

## Enlivening New Taiwan Cinema: In search of Taiwanese-ness and the Postnational

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Another important question is the place of the individual in the nation and in the region. Is it possible for a person to belong to a nation and to a region simultaneously or are these identities incompatible? To put the matter differently, does establishment of a regional community require individuals to identify with it completely? (xiii Kenichiro Hirano)

### Introduction: Conceptualizing the postnational

Two presidential elections captured global attention in the year 2008, one of which took place in the context of East Asia and the other outside Asia: respectively Taiwan and the United States of America. Ma Ying-jeou and Barack H. Obama won. Ma's political regime has been facing a crisis since the earthquake in Hualien on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2009, and that the global political climate has also been constantly in flux, including but not limited to Obama's declining popularity. Obama popularized the "buzzword" change, but ironically, the changes in question are sometimes beyond estimation and imagination, thanks to globalization. Today, in 2012, Ma Ying-jeou has just won his second presidential election, and Obama is going to face challenges from his opponent in the Republican Party in order to fight for his second presidency. In any case, politicians, political scientists, and social critics try to seek a new language to articulate the newness and changes that Obama aims at bringing about. It is therefore not simply a shift in terms of politics but actually a paradigmatic and hermeneutical one in understanding and deciphering global power anew. Globalization means very differently in various contexts, and the East Asian understanding and articulation of globalism inscribes an extra dimension: the regional. The reason why mentioning Ma Ying-jeou and Obama matters here is that a critical language is equally important to describe the changes brought about by globalization in the context of East Asia. It is not easy to define Asianness, not to mention the term itself is subject to ongoing refinement and redefinition. Alongside changes, globalization, and Asianness, the nation and nationalism are two very much related terms that are subject to constant reexamination. They are contested and questioned because of their sometimes problematic nature, and this is also why nationalism is always one of the common subject matters tackled in cultural texts. In his analysis of contemporary cultures, Tang Xiaobing remarks,

The disjunctive and overlapping order among these various horizons of experiences, collective as well as personal, no longer allows a facile case study of localized, boundary-specific cultural forms or contents. On the contrary, the very concept of “culture” in the age of globalization bespeaks the necessity for continuous negotiations as much as contestations between varied landscapes and historical visions. (3-4)

What is being negotiated here is precisely the different forms of understandings and manifestations of the nation. Despite the very fact that nation states in the East Asian region share some linguistic, ideological, and historical roots, they struggle differently to see what a nation is and what nationalism means to their people. This echoes with what Samuel Kim says, “Far from having a homogeneous Confucian culture, East Asia still embodies, albeit in attenuated form, a high degree of historical and national animus and fratricidal conflict” (13). In light of both the convergence and divergence in question, a lot of efforts have been made by intellectuals to explore the power struggles and politics within the East Asian region. These include films and their directors, who have been striving to ponder what the nation means to cinema, and why films matter to nationalism. To name various global moments has become the endeavors of filmmakers worldwide, with no exception for the East Asian ones.

These moments are usually new, fresh, and unprecedented. With the fostering of globalization, they circulate rapidly and rhetorically, and filmic works produced during these moments share similar characteristics, that they are dynamic in nature. These films respond to globalization in one way or another in terms of new aesthetic values, ways of shooting, and ideological orientations. The newness inscribed in contemporary East Asian films precisely overrides and goes beyond the national cinema model, and trespasses or even transgresses the national and postcolonial discourse. Wei Te-sheng’s *Cape No.7* (2008) is a case in point. The film is an exemplary case that demonstrates the ways in which colonial history and nationalist sentiments can be negotiated and rethought. In light of the colonial history of Taiwan and the colonial subtext in *Cape No.7*, some questions immediately arise: After territorial colonialism is over, how are we supposed to tackle the cultural effects of colonization? What is there to restore, and how do cultural texts like films play a role in expressing the sentiments involved? Are residual colonial legacies manifested in texts as such, or rather, are the legacies manifested in various cultural forms that may not seriously scrutinize colonial history and confront formal historiography? A unified postcolonial and nationalist discourse may overlook these questions and obliterate local uniqueness as well as differences. This brings about my discussion of the postnational.

Scholars from different disciplines have tried to conceptualize the postnational /postnationalism/postnationality in order to reexamine nationalism and the nationalist discourse. There are at least three strands of arguments: Jürgen Habermas’ *The Postnational Constellation* is a political and philosophical account on the future of democracy, the origins of national identity, and global human rights. Understandably, Habermas’ arguments set foot on the realm of political science. Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* and *The Postnational Self* co-edited by Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, as we shall see, are more related to cultures and globalization. Even so, I am employing the notion of the postnational in this article to the analysis of films in which previous scholarship does not engage with. I assert that what is emerging is something less nationalistic/political and more humanistic/personalized in the form of belonging to a community. Nevertheless, the

postnational does not simply go beyond the national; it dialogues with nationalism and reacts critically to globalization. These responses to and interactions with everyday culture forge alternative approaches, and the postnational also evokes a different kind of individuality. Very often, filmmakers, including but not limited to Wei Te-sheng, make claims that they are not into politics and that their works are not political. When I say these films are less politicized or even depoliticized, therefore, I mean that they still inscribe a certain political inclination and make references to a certain political background, but the concern is not politics per se. For instance, the obscure relations among Taiwan, Japan, and China as allegorically represented in *Cape No.7*, which will be discussed further along in this article.

In this proposed model, I see a continuous contrast between the city and the outskirts, between urban cultures and rural traditions. This generates a different sense of belonging: one's commitment to a locale and a community instead or on top of the nation. Struggles are contested over a site, and the process helps define and formulate a certain identity that has not got much to do with post/colonization and nationalism. The local identity, or the "postnational self"—to borrow from Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort—precisely lies between being nationalistic/patriotic and global/cosmopolitan, which is "a "third way" between rampant globalization and conservative nationalism" (xv) to search for a base for identity formation in the globalized world nowadays. Hedetoft and Hjort suggest that "the national context and its identity-shaping power can become so "banal," so inconspicuous, that it may cause people to imagine that it has disappeared, that they are cosmopolitan and global *rather than* national" (ix, original emphasis)—in other words, if the national is beginning to fall apart, the local is able to recapture its importance and gain substantial space in the search of a communal identity—Taiwanese-ness in our case.

Locality is no longer confined to the nation per se, and the production of locality, to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology, can take root in the city, the rural, and the space in between the two. According to Appadurai, the postnational has at least three implications. Firstly, it is "the process of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken its place" (169). In other words, there is the potential and possibility to (re)define identity beyond nationalism, and national identity, similar to the nation itself, tends to be constructed and imagined, and globalization fosters new designations of identities in pluralities. Secondly, Appadurai proposes that "what are emerging are strong alternative forms for the organization of global traffic in resources, images, and ideas—forms that either contest the nation-state actively or constitute peaceful alternatives for large-scale political loyalties" (ibid). A film like *Cape No.7* in one way or another abandons, trespasses, and transgresses the nation, or embraces the nation in an alternative manner. Thirdly, Appadurai argues that "while nations might continue to exist, the steady erosion of the capabilities of the nation-state to monopolize loyalty will encourage the spread of national forms that are largely divorced from territorial states" (ibid). Taiwan, for instance, with a highly specific political demography, serves as a perfect example to demonstrate how nationalism varies within one same nation; the postnational is telling precisely because of its ability to override territorial states. Instead of the nation and territorial states, the city-rural split mentioned above becomes equally prominent. In my own account, therefore, a more humanistic and engaging gesture is offered to greet globalization, and there is always the tendency and possibility to soothe historical burdens, dilute national conflicts, and deemphasize political tensions.

## **The postnational**

A methodological concern has to be noted beforehand: I am using *the* postnational instead of postnationalism for several reasons. Previous scholarship employs the term in different manners across different disciplines. For example, politicians and political scientists may see postnationalism as a way to dissolve the nation as a unit. Another example would be Paul James who pointedly argues that some people “are beginning to put their faith in the new possibilities of postnationalism [...] It has deeper foundations in the upheavals of contemporary globalization” (292). I am therefore using the postnational as an adjective precisely to avoid creating another -ism: instead of seeing globalization as a cataclysm in James’ rather pessimistic view, I would like to see the many intriguing ways the local negotiates with the national/global and comes up with some interesting bargains. Also, not using postnationalism hints that I am not trying to advocate an alternative or even radical ideology, especially that its prefix post- is commonly seen in a number of influential concepts like postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. These -isms entail ideological readings and interpretations, and I am conversely using the postnational as an adjective for interrogations. We do not only tackle culture, but we look into *the* cultural—the various manifestations and representations of culture. Likewise, we do not talk about postcolonialism as a historical junction and moment per se, but we are also concerned with *the* postcolonial sentiments, colonial nostalgia, etc. The postnational interrogates the national and enables dialogues between conflicts and relations. Thus, the postnational in my account is neither counter-national nor non-national: it does not go against nationalism but provides an alternative yet critical tool to dissect the nation—especially by means of the filmic discourse. It engages with the nation, but may not succumb to nationalism and the national cinema model.

There are many ways to understand and approach nationalism and national cinema. Nationalism can be about a sense of pride and belonging to the nation, and national cinema may represent a certain nation and its success. The postnational is more intricate: it goes beyond the nation by examining the belonging to the local, locality, and the community. As May Joseph succinctly puts it, we are “not to deny the continuing presence of the national [...] but, instead, to scrutinize those affiliations through a reexamination of what has always fallen outside the purview of the national” (157-8). These affiliations may include the internal, tribal, and racial tensions *within* the nation. Territorial controversy is therefore not a concern in this proposed paradigm, particularly not in the case of Taiwan since it is debatable whether Taiwan is a part of China (something that is not within the scope of this study). Instead of debating whether Taiwan “belongs” to China, this article examines the notion of belonging within Taiwan itself, and how Taiwanese-ness is conveyed and circulated by *Cape No.7*. As mentioned above, the political is toned down; and simultaneously, the personal and the individual come to the forefront in the postnational model I bring forth. While local cultures and communities are sustained, the national is not necessarily condemned or forgotten. Sun Lung-kee is appropriate to point out that “postnational society does not shed its nationhood and certainly not its culture. Instead, “national culture” is now typified in the private lives of citizens carrying local color” (242). Viewing Taiwan, *Cape No.7*, and contemporary Taiwanese films via a postnational angle hence reveals the construction and sustenance of a certain locale and its neighborhood. We shall then see the urban city and the rural landscape may at

one point be torn apart, but the essence of the two can equally exist together. The harmonious coexistence provokes multiple identifications, something put forward by Hedetoft and Hjort as a different sense of belonging:

[P]eople may feel that they have several belongings, several places and cultures they belong to and that determine their identity as multiple, nested, situational, or fluid, whereas others react to the uncertainties and erosions of belonging following either from nomadic existences in the global village or from the impact of globalizing forces on handed-down sites of loyalty by developing new attachments, to belongings (in the sense of material possessions), familiar surroundings, close-knit localities, or the intimacy of personal relationships. Still others choose to abandon all collective solidarity in favor of pursuing individualism or elitism, in whatever guise. (ix)

In other words, as illuminated by Hedetoft and Hjort, identification and belonging may have multifaceted dimensions and can be manifested in various levels, surpassing the national. Chris Berry also captures a similar essence: "Although members of nations are (supposedly) constituted as citizens with equal rights and obligations, this individual national identity is complicated by citizens' affiliations to other local and trans-national identity formations, including region, class, race, religion, gender, and sexuality, to name but a few." (142) Berry's idea to "rewrite" Taiwanese cinema is an attempt to reconsider both nationalism and national cinema in the context of Taiwan and rethink Taiwanese identity as a nationalistic construct. Yet, there has been a constant search for Taiwanese-ness: what it means, and how it is enlivened in the filmic discourse. A postnational film re/presents history and nationalist sentiments; one can of course belong to a country/nation, but at the same time the sense of belonging can be multiplied and intensified to the level of belonging to the local, the community, and the locale, which can simply be a village or a small town as represented in *Cape No.7*. Although the postnational enables alternative identifications that transcend patriotic and postcolonial nation-building, I have to reassert that my conceptualization does not go against nationalism. As Christopher Hughes notes, "[T]he resulting identity can be said to be 'post-nationalist' rather than 'anti-nationalist'. This is because it still bears some of the imprints of the history of Chinese nationalism and nation-building, in the form of ethnic, cultural and economic relationships with Chinese communities outside the island" (128). To concretize the above conceptualizations on the postnational, I will now use *Cape No.7* as the core text of this article to illustrate the postnational paradigm I am employing, and point out the limitations of the film despite its immense popularity.

### **New Taiwan Cinema and thereafter**

The year 2008 witnesses a number of exceptionally successful Taiwanese films, including but not limited to the well-received *Cape No.7*. The unexpected domestic success of *Cape No.7* revitalizes the local filmmaking industry, and subsequent commercial blockbusters in the following two years include Cheng Fen-fen's *Hear Me* (2009) and Doze Noi Chen-zer's *Monga* (2010). Films like Leon Dai's *Cannot Live Without You* (2009) and Arvin Chen's *Au Revoir Taipei* (2010) are not necessarily blockbusters, but they win the favor of film festivals and continue to strive for endorsements through an alternative circuit. More recently, 2011 is another remarkable year that can be regarded as the milestone of contemporary Taiwanese cinema: Giddens Ko's *You Are the Apple of My Eye* and We Te-sheng's *Seediq Bale* hit the box

office well and the former has even stirred up noises in the context of the Greater China. Taiwan, whose cinema was once only recognized by its artistic appeal in international film festival circuits, welcomes her “national cinema” back. This progress facilitates Taiwanese films to be understood in both aesthetic and commercial terms, especially in light of the shrinking film industry.<sup>1</sup> National cinema, for that matter, no longer simply means how a certain film or filmmaker represents a nation, but rather how a nation embraces its films in both a participatory and celebratory mode. In other words, as suggested by Sheldon Lu and Emilie Yeh, it is about the ways in which “filmic discourse expands above and beyond the level of the national” (6).

The emergence, popularization, and wide circulation and discussion of *Cape No.7* in the local and regional context prove that localization plays an important role in disseminating the film in the context of Taiwan. At the same time, cultural specificity and regional differences account for its lack of recognition in other regions – as well as in the Golden Horse Award in the local context. Failing much expectation, *Cape No.7* does not receive “big” awards whilst Peter Chan’s *The Warlords* (2008) sweeps both Best Director and Best Picture. This leads to debates concerning *Cape No.7*’s “failure” to establish its status of a new representative national cinema by means of film awards. The fact that *Cape No.7* fails to surpass *The Warlords* is not only signaling the insufficiency of the former but also reinforcing the power of the latter in terms of its transborder appeal as an epic. Power and politics are of course involved in the results of the Golden Horse, taking into consideration the Hong Kong-China connection in *The Warlords* (finance, the cast, the production team, etc.) versus the kind of indigenism deeply rooted not only in *Cape No.7* but also in the reception of it.

Some crucial questions, therefore, have to be asked: what accounts for the local success of *Cape No.7*, and what contributes to its nationalistic reading? The film itself, or the reception of it? If it is the former case, namely the film’s plot and content, isn’t it ironic that the film presents such a nostalgic yearning for the colonial past allegorized by an “invisible” romance? It is so invisible to an extent that it is more than visible and obvious: the Taiwan-Japan imaginary is disturbingly prominent there, and the story-within-a-story structure serves as a double uncanny when we have Aga (Van Fan) abruptly developing with Tomoko (Chie Tanaka): the colonial past is romanticized if not depoliticized—this point will be elaborated in the next section. Or, rather, shall we opt for the discursive reception of *Cape No.7*, namely it is the circulation of the film and the dissemination of (indigenous) Taiwanese-ness that matter to the general public of Taiwan, especially at a time of political turbulence in order to (re)establish a Taiwanese identity? This assumption would perhaps become even sounder when one takes into consideration the obstacles the film faces entering the mainland market owing to its sensitive or “improper” component—precisely the mentioning of the Japanese colonization. If we try to apply the commonplace notion of “your enemy’s enemy is your friend” here, it is not difficult to arrive at a claim that Japan tends to affiliate culturally with Taiwan (and vice versa) rather than the mainland;<sup>2</sup> in terms of cinematic mutual illumination, one will also not forget the way Hou Hsiao-hsien maintains his lifelong impact from Yasujiro Ozu.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from Hou, a number of world-renowned filmmakers represent New Taiwan Cinema, ranging from the late Edward Yang to the more controversial Tsai Ming-liang. These directors are very often considered to be “arty”, embraced by film festivals worldwide. Their touch on nationalism rests on the subject matters they deal with and the discursive space

their films are engaged within. Hou Hsiao-hsien takes history very seriously and has a tendency to portray Taiwan as/in a state of melancholia, as in works like *A City of Sadness* (1989) and *Three Times* (2005). Lu and Yeh, for instance, consider the male protagonist (Tony Leung) in *A City of Sadness* as “the deaf-mute photographer [who] documents history in his own quietly perceptive manner with the camera’s eye” (6). Berry also notes,

Maybe the counter-history of *City of Sadness* does not separate the state and the people who suffer at its hands in order to retreat from the modern to nature or ‘tradition’. Perhaps it inscribes both human and natural spaces that resist being subsumed into a nation-state modernity to point to different relations of modernity and the nation-state and to the possibility of different futures and different models of the national. (150)

Another example would be the silent segment in *Three Times*, in which silence is used rather poetically and sublimely for one to contemplate not only the romance between the characters (Chang Chen and Shu Qi), but also history or even cinema itself. Edward Yang, on the other hand, is more lighthearted and history to him is less a burden. He is fond of employing city dwellers to depict contemporary life and lifestyle of Taiwanese, prominently presented in *A Confucian Confusion* (1994) and *A One and a Two* (2000). Tsai Ming-liang’s auteurist inclination is obvious: his obsession with the human body and social alienation do not only serve as a trademark of his filmic signature but also a subtle critique of the Taiwanese society in chaos, thanks to the governance under Chen Shui-bian. Meiling Wu regards Tsai as “postsadness”, whose works are “marked by nihilism and an overwhelming despair of self-imposed isolation [and] are characterized by an inability to communicate” (79). However, it is precisely alienation and isolation as a form, a theme, and a film language that distance Tsai from mainstream audiences, which results in critics and scholars very often equating New Taiwan Cinema to what is non-mainstream, independent, if not alternative cinema. This explains why the three abovementioned auteurs and their works do indeed generate a common understanding of Taiwanese cinema but fail to reveal what Taiwan and Taiwanese cinema genuinely is in the context of East Asia and/or globalization. As Berry accurately points out, “Taiwan constitutes an extreme instance of the kind of tensions that have led to the abandonment of any assumption of a natural, given, and coherent unity of the nation-state – a model that often underpins the idea of national cinema” (141). The notion of national cinema in the context of Taiwan has undergone drastic changes since the emergence of *Cape No.7*. To recapitulate, the post-new wave scenario of Taiwanese cinema as well as the postnational paradigm precisely deal less with “real” politics but more with the politics among human beings: personal struggles, emotional tugs-of-war, and communal belonging. In the next section, I will provide a detailed analysis—both textual and contextual—of the film to observe the postnational at work.

### **Introducing *Cape No.7***

Aga is a rocker who cannot find success in Taipei and returns to his hometown in Hengchun where he now works as a postman, discovering a parcel of love letters. He opens it and finds out a love story spanning across two countries—Taiwan and Japan—decades ago. Meanwhile, a hotel in Hengchun has invited a Japanese singer Atari to perform in an upcoming show. The town representative tries to recruit a local band and Aga is in. A

Japanese girl named Tomoko is in charge of the band. Irritated by the idiosyncratic band members, Tomoko is furious at times but eventually develops an intimate relationship with Aga. The film ends with a beach concert after Aga manages to deliver the love letters to “Cape No.7”—the address on the aforesaid parcel. This is a film with two strands of narratives. While this narrative structure is not something particularly pioneering, the uniqueness of *Cape No.7* is the parallel between the two strands: the juxtaposition of two romantic relationships in which both female protagonists are named Tomoko. This is of course not random, and the two Tomokos pull the two narratives together. One part is what I referred to earlier as an invisible romance which is narrated by an off-screen male voice in Japanese. He is a teacher on his journey back from Taiwan to Japan, and his narrations are his love letters to Tomoko, a Taiwanese girl he loves. His love letters intertwine with the entire narrative. The inclusion of a romanticized colonial past parallels the present romance between Aga and Tomoko. The opening of the film creates a huge contrast: with a ship quietly leaving in the serene sea, the male voiceover says he can no longer see Taiwan. It is the year 1945, the end of World War II, and the scene opens the film almost like an epic which reminds people of previous war films like Michael Bay’s *Pearl Harbor* (2001) and Anthony Minghella’s *Cold Mountain* (2003) that juxtapose romance against warfare as clichés. The case of *Cape No.7* is a bit different though: as it will be detailed towards the end of this section, the film also closes at the port where the entire setting goes back to a farewell scene between Tomoko and the Japanese teacher. The sense of nostalgia is channeled throughout the entire film, and is of course reinforced by both the opening and the closing scenes. Remembering and recollecting the past is at the onset of the film, which suggests the relationship between Taiwan and Japan to be deciphered is not necessarily political/(post)colonial. Shiao Hong-Chi, in his analysis of the reception of the film, observes, “With their criticism being primarily Chinese nationalistic in nature, some scholars criticized the romanticizing of the Japanese colonial occupation” (190). The ex-colonized/colonizer dichotomy that some critics adopt (and thus severely criticize the film) may however in return hinder the intricate relations between Taiwanese-ness and Japanese-ness to be delineated below.



**Figure 1. *Cape No.7*. Dir. We Te-sheng, 2008.**

After the epic-like opening, the scene shifts to present Taipei. The contemporary setting begins with an ideologically violent or politically incorrect scene, when the male protagonist



Aga bangs his guitar and curses Taipei. It is ironic that Taipei, being the central cosmopolitan city, is condemned at the very beginning of the film whose popularity overwhelms the entire country at the same time. The film's opening has already hinted and suggested a move-away from the city to the rural area: the camera captures the 101 Tower, landmark of Taipei city, and then shifts to the landscape and seascape of Hengchun where the story takes place. The 101 Tower serves as the emblem of the Taipei city, and the "disappearance" of this representative architecture subtly suggests that the identity, or precisely national identity of Taiwanese can no longer be defined and refined by the economic and financial discourse per se. The Tower is even seen as a reflection from the rear-view mirror of Aga's motorcycle, furthermore signifying that using Taipei alone to represent Taiwan is to be reflected on (Figure 1). The discarding of Taipei is replaced by the township of Hengchun. *Cape No.7's* heavy reliance on the small-town life in the rural setting does not only induce a reading against the country's political and economic capital, but also eventually promotes Hengchun as a tourist site highly commodified if not fetishized as one of the remarkable scenarios of the post-*Cape No.7* phenomenon. It is hard to say that Hengchun is entirely rural, but its natural landscape/seascape has indeed become a powerful tool to depoliticize cultural conflicts resulted from colonialism, nationalism, and globalization. New meanings are invested into the southern landscape, and the "south of the border" at the peripheral is no longer marginalized but pops up as an acute contrast to the metropolis.

### **Language, identity/politics, belonging**

The shift to the rural landscape of southern Taiwan furthermore provides a clue for the popularity of *Cape No.7* – and simultaneously explains why audiences outside Taiwan (Hong Kong's for instance) do not share an equal enjoyment and appreciation for the film. Even within Taiwan, there is a demographic split and that the film is not appealing to all Taiwanese. For instance, Shiau observes that "some residents of Taipei who do not relate to southern and rural Taiwan decided against seeing the movie" (191). Outside Taiwan, most Mandarin speakers are not familiar with the habitants' language, namely Taiwanese Hokkien (commonly known as simply Taiwanese—the Taiwan language).<sup>4</sup> Back in the 80's, the use of Hokkien was discouraged if not banned by the Kuomintang; eventually, Hokkien is regarded as a symbol of localization in the 90's onwards. Language and politics thus hold hand in hand in the context of Taiwan, and those who seek Taiwan independence advocate the use of Hokkien over Mandarin. This is best demonstrated by the political use of the language during Chen Shui-bian's presidency. As Lu and Yeh suggest, the Chinese language (and its dialectic differences in this case) is "a force fraught with tension and contention" (3). Hence, language belongs to the political realm; what language to use in a film entails the inclusion and exclusion of different audiences as a mode of address. To complicate the issue of course is the ability for the old generation to speak Japanese owing to the colonial history—and we will see how this is explicitly manifested in *Cape No.7*. For the younger generation, there are also struggles between using Mandarin or Hokkien which may go beyond identity issues/politics. As Hughes aptly suggests, "[W]hereas in the past native Taiwanese who reached the level of higher education were more likely to identify with China and speak Mandarin, the process has gradually become less unidirectional. Younger 'outsiders' have also felt a natural need to use the Taiwanese dialect for everyday living and work purposes" (98). The ethnicity of Taiwanese is therefore both generational and dialect-based, and that different generations of Taiwanese are prone to be bilingual if not trilingual.

Language itself is both a prominent issue in the film as well as in Taiwan, which brings about both tension and absurdity in the general Taiwan society. The political scene of Taiwan is ideologically split into the two colors: blue and green, the former representing Kuomintang (KMT, the Pan-Blue Coalition) and the latter the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, the Pan-Green Coalition). From 2000 to 2008, under the governance of Chen Shui-bian, a significant number of Taiwan citizens have been living in a state of sufferance, with continuous complaints and dissatisfaction. Many of the films produced during this period depict a rather gloomy and unpromising city, including but not limited to many of Tsai Ming-liang's works.<sup>5</sup> The second appointment of Chen in 2004 is controversial and melodramatic, featuring a suspicious assassination-like attack to the President, which directly or indirectly constituted the winning of his second presidency. Surviving as a weak politician, Chen and his unwelcoming policies (especially towards that of Taiwan-China relationship) came to an end in 2008 when Ma Ying-jeou came onto stage. Nothing can be more absurd when Chen, soon after his step-down, was being investigated for a number of bribe cases and the amount of money involved is just beyond estimation—as well as imagination. The imagined reality, however, is interestingly portrayed on the cinematic screen. It is not difficult to observe from Post-New Taiwan Cinema that a number of contemporary Taiwanese films precisely address this sense of absurdity, mirroring and actually reflecting the status quo of life in Taiwan. Even so, “post-new” Taiwanese films inject a positive and forward-looking dimension: unlike, for instance, Tsai Ming-liang's *The Wayward Cloud* (2005) which features inhumane, almost animalistic characters including the male protagonist who is reduced to a Freudian, libido-driven sex machine, *Cape No.7* focuses on the insertion of human subjectivity and humanistic consideration of individuality. The film, among others, allows a new way out for both local and regional audiences to reexamine not only Taiwan cinema but humanity as the basis of life. This, I believe, serves as the core value of the postnational model I put forward, which does not only provoke a new understanding of a nation's cinema but also suggests a paradigmatic shift in deciphering or even trespassing nationalism via film studies.

The brief sketches above on the linguistic discourse in the context of Taiwan provide a sociopolitical backdrop for a cultural and postnational analysis on *Cape No.7*. Hokkien being used in the film is not a pure language barrier, but it is the foreignness of the language that shares a similar linguistic root which in turn creates a certain sense of unfamiliarity or even uncanniness to viewers outside the context of Taiwan. Lu and Yeh rightly put it, “Dialects and accents create both intimacy and distance onscreen for the characters in the film as well as offscreen among the audience” (3). As a matter of fact, the film features at least three languages which are interplayed throughout the entire narrative: Mandarin, Japanese, and Hokkien. The Japanese element does not only appeal to the Japanese market<sup>6</sup>, but the Japanese touch also enhances the narrative in terms of evaluating the impact from outside forces on a township as such. Japaneseness in the film actually reminds people in Hengchun of their own identity, and the sense of belonging is not necessarily to Taiwan as a state, but to a town residence where the community is not imagined but communally built. That is one of the reasons why Tomoko is depicted as an outsider if not an intruder when she is firstly introduced in the film. When she speaks Mandarin, her accent is more than obvious—at some points in the film, she is being teased and laughed at precisely because of her accent. For instance, when she scolds Aga, Rauma asks him why he does not respond to her. Aga answers by asking Rauma which sentence of Tomoko in Mandarin he can understand. The

language issue, therefore, intensifies the conflicts between the indigenous villagers and the outsiders. Another example of these conflicts is the villagers' insistence on their indigenesness—where language also comes to play a part. At one point, Aga's stepfather (Mr. Representative) is talking to Tomoko, but in Hokkien. While he is saying in a melancholic manner how the serene and beautiful sea cannot make the young people stay, Tomoko gets mad and says she does not understand "Taiwanese" (*taiyu*), namely the language of Taiwan. The sentiment of belonging is evoked through the use of language to generate contradictions beyond the terrains of the nation-state.

On top of language, locality and neighborhood are two important elements that constitute my postnational account. Selfhood comes under the spotlight in postnational circumstances. As Joseph argues, "The notion of the postnational departs from national, contained forms of belonging in a self-conscious and contingent way" (157). The local self belongs to a particular neighborhood, which is distinguishable from the national self who uses the nation to define one's identity. Here, the intriguing thing for *Cape No.7* is that while it is a national success, its appeal is driven from the nation's local, indigenous, and communal aspect. The backdrop of the film is that a band show is about to take place in Hengchun—whereas the usual practice is to invite a band from elsewhere, yet Mr. Representative would like to have a local band instead. When he is confronted to undermine the concept of a global village and cosmopolitanism, he reasserts his stance by guaranteeing there *are* talents in Hengchun. The conflict between the local and the global is described by Shiau as such: "The contrast of mannerisms between the "local," represented by the black glasses and patterned clothes of the check representative, and the "global," represented by an unseen white photographer and a group of foreign female models, is comical and quite realistic" (197). Apart from the tendency to establish a local, specific, or "self-conscious and contingent" identity in Joseph's account, this particular scene which appears not long after the beginning of the film hints a significant point: if the cosmopolitan conceptualization of globalism is potentially homogenizing, then the postnational paradigm I propose does not articulate the cosmopolitan ideal as to aspire to a world culture. Rather, it acknowledges if not celebrates the uniqueness of a locale that goes beyond national traits, and the understanding of a nation and the nationalist discourse can be transcended to another level in which multiple layers of identification are present.

An audition is therefore held to fulfill Mr. Representative's desire for a local band, and villagers from "all walks of life" participate. In the audition, an identity card is needed to confirm the local Hengchun identity of the participants, furthermore reinforcing the localness insisted. The urge to form a local band can be seen as a way of struggling for what (indigenous) Taiwanese means, and the capacity to embrace differences is vital. The band eventually recruits Frog the drummer, Malasun the guitarist, Dada the pianist, and Old Mao. This ensemble of eccentric villagers with different backgrounds suggests solidarities and bonding in a town that reaches over differences: linguistic, ethnics, and especially age. Thus, when Shiau asks, "Is it possible for inter-generational differences to be bridged and connections reestablished in a movie theater?" (200), the answer is quite positive. The sense of national togetherness is minimized to the scale of a small-town residence, and the national is at work in the form of the postnational. As Joseph remarks, "Postnational identifications open up those arenas that do not belong to the state by way of the notion of nation and point to those forces that replace the state in some instances, under the rising influence of a

globalizing logic that is based less and less on popular conceptions of the nation” (158). When it comes to generational differences, Old Mao is the character under the spotlight. He speaks for the elderly who ostensibly stands for traditions and the colonial memory, and the misfits he faces is typical of a town facing the many forces of globalization. Recruiting him into the band creates tension and incongruity, since he plays the *yueqin* (a traditional four-stringed Chinese musical instrument, Figure 2) and is later on forced to abandon it and play something else. The way he is able to recollect his once beloved instrument again towards the end of the film is suggestive and will be analyzed below. Whereas Old Mao is the root of traditions in the town, struggling to register the past and (re)negotiate with the present, Aga, someone who opts to leave and seeks opportunities, represents the younger generation who moves to Northern Taiwan i.e. Taipei to make a living. The demography of Taiwan indicates that Taipei is the commercial center, whereas people from the central and the south have to move upwards as if climbing up the social ladder for better paid jobs. Tourism sector also once concentrated on Taipei, but as briefly mentioned above, things have changed after the incredible success of *Cape No.7*, and the serene beauty and seaside of southern Taiwan became another tourists’ attraction. As we can see, the division *within* Taiwan is in a constant tug-of-war in terms of developing the urban and sustaining the rural. *Cape No.7* reaffirms a local but not necessarily national identity of belonging to *the* South—a locale striving for uniqueness regardless of the global, cosmopolitan outlook Taiwan tries to maintain. This in one way or another provokes audiences to rethink what kind of meanings nationalism entails in the context of Taiwan, where the nationalist discourse is always in flux.



**Figure 2. *Cape No.7*. Dir. We Te-sheng, 2008.**

The postnational way of seeing the conflicts in *Cape No.7* is therefore two-fold: conflicts arise when the new and the old collide, and there are conflicts within history itself. As mentioned above, the colonial history is toned down to an extent that bits and pieces are only mentioned very briefly in the film. For example, the off-screen voice narrates the colonial past at one point by merely saying Japan is the defeated country, and it is a national sin for the Japanese. In other words, history is represented not essentially as a burden but as a backdrop for cultural imaginations to evolve. Those who seek a serious national reexamination on the Japanese colonization may not find the film fitting their appetite, but the film introduces

another dimension to see the struggles between Taiwan and Japan. Japaneseness, as a matter of fact, is not necessarily remembered as traumatic scars left behind in some of the Taiwanese older generation. Again, Old Mao demonstrates such a prototype. At the beginning of the film, he is a mail deliverer—and his post is passed on to Aga because he gets injured in an accident. Their clash begins right away, that Aga respects neither his job nor traditions—he even abandons all the mails at home without delivering them. At one point he defends his misbehavior by saying that nobody uses mails nowadays; people use telephone. The ironic twist towards the end of the film, of course, is that he manages to deliver the most important mail—the love letters from the unnamed Japanese teacher six decades ago to his lover. Whilst Aga despises Tomoko's Japaneseness, it is Old Mao who manages to make Tomoko stay behind. Frustrated and put off by the messy local band, Tomoko decides to leave. When she is stepping out from the hotel, Old Mao appears and invites her to a banquet. Here comes an intriguing point: all of a sudden, Old Mao speaks in Japanese—he talks to Tomoko in Japanese. Once again, the language issue is manifested through a generation that experiences the Japanese colonization. Even though the film does not state so, it is understood that Old Mao is someone that has undergone the period; he is, however, not characterized as a role that goes against Tomoko. Instead, he is able to keep the “invader” behind. The post/colonial discourse and the oppressor-oppressed binary are not at all at work, and what we see is a romanticized and humanistic version of the ex-colonizer and colonized presented without a victimizer-victimized dichotomy. *Cape No.7* as a romantic comedy entails both romance and comical elements, which also partially explains why Aga and Tomoko abruptly develop.

### **From different languages to music as a shared language**

Tomoko finds the band extremely absurd and ridiculous but then it is going to perform on stage together with Kousuke Atari, a Japanese singer. The inclusion of Atari in the film serves several purposes: first of all, he plays double roles, that of Atari himself as well as the unnamed Japanese teacher. Audiences do not find it confusing but instead see resemblances going on between the two narratives by viewing Atari in both stories. Secondly, Atari also plays himself as a “healing/soothing singer” well-known in the Japanese context. His arrival, be it a coincidence or not, does soothe the relationship between Aga and Tomoko as well as the inside-outside split of Hengchun. It is, nevertheless, since his arrival that film becomes cheesier towards the very end. Atari arrives and observes Tomoko being melancholic; he asks her to be positive and expect the rainbow to emerge after the rain. The rainbow as a clichéd emblem for hope is introduced and is repeatedly seen since then. The film's positive outlook concerning Taiwan-Japan reunion is mildly suggested; on the textual level, it is Aga and Tomoko, as well as the unnamed Japanese teacher and “his” Tomoko, who are being reunited. The final performance of the band showcases two songs which bear both intertextual and intratextual meanings. These meanings demonstrate a culturally discursive space in which interpretations are not fixed and subject to the contexts one adopts to apply in reading them. The first song is “South of the Border”—from the title itself, at least two layers of analysis can be made. Firstly, Hengchun is located at the far south of Taiwan, precisely at the border, so the song connotes its geographical location. Taiwan is also Japan's south of the border during the colonial period, so the Japanese connection is also there. Secondly, another intertextual association can also be made, which is the novel of Haruki Murakami: *South of the Border, West of the Sun*. The intertextual borrowing of Murakami's novel title once again recalls and evokes the subtle relationship between Taiwan and Japan, not to mention the overarching

popularity of Murakami across the region, including but not limited to the Taiwanese context. Briefly put, *South of the Border, West of the Sun* is about Shimamoto and Haijime, a secretive woman and a man who has to choose between her and his wife after not seeing each other for many years. It is about the recollection of the past, nostalgia, and a yearning for the unknown. At first glance, one can immediately see some parallels between Shimamoto and Haijime and the two Tomokos and the Japanese teacher/Aga. We cannot tell whether Murakami's novel casts an impact on the film's narrative, but when it comes to the lyrics of the song, the connection is more than obvious. The chorus says, "When the sun shines on the rainy border of the south, I will try to retell and continue with the story which takes place in that year."<sup>7</sup> The sun is definitely referring to the Japanese owing to its national flag, and the retelling, or actually reenactment of the romance between Aga and Tomoko is precisely the continuation of the story between the Japanese teacher and his lover Tomoko. When Aga sings this song with the band, he confirms his love to Tomoko. His confession is arranged in such a way that audiences see a rather perplexing scene: the entire performance is projected onto a big screen right behind the band (Figure 3). When Aga faces Tomoko, we see the "real" Aga captured by the film's camera on the right and the projected Tomoko on the big screen captured by the camera in the film on the left (Figure 4). This reinforces the convoluted and ambivalent relationships between the Taiwanese and the Japanese as reflected by the song itself. This inevitably raises a doubt whether the reunion is to be deemed as real or simply imagined.



Figure 3. *Cape No.7*. Dir. We Te-sheng, 2008.

The crowd yells for an encore, and Old Mao steps on stage with his yueqin. The rest of the band members eventually do the same and choose the musical instruments that they are most comfortable with. Unrehearsed, they sing the Mandarin version of a famous German tale, "Heidenröslein", a poem written by Goethe with the music and melody set and composed by Schubert. I regard this as a threesome of the local (the band using "indigenous" instruments), the regional (Atari from Japan joining the ensemble, Figure 5), and the global (Aga and Atari singing a German score in their mother tongues respectively). I have been arguing in this article that the postnational deemphasizes national conflicts, transcends or

even transgresses the nationalist discourse, and offers an alternative route to decipher post/colonial sentiments and ambivalence, and this final scene reaffirms such assertion. The postnational arouses reverberations, sees the role the local/regional plays aside the national, and *appropriates* the global. Greeting strangers from all around and appropriating the global echo with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s claim and cosmopolitan ideal that “we have obligations to strangers” (153). If he argues that “[p]eople who complain about the homogeneity produced by globalization often fail to notice that globalization is, equally, a threat to homogeneity” (101), this final scene as well as *Cape No.7* as a whole show that homogeneity and heterogeneity do not necessarily go against each other. We see sameness and differences at work and coexist harmoniously; despite occasional disputes and negative sentiments, the film provides a different perspective to (re)examine colonial legacies and nationalism. The Taiwan-Japan cultural imaginary is not simply romanticized but is tackled via a community and a network of reception. The postnational does not essentially disregard politics—a point commonly and severely attacked by critics as one of the shortcomings of *Cape No.7*—but it offers a personal, individualistic, communal, and perhaps alternative way to see the relationship between a nation and its people, as well as a nation’s cinema and its spectatorship.



**Figure 4. *Cape No.7*. Dir. Wei Te-sheng, 2008.**

The very last scene of the film can fruitfully demonstrate this idea and wrap up the entire argument on the concept. When “Heidenröslein” is simultaneously sung by Aga and Atari, the camera cuts to the scene where the old Tomoko, the beloved girl of the unnamed Japanese teacher, is reading the love letters Aga has successfully brought to her. Not much emotion is observed, and the scene quickly shifts to a port—obviously echoing the opening scene when the Japanese teacher is leaving. A banner stating “retrocession of Taiwan” is clearly seen—almost the most explicit “political” statement concerning the Japanese colonization in the film. Audiences then see Tomoko bidding farewell to her lover on board, and the film gently ends. Wei Te-sheng intentionally tends not to dramatize the two final scenes, namely Tomoko bidding farewell to her lover and reading his letters. In contrast to some of the cheesy, exaggerated, and melodramatic moments in the film, Wei chooses not to overdo the finale—

in which he supposedly can—given the melancholic departure vis-à-vis the triumphant setting that rejoices the end of the Japanese occupation. I thus do not agree with the banal saying that *Cape No.7* fails to scrutinize colonial history. History itself becomes an interpretable text in the film which is subject to rereading and renegotiation; history becomes stories, and the political, as we can see, is personalized. The mild ending of *Cape No.7*—which can otherwise be intense and intensified—precisely leaves a vast space for discursive discussions and debates on what Japaneseness means to the search and construction of Taiwaneseeness. With “Heidenröslein” resonating both the Taiwanese and the Japanese voices and closing *Cape No.7*, viewers are left with a space for contemplations about their identity on various levels: the personal, the communal, the national, the regional, and the global. The intricate essence of sense of belonging—especially under the impact of globalization—is captured by Hedetoft and Hjort:

[B]elonging in globality is either a curse (globality as rootlessness), a blessing (globality as help against repression), or an opportunity (globality as freedom and progress); but in none of these cases is globality imagined as something people belong to. Our home may be open to the globe (liberal, tolerant, sensitive, multicultural), but the globe is not our home. “Belonging” spells different assumptions and implications in the two settings and the ever more crucial interaction between them. (xx, original emphasis)

This quote as a final touch can then nicely sum up the above idea concerning multiple identifications and belongings discussed in this article. Thanks to *Cape No.7* and the enlivenment of New Taiwan Cinema, nationalism and Taiwaneseeness can once again be seriously scrutinized and rethought.

This paper advocates a conceptualization of the postnational, and that the demographics of Taiwan underscores a split in understanding the landscape of the nation. The landscapes in question can be economic (the north, namely Taipei) and political (the blue-green split, namely the north versus the south). Interestingly, the cultural landscape and actually seascape of southern Taiwan, particularly Hengchun, is colored and flourished by the success and circulation of *Cape No.7* as a cultural product and wide-disseminating film. As mentioned earlier, the film shifts from the capital city that features neon lights and buzzing lifestyles to the simple and down-to-earth rural township. The constant tug-of-war between urbanity and the rural is manifested in *Cape No.7*, trespassing, transgressing, and transcending nationalism, the national cinema model, and nationalistic sentiments. Colonial memories are represented not as wounds and scars but are transmuted into an alternative form of cultural imaginary and postnational imagination. Locality, community, and belonging are highlighted and thus understood in a radically different light. This paper on the postnational is an attempt to put forward a different model in seeing Taiwan, its cinema, and its relationship with Japan aside the national, the post/colonial, and the global discourses. Whether the postnational paradigm is applicable to other films in the region may hopefully provoke further research. For example, what we have dealt with in this paper is the intricate relations between Taiwan and Japan, as well as the internal conflicts among the different demographics, generations, and ethnicities of Taiwan. What about the cases besides the Taiwan-Japan axis? If we have to handle a colonial past and its legacies between Taiwan and Japan, then what is even more difficult and sensitive for films to tackle is the traumatic memories of Japan’s military intrusion to China during World War II. Both historical facts and fictionalized accounts are recorded,



ranging from documentaries like Christine Choy and Nancy Tong's *In the Name of the Emperor* (1998) and Li Ying's *Yasukuni* (2007) to more recent feature films like Lu Chuan's *City of Life and Death* (2009) and Chen Kuo-fu and Gao Qunshu's *The Message* (2009). *City of Life and Death* and *The Message*, for instance, detail the same historical incident using very different strands of narrative. What is the underlying purpose of these filmmakers to recall the trauma and retell different stories? Are these films trying to remind people of a traumatic past, and what is being reclaimed by doing so? What are the nationalistic or even patriotic implications of these obviously political agendas? While Huang Xiaoming in *The Message* plays the role of Takeda—a Japanese colonel in the imperial army—is not at all bashed, why is Zhang Ziyi harshly condemned in taking up the role of a Japanese geisha in Rob Marshall's *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005)? Are nationalistic and patriotic sentiments selective and individualistic, which remind us of the postnational paradigm that promotes the inseparability of the personal and the political? These are some of the questions that further research may list down and ponder over, and the challenge to come to terms with them leaves behind an enormous discursive space, showing a lot of potentials of the postnational for critics and scholars to embark upon.



Figure 5. *Cape No.7*. Dir. We Te-sheng, 2008.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the overarching downfall of Taiwanese films, see Chris Berry, "Re-writing cinema: Markets, languages, cultures in Taiwan", especially p.151.

<sup>2</sup> Taiwanese culture, in particular popular culture, has been heavily influenced by the Japanese. This ranges from fashion and pop music to soap operas and television shows. Admittedly, the Korean wave has once blown across the East Asian region and left tremendous traces; it is, however, the Japanese impact that is relatively more long-lasting. See Leo Ching, "Imaginings in the Empires of the Sun: Japanese Mass Culture in Asia" in *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production* (eds. Arif Dirlik and Rob Wilson).

<sup>3</sup> See Hou's endorsement of *Cape No.7* in Shiau Hong-Chi's "Spectatorships, Pleasures, and Social Uses of Cinema: A Tentative Study of the Reception of *Cape No. 7*", p.189.

<sup>4</sup> See Berry, pp.144-145, for a detailed account of the origin of the language and the

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complexities involved in its usage across different parts within Taiwan.

<sup>5</sup> A cross-regional comparison here can be Samson Chiu's *Golden Chicken II* (2003), in which Hong Kong's people's anger and dissatisfaction with the HKSAR government in particular the Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa after the SARS outbreak are comically channeled through the female protagonist (Sandra Ng)'s yearning for a new, capable leader, wittingly played by Andy Lau. Unlike the Taiwanese scene, the political here is toned down to a more lighthearted representation.

<sup>6</sup> See the official, Japanese version of *Cape No.7*'s website: <http://www.kaikaku7.jp/>.

<sup>7</sup>Originally in Chinese

(當陽光再次回到那飄著雨的國境之南/我會試著把那一年的故事再接下去□完), my own translation.

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