Cinedossier: Edward Yang.” A brief overview of the career and films of Edward Yang that is put out by the Taipei Golden Horse International Film Festival Executive Committee.


Translated as: “Edward Yang revisited.” A major collection of interviews of key figures in Taiwanese cinema who knew and worked with the late Edward Yang. Included are Xiao Ye, Wu Nian-jen, Tu Tu-chih, Liao Ching-song, and the actor Zhang Zhen, among others.


The published script of A Confucian Confusion (1994) released with the film itself. Several reviews and essays, including by Edmond Wong and Tony Rayns, are included in addition to the script.

Tsai Ming-Liang

The issues surrounding Tsai Ming-liang are different from those of Hou and Yang. First, is the question of his national identity since he is a Malaysian-born Chinese who came to Taiwan only as a young adult after the New Cinema proper ceased to exist. Second is the question of sexual identity and how much his films reflect a supposedly queer sensibility. Both of these issues have made Tsai one of the most controversial figures in Taiwanese cinema within Taiwan, most of all in the local newspapers. Although innumerable articles are available in English, the definitive study of Tsai is Lim 2014, which offers a different perspective from most before him. Wen 2002 provides arguably the best study in Chinese about Tsai himself and his background in both Malaysia and Taiwan. Tsai and Zhang 1992, Chiao and Tsai 1998, and Tsai 2002 all are sources of Tsai Ming-liang’s own writings on his films, all in Chinese. Zhang 2004 provides a look at the working process.
of Tsai making his films from a notable Taiwanese critic who became head of the National Film Archive. Rehm, et al. 1999 provides one of the most in-depth interviews in French, which has been translated into Chinese. Tan 2011 relates Tsai’s work to issues of globalization.

Published script for The Hole (1997) that includes interviews done in France and reviews by critics such as Kent Jones.

An impassioned scholarly defense of the “slowness” of Tsai’s works, tackling that particular issue from nearly every conceivable angle. He takes to task those who argue that Tsai is following the recent pan-Asian trend of minimalism.


An argument that Tsai’s two films represent an attempt at reestablishing human relations in the face of displacement caused by shifting global relations.

Self-authored book about the making of What Time Is It There? (2001). Includes essays and notebooks by the director, plus the script and various critical reviews, such as those by Jean-Michel Frodon and Tony Rayns.

Published script of Tsai’s first feature film, Rebels of the Neon God from 1992.

A biographical study of Tsai Ming-liang. The first three chapters cover his background in Malaysia, his time in the Taiwanese theater scene, and his time in television. The last five chapters break down his story by his five feature films up to What Time Is It There?

Study of the making of Goodbye Dragon Inn and The Missing, with a focus on the collaboration between Tsai and Lee Kangsheng, who has starred in every one of his films.

Ang Lee

While born in Taiwan, Lee is difficult to define: is he a Taiwanese director or a Hollywood director born in Taiwan? The question is crucial because Ang Lee is the most decorated director to have ever emerged from Taiwan, having won multiple awards at both leading
international film festivals and the Oscars. Most studies on Taiwanese cinema still tend to claim him as being a Taiwanese director, not merely a Hollywood director from Taiwan. Chen 1991 offers one of the earliest studies on Lee. Dilley 2007 remains the primary monograph on Lee in English. Huang 2002 and Ye 2012 are both the most complete studies in Chinese. Wang, et al. 1994 is a joint effort by Lee and his constant producer/screenwriter James Schamus that is published in Chinese.

Translated as: “Cinedossier: Li An.” Since it was published immediately after his first film, this is likely the first book published about Ang Lee in any language. Part of the series put out by the Taipei Golden Horse International Film Festival Executive Committee.

Covers Ang Lee’s career up to Brokeback Mountain and is broken up into four main sections, with the first being about context and the second about his trilogy made in Taiwan. Two chapters have “gender” as part of the title, while four have “identity,” revealing the main issues covered. Chinese translation published in 2009.

In depth academic book about how Ang Lee broke into Hollywood and compares his experience with that of other Chinese directors.

Published script of Eat Drink Man Woman that includes interviews with Wang Huiling and Ang Lee, plus a brief biography of James Schamus.

An in-depth academic study of the cross-cultural implications of Ang Lee’s career and films. Includes a chapter on how Lee negotiates art and commerce.

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