

Chinese Diasporic Films:  
A Case Study in Transnational Cinema

David Hanley

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By: David Hanley

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Read and approved by the following jury members:

Paul Salmon External Examiner

John Locke Examiner

Peter Rist Supervisor

Approved by

September 19, 2013

Date

September 19, 2013

Date

Catherine Russell

Graduate Program Director

Catherine Wild

Dean of Faculty

## **ABSTRACT**

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David Hanley

In the 1980s and 90s, the mobile populations that have characterized our increasingly globalized world and the resultant creation of diasporic communities has been reflected in a large number of transnational films that challenge the model of national cinema. Diasporic films, which are acutely concerned with identity and examine the tension between assimilation and retention of the immigrant's home culture are transnational as they belong entirely neither to the adopted country in which they are made nor the homeland which they look back to. This study examines films made in roughly the same period that belong to a pan-Chinese diaspora, but are produced in the distinct geographical and cultural contexts of Taiwan and North America. Using a model influenced by the work of Hamid Naficy, this thesis performs a close analysis of these films by exploring the differing ways in which they represent "home" space (the ethnic enclave which can serve as either fortress or prison), "host" space (the often hostile area dominated by the host community) and "intermediate" space (the borderline territory where competing ethnicities interact) in expressing the strategies and negotiations central to the immigrant experience. In this way, this thesis aspires to map out the process in which the global is transformed into a multitude of hybrids through contact with local contexts.

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. . . and my family

*For my parents*

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## Introduction

In the Canadian film *Double Happiness* (1994, Mina Shum), the lead character, Jade Li, addresses the camera directly and describes her family as “very Chinese, if you know what I mean.” What exactly she does mean by this statement to some extent depends on who “you” is. On the most basic level, the comment creates a link between her and the audience that excludes the “very Chinese” characters, such as her father, the film presents. However, as Brenda Austin-Smith argues, “the phrase ‘if you know what I mean’ signals the multiple audiences Jade has in mind, including those whose knowledge arises from similar experiences of family membership and those whose ‘knowledge’ is, perhaps, rooted in stereotypes” (207). That writer-director Mina Shum is aware of these multiple audiences is shown by her comment recalling the experience of watching her films with an audience and hearing “trickles of different laughs from the crowd, depending on what cultural background that person came from” (Spaner 138).

It is this multiple address that is one of the most distinctive aspects of diasporic cinema. In the case of *Double Happiness*, a story concerning Chinese Canadians in Vancouver, Shum was conscious while making the film that members of her own community would experience the film in a different way than non-Chinese Canadians, which in turn is different from the way it would be experienced by non-Canadian Chinese, and different again from those who are neither Canadian nor Chinese. The film is certainly more “Chinese” than just about any other Canadian film, but it would likely strike most non-Canadian Chinese as “very Canadian” (Austin-Smith and Melnyk 2). Both views of the film are correct, as it plays off a variety of cultural references and assumptions, some of which are more accessible to the international Chinese audience

and others that play to a non-Chinese Canadian one. The ability to offer an “insider” perspective of a community that is both within and without distinct national borders, simultaneously local and transnational and consequently intensely preoccupied with identity, is a defining characteristic of diasporic cinema.

### **Transnational and Diasporic Cinema**

Diasporic films are narratives of immigration and exile where protagonists negotiate the tension between creating new identities appropriate to their new host country while deciding what to retain from their original homeland. These are not simply stories about immigrants, but stories about immigrant communities told by filmmakers who identify themselves as members of the diasporic community portrayed. Diasporic cinema has been a stream running through the history of film. From the Hollywood Golden Age films of Irish American directors such as John Ford and Leo McCarey to the pre-World War II Yiddish cinema and on to contemporary work, such as Magheri-French “Beur cinema” or Fatih Akin’s recent films set in Germany’s Turkish community, and on again to many other examples, the immigrant’s journey, either explicitly or in coded form, has been retold again and again. This thesis examines Chinese diasporic films made in two different locations, Taiwan and North America, during a period running from the early 1980s to 2000. Like *Double Happiness*, the films to be discussed can be seen as Chinese as they are made by ethnic Chinese filmmakers and concern ethnic Chinese communities that identify mainland China as their “motherland,” but are produced outside of the context of mainland Chinese national cinema.

Despite being products of different types of diasporic communities, the chosen films are all in dialogue with not only the countries in which they are made and their



respective national cinemas, but with their common homeland, and indeed with each other as members of the same international diaspora. They reflect a similar ongoing tension between assimilation and maintenance of a distinct ethnic identity, but their different geographic, historical and cultural contexts mean that while they ask similar questions, they do not necessarily produce the same answers. Even within a specific diaspora, it is possible to see different filmmakers produce different responses to these questions. It is the suggestion of this thesis that a useful way to explore the similar and different ways diasporic films respond to questions of identity is through an analysis of their spatial representations. The worlds presented in diasporic films can, through this analysis, be seen as a series of spaces, and the differing ways in which they represent “home” space (the ethnic enclave which can serve as either fortress or prison), “host” space (the often hostile area dominated by the host community) and “intermediate” space (the borderline territory where competing ethnicities interact) serve to illuminate how diasporic cinema can express the strategies and negotiations central to the immigrant experience.

What this model hopes to offer is an analytical tool that can map out the relations between the different films while respecting their diversity of responses. This thesis seeks to use this tool in discussing films made at roughly the same time that have a common root in Chinese culture, but are produced in two distinct political and cultural contexts. Examining how selected ethnic Chinese filmmakers working within these different contexts use space to express how immigrants deal with tensions related to cultural identity can point to the different ways a specific, if broadly defined, culture can evolve depending on the local circumstances it interacts with and produce resolutions to

the problems filmmakers raise that reflect their specific contexts. In particular, this thesis is interested in the ways these films juxtapose an “inside space,” typically associated with the immigrant family serving as a microcosm of the larger diasporic community, and an “outside space,” representing the host community, offering them as twin magnetic poles of the immigrant’s life.

The analytical strategy is strongly influenced by Hamid Naficy, who writes that in what he calls “accented cinema,” the *mise-en-scène* “conveys and embodies displacement and emplacement in its configuration of space and in the manner in which characters occupy the space” (2001: 153-154). Typically, “claustrophobic spaces,” featuring small areas, the frame cluttered with people or objects, parts of the screen blocked off or individuals framed in tight close-ups or frames-within-frames, such as doorways, are played off against “spaces of immensity,” large open areas, with figures in long shot or framed against sweeping landscapes (1994: 12). The question becomes which spaces are ethnically coded and what meanings are ascribed to these spaces. A closed space can be confining or nurturing, an open one liberating or lonely; and either can express ambivalence by mixing positive and negative attributes. The point is that in diasporic cinema, spaces can be used to express tensions related to the deterritorialized immigrant’s (and deterritorialized filmmaker’s) construction of identity.

Naficy’s concept of accented cinema encompasses more than just diasporic films. It is often referred to as “transnational cinema,” a term Naficy uses in his article “Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre” (1994), but abandons for the more nuanced and expansive “accented cinema” in his 2001 book *An Accented Cinema*. However, for the subjects discussed in this thesis, “transnational” is used for

largely the same purposes. This term refers to a group of films that have become larger and more visible as a result of the growth and proliferation of diasporic communities over the past few decades, a by-product of the large scale migrations that have characterized our increasingly globalized, transnational world. In a survey of recent literature on transnational cinema, Will Higbee and Song Hwe Lim point to three main approaches that scholars have taken to the subject. The first sees transnational films as a rejection of the concept of national cinema as “limiting,” since it is less useful in understanding “cinema’s relationship to the cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained within national boundaries” (9). The focus here is on conditions of production and distribution, looking at international co-productions, filmmakers who cross borders easily and are not identified with a particular national cinema or films that play the festival circuit or are distributed, perhaps even primarily intended, for audiences outside of the country in which they are made. A second approach they identify is studying transnational films as regional phenomena, “film cultures/national cinemas which invest in a shared cultural heritage and/or geo-political boundary” (9). A possible example is, of course, Chinese diasporic cinema, and while it is not the guiding theory of this thesis, it is important to engage with the question of the extent to which the concept of diasporic cinema challenges the idea of national, or supra-national, cinema. The third approach is one that is identified with Naficy, among others, and looks at films “characterized by issues of migration, loss and displacement that lead to identities in flux, which . . . challenge the stable and fixed (hegemonic) concept of the national” (2001: 10). According to their analysis, what is interesting about Chinese diasporic cinema is not its “Chineseness,” which it suggests is transformed by engagement with the local into

multiple and distinct hybrid entities, but its usefulness as a case study in transnational cinema. In support of this approach, Naficy argues for the presence of a group style, the “consistent use of technique across the works of several directors” (2001:20), among “accented” filmmakers of various ethnicities working in various places of the world, but all working outside the mainstream of their respective national cinemas and sharing backgrounds involving displacement and deterritorialization (2001:21).

Among “accented” films, Naficy identifies three major types: ethnic, exilic and diasporic. He does not see these as mutually exclusive categories. While some films may contain only the characteristics of one of them, many transnational films cross these borders as easily as they do national ones and contain a mixture of all three types in different measures (2001: 29). Ethnic films are primarily concerned with a diasporic community’s identity within the host society with relatively little attention given to the “motherland.” They are similar to the work of what Naficy calls “poststudio American ethnics” such as Woody Allen, but are made by filmmakers who are either immigrants or the children of immigrants, often belonging to non-white, postcolonial ethnic communities. Since this type of film “deals with the exigencies of life here and now” (Naficy 2001: 44) and “highlights links of the immigrant to the adopted country,” it is also the least distanced from mainstream national film industries (Marchetti 2006: 26). Conversely, exilic films are primarily concerned with the relationship between the immigrant and the country of origin. Rather than the “here and now,” exilic filmmakers are concerned with recreating the “sight, sound, taste, and feel of an originary experience, of an elsewhere at other times” (Naficy 2001: 11). Appropriately, diasporic films are in some ways a hybrid of the other two types, feeding on narrative tension created by a

preoccupation with both the “here and now” *and* the “elsewhere at other times.” This reflects the nature of diaspora itself, which Yingchi Chu describes as “the space between ‘here’ and ‘there,’ between their resident society in their host territory, and their homeland of origin” (25). Rather than a vertical and primary relationship with either host or homeland, diasporic films exist at the centre of a series of horizontal and plural relationships with host, homeland and the variety of other communities within the same specific worldwide diaspora. (Naficy 2001: 14, Marchetti 2006: 26).

William Safran defines “diaspora” as an expatriate minority community that shares several, though not necessarily all, of a series of defining characteristics, which include a history of dispersion from an original homeland to two or more “peripheral” regions; a collective memory or myth about that homeland; a feeling of alienation stemming from a belief that full acceptance by the host country has not been given and might be impossible to achieve; a vision of the ancestral homeland as the community’s true home to which they or their descendants will return “when conditions are appropriate”; a collective commitment to the maintenance (or restoration), safety and prosperity of the original homeland; and an “ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity” defined by a continuing relationship to the homeland (Safran 83-84).

Although the focus in Safran’s definition shows a preoccupation with homeland that is more aligned with exilic cinema than the diasporic type, it contains points that are useful in distinguishing between the two. Naficy argues that while both diaspora and exile may be rooted in a traumatic, forced scattering of a population, diasporas can also be created by economically motivated migrations or as part of a colonial project. Further, while an exile can be individual or collective, diasporas are by definition collective in origin and

destination and “the nurturing of a collective memory, often of an idealized homeland, is constitutive of the diasporic community” (2001: 14). Therefore, while exilic films can be about individuals alone in a strange land, diasporic films always present their protagonists in the context of the diasporic community. It is interesting that Naficy qualifies his description of diasporic collective memory as *often*, rather than *always*, being of an idealized homeland, since in films about non-exilic diasporas the homeland might not be constructed as a lost paradise, but instead represented at least as ambivalently as the adopted country.

There are a number of formal and thematic characteristics which Naficy and others associate with diasporic cinema. Among the most important is hybridity, the mixing of elements by the interaction of the diasporic protagonist (and the film text in which the protagonist appears) with both host and home country. Stuart Hall writes: “Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (394). The resulting hybridity “provides an alternative to complete assimilation, on the one hand, and a fundamentalist adherence to old cultural forms, on the other” (Leach 125). It is this tension, according to Patricia Erens, that creates a “diasporic aesthetic” which “both produces and is produced by a specific cultural environment” (46). There is a paradoxical outcome, since it is implied that while there is a shared aesthetic that cuts across borders and cultures, each diasporic instance, through its distinctiveness, creates a unique variation – a hybrid of local and global that is always the same, but always different.

Not surprisingly for films associated with the interaction of different cultures through immigration, one of the most popular narrative forms is the journey film. Often,

this involves recreating the immigrant's journey in allegoric form: from city to country, from ghetto to suburb, from dust bowl to California. As Naficy writes, "these journeys are not just physical and territorial but are also deeply psychological and philosophical" (2001: 6), and often reflect a parallel change in identity from exilic to diasporic and on the way to ethnic. These coded journeys will also often feature journeys within journeys, where members of the diaspora are separated from community and family, recreating an exilic situation in the adopted country and reflecting an ongoing "preoccupation with deterritorialization and unbelonging" (Naficy 2001: 290).

This thesis is particularly interested in the way diasporic films use the narrative device of the family as a microcosm for the larger diasporic community, typically as "a unit that is under tremendous pressure" (Naficy 2001: 290). While such a pressure often plays out in frayed personal relationships, it is often sparked by the difficulty of maintaining traditional customs and markers of identity in an assimilationist host society. Several of the films to be discussed frame questions of identity through the juxtaposition between traditional parents and restive offspring who were either born in the new country or arrived there as a child, a situation not coincidentally mirrored by many of the filmmakers associated with diasporic cinema. These filmmakers also share their young protagonists' weaker connection to the diaspora's collective memory of homeland. However, while their films often offer a sympathetic treatment of youthful rebellion, it does not necessarily mean that the attitude toward the traditional older generation is hostile. On the contrary, the loosening of the tie to parents and homeland is often tinged with nostalgia, of which Walter Benjamin once wrote: "Anything about one which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image" (87). In this way, the

nostalgic curiosity that diasporic protagonists and filmmakers experience when calculating what they have lost in the formation of their hybridized identities, and their recreation of this loss as a cinematic image, responds to and echoes their parents' yearning for an identity based on a "pure local past when things were uncorrupted (in a sense not yet hybridized)" (Chu Yiu Wai 323). It is the looming disappearance of the traditional culture which creates interest in it. The implied identification of filmmaker with young diasporic protagonist is another common feature of these films and Naficy includes "the inscription of the filmmakers" on to the film text among their defining characteristics (2001: 276). The inscription of the filmmakers appears in various forms, including direct address to the camera, voiceover narration, self-reflexivity, incorporation of autobiographical details into the storyline and narratives framed as memory pieces.

### **Chinese Diasporic Cinema**

Given its fractious political history, involving centuries of division and civil wars and a disastrous encounter with Western imperialism, along with its multiplicity of languages and wildly diverse regions, there is an argument that a large proportion of mainland Chinese films can be read as diasporic. There have certainly been many films about identity forged through long journeys, crossing borders and exile, and precursors can be found in Chinese literature that share the same preoccupations. Indeed, of the "Four Great Classical Novels" of pre-modern Chinese fiction, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* deals with a period when the country was divided into three feuding regions, *Journey to the West* is a transformative journey narrative, and *The Water Margin* is the tale of a community made up of political exiles plotting their return home. All have been made into films, with *The Water Margin* a particular favourite of Hong Kong filmmakers,



who seem to find a special resonance in it and have produced numerous remakes and variations. However, there is disagreement about the extent to which generalizations can be made about Chinese culture, let alone cinema.

Sheldon H. Lu argues that as a result of various factors, notably the division of China into a number of distinct geopolitical entities in the nineteenth century (mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) and the globalization of the Chinese film industry's mechanisms of financing, production and distribution in the 1990s era of transnational capitalism, "Chinese *national* cinema can only be understood in its *transnational* context" (1997: 3). He considers the Chinese film industry a paradigm for the changes in world cinema, and the growth of transnational cinema a challenge to the idea of national cinema. For example, if a production receives most of its financing from Hollywood, features stars from various parts of Asia speaking Mandarin in a melange of accents, is filmed in mainland China, has a Taiwanese-American director who has also worked in Europe, and is marketed primarily for a worldwide rather than a domestic audience, can you call it a Chinese film? If not, then what *is* the best way to describe *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, Ang Lee)? More and more, one thing it is not is unusual. In addition, an increasingly mobile population has also changed the nature of the ethnic Chinese diaspora and the potential market for Chinese films, since the combined population of China's primary "peripheral areas," Hong Kong (7.1 million), Taiwan (23.3 million) and Singapore (5.2 million), is now less than the approximately 36 million other "overseas Chinese," an increasing proportion of them concentrated in North American cities (Fore 117). Further complicating the question of who these films are speaking to is a simultaneous increase in interest from non-Chinese audiences since, as David Bordwell

pointed out in the late 1990s, “Chinese language filmmaking, active in several countries, has become central to world film culture” (141). Sheng-mei Ma notes that this newly transnational audience multiplies the ways in which these films are consumed, since “what a (Chinese) immigrant audience considers a nostalgic moment over an irretrievable Chineseness may turn out to be an exotic/ethnic tour for a Westerner venturing into an alien culture” (193). The multiplication of sources for the films and an increasing variety of destinations inevitably begs the question of just how Chinese these films continue to be and whether it has led to an inevitable dilution of cultural specificity.

This, in turn, raises the problem of defining Chinese cultural specificity. Steve Fore notes increasing debate among scholars concerning the notion of a “cultural China,” defining it as “a universalizing assertion of pride and unity that ostensibly connects all people of Chinese ethnicity all over the world” (117). This idea has been the subject of withering comment. Aiwā Ong criticizes any positioning of a singular history or “cultural core” as a primary and fixed source for identity as an “essentializing notion of Chineseness,” tartly remarking that “sometimes we forget that we are talking about one-quarter of the world’s population” (111). Gina Marchetti also argues this is a flawed approach since while China is indeed a nation, it is also “a divided political, polyglot, multiethnic, multi-cultural entity, with dramatic rifts between classes, genders, sexual orientations, etc.” (1998: 69). James Udden agrees, writing that “what Chinese culture means in Taiwan is radically different than what it means in mainland China, or even Hong Kong” (7). In any examination of a Chinese diasporic film, Ong, Marchetti and Udden’s approaches would focus more on what it reveals about transnational cinema or

individual national cinemas than what it might say about a supra-national, border-crossing Chinese cinema.

On the other hand, Nick Browne, warning against overemphasizing the differences between China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, asserts there is a “common cultural tradition of social, ideological, and aesthetic forms that stands behind and informs Chinese cinema as a whole” (1). For him, it is important to balance the differences created by geography and history with common cultural elements, because while it is impossible to refute the hazards of insisting on a single hegemonic Chinese culture, it is equally impossible to deny the presence of common cultural markers in these films regardless of their provenance. Further, no matter how distinct from each other the cinemas of mainland China, Taiwan and other ethnic Chinese diasporas have become, there is a relationship between them that does not exist between any one of them and, say, Swedish or Uruguayan cinema. Therefore, while this thesis is primarily interested in Chinese diasporic films because of their transnational character, their common Chineseness is also implicated. In particular, while spatial analysis has been used by Naficy and others on all diasporic films, it becomes particularly useful in the Chinese case because the traditional Confucian model of social order is partly based on the concept of “inside” and “outside,” with the extended family being the primary inside grouping. In this system, individuals might find family rules and hierarchies restrictive, but breaking away means they no longer “belong” and therefore can no longer benefit from the family’s help (Levitin 275). A more perfect analogy for the relationship between the immigrant and the diasporic community is hard to imagine.

This thesis examines selected films from two of China's major diasporas: Taiwan and North America. There are of course many sub-communities within these large groups and many other Chinese diasporic communities scattered around the globe, but these two communities are useful because they have produced representative examples of films about the Chinese immigrant experience, they comprise distinctly different types of diasporic communities, and the period examined was particularly important for both of them.

In Taiwan, a long period of martial law ended in 1987, and the next decade brought a series of reforms that led to a gradual transition from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy. Part of this reform process involved a relaxation of censorship, allowing filmmakers to explore the post-World War II origins of the state, in particular its blood-soaked takeover by anti-communist refugees from mainland China and the ensuing societal division between the diasporic *waishengren*, post-1945 arrivals who monopolized political power during the martial law period and make up about 15% of the population, and *benshengren*, Taiwanese of Chinese descent who make up about 84% of the population (the remaining 1% being aboriginal) (Udden 17). In North America, the 1980s and 90s featured the emergence of multiculturalism as an intellectual and policy issue (Marks 2), particularly in Canada, and the related release of several films by a new generation of Chinese-American and Chinese-Canadian filmmakers who, in the context of often racist or patronizing portrayals of their communities, began to take control of the images that represented them on film.

One diasporic community exercised political control despite its minority status, which persisted even though its ethnicity was shared with the majority, while a second

was a largely powerless minority faced with a much larger, and often hostile non-Chinese host community. In each case, a major component of the community's adaptation was an abandonment of the first generation immigrant definition as an exilic community in favour of a search for an identity that could encompass both their Chinese origins and the sense that their communities had developed identities clearly distinct from mainland China. In both cases, political and cultural changes that made members of these diasporas revise earlier ideas of identity were reflected in films made by members of these communities, and above all that is what these diasporas, in their own distinct ways, have in common during the period discussed.

### **Methodology**

This thesis will examine selected films using an analytical model influenced by the work of Hamid Naficy. As discussed, he argues that the diasporic filmmaker, geographically cut off from his homeland but not integrated into his adopted country, is deterritorialized. This leads to a preoccupation with place which is expressed through representations of "open" and "closed" spaces through the use of *mise-en-scène*. Among the strategies he lists that are used to create open spaces are "external locations and open settings and landscapes, bright natural lighting, and mobile and wandering diegetic characters" (2001: 153). Conversely, closed spaces are associated with "closed-shot compositions, tight physical spaces within the diegesis, barriers within the *mise-en-scène* and the shot that impede vision and access, and a lighting scheme that creates a mood of constriction and blocked vision" (2001: 213). Naficy also discusses "transitional" spaces. These are transitional and transnational spaces that are not associated with either host or homeland and can be either spaces associated with travel, such as "borders, tunnels,

seaports, airports, and hotels” or means of transportation, such as trains or buses (2001: 5). Naficy notes that as “people rarely go from a place of origin directly to a permanent place of exile,” that these “transitional places” also play a part in forming the immigrant’s new identity (2001: 152). He describes these spaces as “cathartic borders,” sites of “encounter, confession and transformation” (Naficy 2001: 234; Yue 17-18). As the films this thesis focuses on are not, for the most part, journey narratives, Naficy’s concept will be adapted through the use of the concept of “diasporic space” as proposed by Avtar Brah, who defines it as that place “‘inhabited’ not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous” (181). Since the immigrant’s integration into the host society is no more direct than the journey from origin to permanent place of exile, this thesis proposes the existence of “intermediate spaces” which are not used to represent host or homeland. Instead, these are the spaces in which members of a diasporic community come into contact with representatives of the host culture. They are, in a sense, also transitional even though no literal border is crossed, as they chart a necessary passage in the construction of the immigrant’s new hybrid identity. That is, although Naficy’s “transitional spaces” are literally places or vehicles where travel takes place, this thesis’ concept of “intermediate spaces” refers to actual places, but any travel that occurs is typically metaphorical. As with what this thesis calls “home” and “host” space, the meaning ascribed to “intermediate” space can be either positive, negative, or a mixture of the two. As Naficy writes, “the connotations of open, closed, and transitional forms do not reside inherently or permanently in these forms; their significance and meaning must be derived from the contexts in which they are deployed” (2001: 154).

In Chapter One, this analytical model will be used to explore diasporic cinema in the context of Taiwan by examining several films by Hou Hsiao-hsien. Hou was the first filmmaker to take advantage of the relaxation of martial law to probe the violent origins of modern Taiwan and the subsequent ethnic tension and ruthless persecution of political opposition. He is also a diasporic figure, having been born in Guangdong, in mainland China, in 1947 and moved to Taiwan at the age of two, making him a member of the *waishengren* minority. His parents initially expected to stay only a few years before returning “home” to China and his films are intimately concerned with the difficulties facing diasporic newcomers like his family. In *A Summer at Grandpa’s* (1984) and *A Time to Live, a Time to Die* (1985), Hou uses small town rural settings to represent mainland China and the traditional values the immigrant generation identifies with their homeland to track the fading of the *waishengren* dream of a triumphal return to the mainland and their children’s waning commitment to their community’s collective diasporic myths. *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983) and *Dust in the Wind* (1986) are classic journey narratives, following groups of young men who leave their small towns to find work in larger metropolitan centers. Usually discussed in terms of their portrayal of the country’s industrialization or the lead character’s coming of age, they can also be read as coded retellings of the immigrant journey, with small town and big city standing in for China and Taiwan. Spatial representation is used in an innovative way to portray the arrival and takeover of Taiwan by his parent’s generation of *waishengren* in *A City of Sadness* (1989). Finally, *Good Men, Good Women, Good Women* (1995) and *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996) will be discussed in terms of how they use space to portray the death of the exilic dream and its implications for his community’s search for identity.

In Chapter Two, selected films from the period where the rise of multiculturalism and independent cinema opened space for members of ethnic Chinese communities in North America to tell their stories onscreen will be examined. The main subject of this chapter is Mina Shum, who was born in Hong Kong in 1966 to parents who had moved there from mainland China and continued on to Vancouver, landing there when Shum was one. Her first feature film, *Double Happiness* (1994), was one of the best, as well as most popular, of films that emerged in Canada in the 1990s as a result of the federal government's multiculturalism project. One filmmaker whose work will be used to explore Shum's use of space to express diasporic tensions is Wayne Wang, who was born in Hong Kong in 1949, also to mainland Chinese parents, attended university in San Francisco, and then returned there in the late 1970s after gaining experience in the Hong Kong film industry. His pioneering films *Chain Is Missing* (1982) and *Dim Sum* (1984) offer an interesting counterpoint to Shum, coming as they do from a larger, more established immigrant community.

### **Literature Review**

Stuart Hall argues there are at least two ways of approaching the concept of "cultural identity." The first posits the existence of a single culture, held in common by "people with a shared history and ancestry," which provides "stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" and persists underneath any surface changes required by adapting to changing times or geography (223). The second position, preferred by Hall, is that history intervenes to create significant differences. While recognizing inevitable similarities related to common origins, cultural identity should be



seen as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being,’” a dynamic hybrid undergoing constant transformation through interaction with “place, time, history and culture” (225).

William Safran also emphasizes the local. He argues that, despite not meeting all his criteria, the various Chinese expatriate communities can all be considered genuine diasporas. However, he draws a distinction between those communities, particularly in the United States and Canada, where the homeland myth and, therefore, diaspora consciousness, have become attenuated due to the lessening of discrimination and consequent expansion of economic opportunities, which in turn have led to a weakening of the connection to the Chinese language and culture, and those like Taiwan and Hong Kong, which exist in Chinese-language societies (89). This thesis will suggest that although the distinction Safran draws is undeniable, pressures caused by what Hall would describe as the intervention of “history” have led to the creation of distinct hybrid identities in both diasporas discussed.

These approaches are related to that of Naficy, who writes that “loosened from the biological moorings of blood and descent, identity is now recognized as socially produced” (269). This goes back to the roots of the concept of transnational cinema in postcolonial theory, with part of its project being the dismantling of the idea of national cinema as an extension of a western (neocolonial) construct of national culture (Higbee and Lim 9, Chu Yiu Wai 321). His use of “accented style” allows him to sweep away “national” labels and find formal similarities that “cut across gender, race, nationality, and ethnicity, as well as across boundaries of national cinemas, genres, and authorship” (2001: 39). However, his analysis only applies, as Naficy notes, to films on the margins of national industries. Transnational cinema exists as an alternative to dominant practices,

but national cinema persists and is an important element in the hybrids created in various diasporas. As Chris Berry writes, “no transnational cinema exists without encountering and negotiating national spaces and cultures” (2010: 112). So while this thesis finds arguments concerning the centrality of history and the local very powerful, it does not entirely reject the importance of pan-Chinese cultural markers in the films discussed.

Hou Hsiao-hsien’s films are not generally discussed as being primarily diasporic. Naficy, for example, never mentions him. In *No Man an Island* (2009), James Udden argues that place and history are the most important influences on Hou’s work. He suggests that locating Hou’s distinctiveness in his roots in Chinese culture is “essentialist” (1), since it is a culture that is so varied and multi-faceted that “to merely say Hou’s films are very Chinese does not say very much at all” (7). For Udden, Hou’s identification with the *benshengren* majority rather than his own *waishengren* community is the key to discussing his work, which “expresses an ambivalent hybridity” and an overall hesitant sense of identity (118). Fredric Jameson, in “Remapping Taipei” (1994), also emphasizes the distinctive Taiwanese quality of Hou’s films, discussing them in terms of their mapping the industrialization and modernization of the country. While he sees the rootless, atomized characters who are cut off from tradition, history or a sense of a shared national identity that are found in films by Hou or other New Taiwanese Cinema directors, such as Edward Yang, to be typical of anywhere in the modern industrialized world, Taipei’s post-1945 political and cultural history offers a unique vantage point to chart these changes. Nick Browne, on the other hand, sees “a strong sense of the continuity of Chinese culture and history” in Hou’s films, which he discusses as a “sustained meditation on the social evolution of Taiwan and the personal and familial

meaning of the progressive urbanization of the island” (5). While all these scholars recognize the importance of the fading of the dream of returning to the mainland, none of them treat Hou’s work as diasporic. William Tay offers an insightful analysis when he notes “a constant tension between two worlds, or perhaps between two value systems” running through Hou’s work (155), but does not suggest this city-country opposition, which the other writers also emphasize, might also be seen as a displacement of a similar China-Taiwan tension. This thesis does not suggest they are in any way wrong, but it is possible that a new lens might offer a different, and legitimate, perspective.

Laura U. Marks places Chinese-Canadian and Chinese-American films of this period in the context of the growing force of multiculturalism and the related changes in the availability of funding for non-commercial cinema (2), while Brenda Austin-Smith notes that Mina Shum’s work expresses an ambivalence to both home and host culture that easily fits into Naficy’s transnational model(209). While filmmakers like Mina Shum and Wayne Wang can be discussed in terms of their relationships to specific localities (Vancouver and San Francisco, respectively), this thesis argues that despite their different conclusions concerning relationships with the diasporic communities they belong to, they share important affinities that help explore and illuminate questions relating to Chinese diasporic cinema.

## Chapter 1: Hou Hsiao-hsien, a Taiwanese Director

In Olivier Assayas' 1997 documentary *HHH – un portrait de Hou Hsiao-hsien*, Taiwan's best known international filmmaker is asked whether he considered himself a Chinese or Taiwanese director, and Hou answers: "Cultural-wise you can't deny that you are Chinese. But the political reality . . . [is] you can't deny that you are Taiwanese. A Taiwanese director." What being Taiwanese precisely means is one of the central concerns of Hou's films of the 1980s and 90s, and it is intimately tied to his investigation of the island nation's history and the implications that investigation has on his ambivalent feelings toward the diasporic community he was born into. This ambivalence, in turn, can be read in the way he uses space to express these feelings.

Any discussion of Hou's work has to begin with Taiwan's past. As June Yip writes: "Of all the New Cinema directors, no one has been more concerned with Taiwanese history" (140). His films are set in specific times and play off specific historical events that, even if they are rarely spelled out and are instead presented in indirect and suggestive ways, add layers of meaning to the episodic and quotidian actions that tend to comprise the narratives. They also serve to undermine the official history then sanctioned by the Taiwan government and enforced by both its schools and its police. In exploring the question of the manner in which local events transform the general category of Chinese diasporic cinema into something specifically Taiwanese, the dilemmas surrounding identity created by the country's historical circumstances are central.

## Historical Context

Probing Taiwan's past was necessary because the government of the Taiwan where Hou grew up pursued a project of constructing a national identity built on a series of lies. The first of these lies was that the Kuomintang Party (KMT), which took over Taiwan at the end of World War II, was the legitimate ruler of all of China. In fact, the KMT and its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, had been decisively defeated in 1949 by the communist People's Liberation Army after years of civil war. Having fled to Taiwan, its continued existence was owed to the military umbrella of the United States, who stationed its 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet in the Strait of Taiwan in 1950, at the beginning of the Korean War. Through strict control of the information media and education ministry, the KMT asserted a claim to be the "rightful heir" to thousands of years of Chinese imperial tradition and for decades maintained the pretence that a triumphant return to reassert control over mainland China was imminent (Yip 139). The generation of refugees from the mainland that believed this is well represented in Hou's work, notably the parents in *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*, who own only cheap bamboo furniture because a return "home" can happen any time.

The second lie was that the KMT takeover of Taiwan was both nonviolent and popular. The island, located about 180 km off the southeast coast of mainland China, had been a colony of Japan since 1895, but was transferred to KMT control with the Japanese surrender in 1945. Since most of the population was ethnic Chinese, there was initially popular support for a return to Chinese rule. However, the mixture of incompetence, corruption and brutality that would result in the KMT being chased off the mainland was soon in evidence in Taiwan. The new overlords centralized police, military, judicial and

administrative powers, and then filled all but the lowest positions with new arrivals from the mainland while squeezing out the native Taiwanese (Udden 92). Protests against the regime led to the notorious “228 incident,” when, on February 28, 1947, soldiers fired into a mob of demonstrators. In the aftermath, the KMT briefly lost control of the island, until troop reinforcements arrived and plunged into an orgy of indiscriminate killing. In the immediate aftermath, roughly 30,000-40,000 Taiwanese were murdered or “disappeared.” Some estimate the death toll to have been as high as 100,000 (Udden 94-95). Martial law was declared in 1949 and a “White Terror” that targeted leftists and any other regime opponents was conducted throughout the 1950s and 60s. By the time martial law ended in 1987, Taiwan had 29,000 political prisoners, many of them tortured, between three and four thousand executed, and hundreds of thousands of others attacked, persecuted, or otherwise harassed (Udden 134). For nearly forty years, the government denied the 1947 massacre had even occurred (Udden 17) and to bring up the subject of the 228 Incident during the martial law period was grounds for a charge of treason (Udden 95).

The third lie was that there was no division between the Taiwanese and the newcomers. The refugees from the mainland, known as *waishengren* (“outer province people”), would come to make up roughly 15% of the population. The 1945-1949 period saw them arrive in a growing flood, with 1.5 million landing in 1949 alone (Udden 21). The Taiwanese of Chinese descent resident before 1945, known as *benshengren* (“original province people”), are roughly 84% of the population, with aboriginals making up the remaining 1%. In the wake of the 228 Incident, the government ensured the *benshengren* would have a prominent role in the economy and benefit from economic

development, but political offices were tightly controlled by the *waishengren* (Udden 22). In addition, the KMT used its control of education and the information media to impose a single, mainland Chinese culture by suppressing anything seen as “distinctly Taiwanese” (Udden 24). For example, beginning in 1951, and extending into the 1970s, only Mandarin, the mother tongue of the majority of mainland Chinese and most of the *waishengren*, was taught in schools, with any use of Taiwanese or other minority Chinese dialects harshly punished (Udden 24). This created a gap between the official Taiwan, with a fossilized and homogenous “Chinese” culture, and the real Taiwan society which, as Douglas Kellner writes, “is genuinely hybridized, containing an amalgam of many different cultures, ranging from various Chinese traditions, Japanese or European colonizers, and U.S. and global culture” (Kellner).

These three lies were interdependent and mutually reinforcing. As June Yip notes, the KMT’s “institutionalized remembrance and careful preservation of a ‘coherent’ Chinese tradition” that it could claim to be heir to was ultimately reliant on “organized forgetting” (139). This has an effect on any definition of Taiwanese identity. James Udden argues that this “imaginary” existence has eventually trained the Taiwanese, regardless of background, to reject the ontology of “imagined community” that typically provides a group with its shared sense of national identity (13). This is the background to the filmmakers identified with Taiwanese New Cinema in the 1980s seeing one of their chief objectives as being to challenge the official version of history through construction of “historical representations of the ‘Taiwanese experience’ on film” and “claim cinematic space for Taiwanese ‘popular memory’” (Yip 140). By showing Taiwan life as it really was instead of the way the government pretended it was, they intended to help

foster the kind of shared national identity the KMT had failed to provide during its long years in power. At the very least, rejection of the official fictions left filmmakers, as it left all Taiwanese, with the question that if being Taiwanese is not what the government claimed it was, then what did it mean to be Taiwanese?

### **Hou Hsiao-hsien**

Hou Hsiao-hsien was born in 1947 in Guangdong, mainland China, and moved to Taiwan at the age of two. His family belonged to the transient Hakka minority, which had been at times the subject of persecution from mainland China's Han majority. This community spoke the Hoklea dialect rather than Mandarin, and was one of the sources of pre-1945 migrants to Taiwan. Although Hou was not raised in a Hoklea-speaking community, Udden plausibly suggests his linguistic minority background pushed him away from identification with other *waishengren*. Another influence he points to is Hou's growing up in a small town in southern Taiwan, where most of his contemporaries were *benshengren*, and where he consequently became fluent in Taiwanese. (Udden 17-18, Kellner). It is certain that Hou's version of Taiwan is multilingual rather than the officially sanctioned Mandarin-speaking image preferred by the government. Mutual incomprehension between language groups existing underneath the facade of a single "Chinese" culture surfaces frequently in Hou's films. Notable examples include the inability of villagers to understand the grandmother asking for directions to China in *A Time to Live, a Time to Die* and a negotiation between gangsters increasing in tension because of a laborious translation process in *A City of Sadness*. An additional factor in Hou's alienation from the *waishengren* was the premature death of his father, a low-level bureaucrat who initially expected to return to China after a brief sojourn in Taiwan. This



item of family history may also be related to the frequent identification of patriarchal authority figures with China and traditional values, and the displacement of these figures during the course of Hou's narratives (Tay 157-158). For whatever specific reason (or reasons), Hou developed a sense of rootlessness related to his diasporic status. He may have identified with the *benshengren*, but he knew he was not one of them. As he tells Olivier Assayas in *HHH*: "You felt like there was no family graveyard. You just don't belong."

The film industry that Hou entered in the late 1970s was, as it had been since the arrival of the KMT, exclusively government-financed and controlled (Kellner). Until the early 1960s, only a handful of feature films were produced, and they served the government's propaganda ends. For example, *Together Forever* (1951, Xu Xinfu) claimed that any friction between *benshengren* and *waishengren* was the fault of communist troublemakers (Udden 30). An example of the thoroughness of KMT censorship in this period regarding representations of the mainland is that even its own propaganda films could not show any Communist Party flags or emblems, or any image of mainland Communist Party Chairman Mao Tse-tung (Udden 31). Even after government control relaxed, a film such as *Spring Outside of the Fence* (1986, Lee You-ning) was typical in eliding any difference between mainlander and islander, offering a nostalgic melodrama that presented a history of Taiwan from 1949 through to the 1980s in which there were *only* former mainlanders (and their children). Even after the end of martial law, filmmakers remained circumspect. Yu Kan-ping's *People Between Two Chinas* (1989), a drama where a married Taiwanese businessman and his family reunites in the "neutral ground" of Hong Kong with the family he left behind in China in 1949,

only hints at Taiwan's ethnic friction. The Taiwanese wife may feel inferior to her mainland husband and fear he will return to his Chinese wife, but it is ultimately all in her mind, and her understanding this is the key to making the temporary reunion a success.

Beginning in the 1960s, the Taiwanese government attempted to go beyond straightforward propaganda by encouraging a style known as "healthy realism," which featured stories of the everyday life of "common people," usually set in rural areas, which mixed paeans to economic development with affirmations of traditional values (Udden 16-17). Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh describes these films as an attempt "to define a national cinema coded with cultural harmony, agricultural progress, and development" (165). They presented an idealized Taiwan with no ethnic strife and where everybody spoke Mandarin. The heroes were often government employees, and embodied the ideal of an accountable and efficient administration. This laundered version of Taiwan life was at odds with the reality of endemic political oppression and a popular expression (among *benshengren*, at least) being "getting involved in politics is like eating dog shit" (Udden 19).

Hou's early films were not far from the "healthy realism" template. For example, *The Green Green Grass of Home* (1983) features a young schoolteacher from Taipei (pop singer Kenny Bee) who learns to appreciate the small town and its traditional values, wooing a pretty fellow teacher (played by another pop singer, Meifeng Chen) while leading a crusade to save a local river from pollution, with full and admiring help from the local authorities. This film is, of course, not typical of his subsequent work, but it has some interesting pointers to it. There is the dichotomy between city and country, with the

countryside associated with traditional values and an ambivalent attitude toward the modernity of Taipei, which is represented by the teacher's upstanding parents, but also by his trashy ex-girlfriend. Also, while Hou did not attempt an honest portrayal of relations between ethnic groups, he did include a sympathetic aboriginal family and at least hinted at the existence of racial discrimination in an otherwise nearly perfect society.

Rather than discussing Hou's films chronologically, this thesis suggests that a fruitful approach would be to explore them in terms of their primary spatial relationships. In *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and *A Summer at Grandpa's*, the central contrast is between a family house and the countryside outside of it. In *The Boys from Fengkuei* and *Dust in the Wind* it is between small rural town and large industrial city. In *A City of Sadness*, the opposition is not between opposing spaces, but over spaces that are contested between native Taiwanese and encroaching mainland Chinese. Finally, in *Good Men, Good Women* and *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, the binary is between interiors and exteriors that represent idealized and realistic versions of mainland China. Analyzing these spatial representations using the model proposed in the introduction that identifies "home" (associated with the immigrant homeland), "host" (associated with the adopted country) and "intermediate" (the contested area where the two cultures meet) spaces will situate these films as diasporic cinema and suggest possible answers to the questions raised in the films concerning Taiwanese identity and how local circumstances have transformed any notion of pan-Chinese national cinema.

While Hou's films are not typically discussed as diasporic, they possess many characteristics associated with transnational cinema. They are made by a filmmaker who arrived in Taiwan as a child and is conscious of his difference from the majority

population. This sense of not belonging is reflected in narratives which hinge on the arrival of an outsider protagonist. Several are journey narratives that retell the immigrant's passage in coded form and posit a homeland in a community's collective idealized vision of mainland China. Beyond this, characteristics listed by Naficy as central to accented films that are also found in Hou's work include the use of multiple languages, having ethnically coded *mise-en-scène* and iconography, the inscription of the filmmaker's voice in the film text, the recreation of exile or structured absences of characters that echo the experience of losing direct contact with family members and foregrounding the use of letters and telephone calls to bridge distances and evoke the presence of an absent person. Above all, most of these films present protagonists whose identities are in the process of being defined through the hybridization of the culture they start out with and the one they encounter.

***A Time to Live, a Time to Die (1985) and A Summer at Grandpa's (1984)***

*A Time to Live, a Time to Die* is an autobiographical memory piece that strings together episodes from Hou's childhood and teenage years, structured around three deaths. The first section of the film, when Ah-ha<sup>1</sup> is around 8 years old, ends with his father's death. His senior year in high school seven years later coincides with his mother's illness and death, while the period immediately after this ends, as the film does, with the removal of his grandmother's decomposing body from the living room floor. Each death marks a stage in the weakening of the family's ties with the Chinese mainland and absorption of the second generation into a polyglot Taiwanese culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Hou's actual hometown nickname, as shown in the Assayas documentary when he returns home and reintroduces himself to former friends under that name.

Hou differentiates the family house from the town that surrounds it in several ways. Except for Ah-ha and his grandmother, who is constantly getting lost, family members are rarely seen outside the home; the father never is. Ah-ha speaks Hoklea inside the home, Taiwanese to his friends in the town and Mandarin in school (Kellner). Hou creates a “flowing, expansive” interior through the use of wide angle shots that emphasize its airiness and the communal aspect of their lives, often showing several family members in the same shot engaged in different activities (Udden 72). The home is associated with China through letters that update them on events there and by the observance of traditional customs, such as when the father, being “pious,” will not begin dinner unless the grandmother is there. This makes a strong contrast to the end of the film, when the sons of the house don’t notice their grandmother has died until after her body starts to rot, which the autobiographical narrator describes as “unfilial,” a stinging reproach in traditional Chinese culture. Above all, the family’s and its house’s ties to China are foregrounded in what Hou claims are the only two points that were invented for the film: the family having inexpensive bamboo furniture so that it can be discarded rather than shipped “home” when the mainland is recovered, and the grandmother’s repeated attempts to walk home to China (Udden 69, Tay 155). As Udden notes, these inventions indicate Hou “was after a deeper message of how a new home came to be the only home he has ever known” (75). These fictional additions also serve to transform the film from a tale of a single family into a representative narrative of a diasporic generation.

The associations with China are not entirely positive. Rays of sunlight normally flood the family home, but a downpour darkens the sky and suggests a negative side to the house and homeland it is associated with when Ah-ha’s mother tells his sister about

how her other daughter died, essentially from neglect because she wasn't a boy in a culture that only valued sons. Later, in a posthumous memoir read and related to the family by Ah-ha's sister, the father writes of how he only expected to stay a few years before going back to the mainland and that this attachment to China led to the decision to own only cheap furniture and postpone buying appliances which would have made their mother's life easier. As she reads the memoir, the camera shifts to include the father's empty bamboo chair in the frame, conjuring his presence and the wasted years implied by his message from the grave. In the Assayas documentary, Hou says his intended message here was that "those calls for reclaiming mainland China are nothing but a bunch of lies, impossible dreams." Another reflection of this darker side is that at times the house itself becomes less expansive and airy. While windows or doors open to the outside are visible in almost every interior shot, partly due to Hou's reliance on natural light, there are exceptions. When the family sits vigil by their father's corpse, the camera pans over them, cutting down the space so that no windows or doors are seen. This is also true when the mother first mentions the lump on her tongue which turns out to be cancer. As well as the absence of a visible opening to the outside, she is framed in a doorway which transforms the interior space from expansive and nurturing to confining and ominous.

However, an interesting aspect of the film is that there is not a strict separation between the family house (representing both mainland China and the diasporic community now in Taiwan) and the exterior landscape. The (almost) constantly visible doors and windows being open to the outside at times unite interior and exterior space, suggesting that in some scenes the countryside can also be associated with mainland China. The muted colours of the house's interior that result from Hou's use of natural

light are matched by the soft, muddy brown that dominates the first shot of the town as the grandmother in her traditional outfit (which is rarely worn by anyone else in the film) walks through the village, convinced that her mainland hometown is just around the next bend. This partial identification of the countryside with traditional mainland China reappears in some of Hou's other films, and is used here in an interesting way.

If, under the analytical model proposed in the introduction, the family house is designated "home" space, the Taiwanese "host" space is divided in two. The first is an official Mandarin version of Taiwan represented onscreen only by the school with its unlikeable Mandarin-speaking teacher, but is otherwise only inferred through the random appearance of soldiers on horseback galloping through town, half-ignored radio broadcasts that tell of conflicts with the mainland, and the rumbling of trucks (presumably transporting troops) that wake the family in the middle of the night before they roll over and go back to sleep. Like these sounds of war, the school is mostly associated with conflict, either among the students or between rebellious youth and an authoritarian teacher.

The real Taiwan is that of Ah-ha's friends, and is associated with the colour green, primarily in shots of a lush landscape and the baize cover of pool tables, a cultural marker that Hou uses in many of his films. The conflict between these two Taiwans is shown in a scene where Ah-ha, now a teenager, and his friends play pool in a rundown shed (painted a faded green), while former soldiers outside are seen through a barred window listening to the funeral of a major political figure on the radio, which the teens ignore. Udden notes that this funeral is usually considered the "true end" of the Cold War years and the beginning of an era marked by economic growth and industrialization (75). Just

as with Ah-ha's family, the memory of China was fading for the ageing *waishengren* of official Taiwan, as the next generation is absorbed into the hybrid culture of the real Taiwan.

The "intermediate" space is where Ah-ha interacts with the local boys, and can be seen as being expressed through a narrative arc where the landscape changes from brown and confining to green and expansive. While the first exterior shot of the town made it seem as an extension of home space, the first shot of Ah-ha interacting with local boys is in a game of marbles which is shot atypically close, cutting down the space so that, in contrast to the house, the overall geography is not clear. Subsequent exterior scenes, such as a baseball game (not coincidentally a non-Chinese sport), are more expansive and occur in a greener landscape. The climax of this progression is a scene where the grandmother takes Ah-ha along as she tries to walk back to China. On a green and leafy, tree-lined lane, they stop and pick guavas and later eat bowls of noodles at a roadside stall where the local Taiwanese can't understand the Hoklea-speaking grandmother. This is a key scene, its transitional nature underscored by the train that passes behind them as they eat their noodles. As Udden writes, this sequence is "more than just another detail: it symbolizes the arc of the film . . . an arc of forgetting, the fading away of thoughts about the mainland" (75). The grandmother has spent the whole film to this point talking of China and trying to walk there, but even she can be distracted by the island's tasty green fruit, while her inability to communicate with the locals underlines that mainland China is anything but around the next corner.

Soon after, the father dies, the death of the ailing patriarch signifying a major break between the family and mainland China, and the film jumps forward several years.



The grandmother still gets lost, but there is no more talk of walking “home,” but instead she returns at one point with a bag of guavas. After the mother’s death, the grandmother remains inside, mostly sleeping on the floor as family life carries on around her, until she finally dies. Her death is only discovered after several days and this neglect can be seen as an allegorical representation of “the discarded older Chinese generation, never assimilated, always out of place, and never at home” (Kellner). Her death also reveals a younger generation that *is* assimilated, as shown by the way they treat their grandmother.

June Yip writes that this film constructs a Taiwanese identity “shaped by multiple waves of refugees, immigrants, and colonials and characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity” (140), which was, of course, a challenge to the government’s image of the country. As Tay observes, the film is only “seemingly apolitical,” for its hybridity “confronts the sensitive issue of provincial identity differences” (159). But this hybrid identity does not receive an entirely uncritical representation. If the official Taiwan is authoritarian and imposed from above, the Taiwan Ah-ha is absorbed into in the second half of the film is a valueless one of juvenile delinquents, small time criminals and incipient gangsters. For example, a sequence where Ah-ha and his petty thug friends unsuccessfully try to shake down an itinerant peddler plays out in an open area, dominated by the brown dirt of the street, but also features the green baize of an open air pool table they are playing on. This expansive exterior is not exactly oppressive, but suggests the Taiwan Ah-ha is now a part of is less attractive than the green landscapes of the first half of the film. This raises a question that often arises in Hou’s films, of what is left when traditional Chinese culture is abandoned.

Chinese tradition is also examined in *A Summer at Grandpa's*, a sunnier and more lyrical companion piece to *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*, that also offers a child's view of a small Taiwanese town. Made a year before *A Time to Live*, the narrative, such as it is, involves a brother and sister, Tung-Tung and Ting-Ting, who are sent from their Taipei home to a rural community to spend the summer with their grandparents while their mother is sick in hospital. On this slender plot hangs a string of vignettes which flesh out daily life in a small town which at first seems Edenic, but turns out to have a dark side.

Both these films are autobiographical, although not in the same way. While *A Time to Live* was based on Hou's life and his voice is inscribed on the film at the very start through a voiceover narrator directly addressing the audience, *A Summer at Grandpa's* is instead based on the childhood of his frequent scriptwriter Chu Tien-wen. However, as Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis point out, even when Hou is filming someone else's story, he still frames his narratives as autobiography (149). For example, the central character is not the young girl Ting-Ting, based on Chu Tien-wen as a child, but her older brother Tung-Tung. While she is the more appealing character, cheerfully throwing the boys' clothes in the river when they banish her from their skinny dipping and later doggedly refusing to leave the side of the injured Dim-ma, it is Tung-Tung's point of view which is frequently privileged by the camera, and it is his voice that narrates and comments on events through letters he writes home to his parents. These letters, like the posthumous memoir from Ah-ha's father in *A Time to Live, a Time to Die*, are epistles that create what Naficy calls the "illusion of presence" of an absent or exiled figure (2001: 5), acting fetishistically by "both disavowing and acknowledging the trauma of displacement" (2001: 106). Similarly, letters and telephone calls in *A Summer*

at *Grandpa's* bridge the distance between Taipei and the countryside in the same way that they do between homeland and host country for immigrants.

Both films are also multilingual, a characteristic which Naficy argues undermines any proposed hegemonic national identity linked to a single language (2001:49). Chu Tien-wen's father was a KMT army officer, but her mother was the daughter of a Taiwanese Hakka family (making her, like Hou, both *waishengren* and Hakka, but unlike him, also *benshengren*). Consequently, the film's opening scenes in Taipei are spoken in Mandarin, but in the small Hakka community where the rest of the film is set, the language is Hoklea (Chen). Although it is not necessarily a trope of transnational cinema, William Tay notes the films, like several others by Hou, also share weak or absent fathers. In *A Time to Live*, the father is a chronic invalid who dies halfway through, while the father in *A Summer at Grandpa's* (played by New Taiwan Cinema luminary Edward Yang) makes only three brief appearances. While Tay is correct that these are not strong Confucian heads of households, his suggestion they mark "the absence of a powerful and dominating patriarchy" (157) is problematic in the case of *A Summer at Grandpa's*.

Unusually for Hou, this film does have a strong patriarchal figure identified with traditional Chinese culture in the grandfather of the title. In the other films discussed in this chapter, the family elder is usually absent or ineffectual, but here he is a prominent and well-off doctor, a man of influence and authority in the town, and the family house is an expression of his personality. Instead of an open space, it is a Japanese-style series of narrow arches and hallways, and figures are often framed in doorways or partly obscured by stairwells or sliding panels. The inhibiting nature of the space is emphasized in a scene where Tung-Tung, soon joined by Ting-Ting, runs and slides back and forth in a

short hallway, like zoo animals testing the limits of their cage. The house is dominated by dark brown wood, and while windows are often visible in interior shots, they usually have tight wooden slats that resemble bars, giving the space a dark and heavy feel. The house is also associated with Chinese culture, as Tung-Tung is forced to memorize and recite poetry to his grandfather and is given a traditional Chinese punishment of kneeling on a hard wood floor until he passes out and is unable to stand without help. In almost all cases, decisions are made by the grandfather, whose insistence on traditional mores leads to the banishment of his son (Tung-Tung's uncle) from the family home over a love affair, creating an exilic situation akin to that of immigrants who reject the rigid rules of their diasporic community.

The confining and oppressive house is a stark contrast with the countryside it is set in, an idyllic space photographed to emphasize lush greens and bright yellows, along with the deep blue of the local river under clear, cloudless skies. Several long shots frame the children and their new friends in a way that sees them almost overwhelmed by nature, small figures in a pastoral paradise. Even closer shots echo this, as in a sequence where long grass the children move through almost reaches Ting-Ting's neck. The scene where the boys go skinny dipping offers a sense of total freedom, even if it pointedly does not include Ting-Ting. However, if the house, in terms of our analytical model, is the homeland space, or "China," then what does this exterior space represent?

In an unambiguous assimilationist diasporic text, it would be Taiwan, a space of liberty that contrasts with the old-fashioned and authoritarian homeland culture. This is certainly one way in which the spatial representations function, particularly as representations of both house and countryside spaces become more nuanced and

ambivalent during the course of the film, as is typical of Hou's work. However, there is an additional way in which the spaces can be interpreted. If the film is read as relating the temporary return of the immigrant to the "homeland," then both exteriors and interiors can be seen as representations of different aspects of China. In this type of film, which Naficy describes as an "inward, homecoming journey," identifying the space coded as ethnic and traditional as negative and the space coded as free from these restraints as positive are the marks of an assimilationist text. If, on the other hand, the grandfather's house had been represented positively and the countryside negatively, it would become a resistant text (2001: 273). Instead of the countryside, Taiwan can be seen as represented by Taipei, where the film begins with Tung-Tung's emotional elementary school graduation ceremony and a visit to his mother at an attractive, colonial-style hospital, and ends with the children driving back there with their father.

The "host space" representation of Taiwan is straightforwardly sunny and modern, but the film is not really concerned with it. It is the characterization of the homeland which determines how much of it is useful and can be carried with the immigrant as he returns to his modern, adopted home. The characterization of the exterior space as an aspect of China is reinforced by the relationship of the grandfather with the town. Unlike the father in *A Time to Live*, who is never shown interacting with anybody from outside the family and is never seen outside the house, the grandfather leaves the house several times and can even impose his personality on the exterior landscape. For example, in the scene where he throws his son out of the house, they are shown in long shot in the street outside the house, but trees in the foreground divides the exterior space into narrower, confining segments. In addition, the grandfather is involved with the townspeople,

treating patients, consulting with the police and counselling families. Of course, the Hakka-dominated town in this film is not a new immigrant diaspora, but an established community whose members arrived well before 1945. However, its minority status within Taiwan and the grandfather's nostalgia for Chinese culture mark it as diasporic.

The "intermediate" space would be the square in front of the town's train station. Upon arrival, Tung-Tung stands in the open plaza and plays with a toy car driven by an electronic remote. This intrigues the local children, who place a tortoise in its path so that the car can repeatedly run into it. While this could be seen as a simple city vs. country juxtaposition, the tortoise has special symbolic meanings in Chinese culture, primarily to do with longevity, but also as a symbol of China itself (Eberhard 367). Therefore, when Tung-Tung swaps his modern toy for a local tortoise at the end of this sequence, this can be read as an immersion into Chinese culture and a way of associating the exterior space of the town, and not just the family home, with mainland China.

William Tay writes that "a constant tension between two worlds, or perhaps between two value systems" can be seen in Hou's work (155). Just as two Taiwans were represented in *A Time to Live*, there are two mainland Chinas here: a rigid traditional one that is initially alienating and an initially welcoming natural one that is free of the restrictions and inhibitions associated with the grandfather's house. This dichotomy becomes more complicated as the film progresses. The traditional China becomes more sympathetic as a place where the sick are healed and grandfather and grandson look through books of family photographs. The natural China, on the other hand, turns out to have unexpected hazards. At one point, one of the town children is thought to have drowned in the idyllic river. Later, a train nearly runs over Ting-Ting. She is saved by

the intellectually handicapped Dim-ma, who had earlier been mocked by the village children and impregnated by the local bird catcher. The countryside also has its own confining spaces, such as an underpass where the children witness a robbery and where other, more violent, robberies occur, and Tung-Tung's uncle's tiny house, where the robbers hide out. This revisits Hou's question of what is left if the traditional Chinese values are discarded in favour of "freedom." While Tung-Tung's decision to inform on his uncle may seem like an endorsement of tradition, ambivalence is introduced by his shamefaced reluctance to meet his uncle's gaze. The final result is much the same as reading the countryside as Taiwan and viewing the film as assimilationist despite some queasy misgivings, but the juxtaposition of ideal and real versions of China is a thematic structure Hou will return to in different ways.

### ***The Boys of Fengkuei (1983) and Dust in the Wind (1987)***

The small towns and countryside of Taiwan stand in for China again in *The Boys from Fengkuei* and *Dust in the Wind*. These are journey films that feature young men migrating from poverty-stricken rural towns to industrial centres and finding low-paid menial work in the period between leaving school at fifteen and beginning compulsory military service at eighteen. In *The Boys from Fengkuei*, a gang of teenage layabouts swap dead end lives in their hometown for dead end jobs in the nearest big city, where the protagonist, A-ching, mutely falls for Hsiao-hsiang, the girlfriend of an older boy from their hometown who is already established there. In *Dust in the Wind*, a young man (Wan) from a mining town hit by labour unrest goes to Taipei to find work. He is followed by his girlfriend, but she eventually marries someone else while he is in the army. These films are often discussed as a further probing of Taiwan's history,

explorations of the effects of the crash program of industrialization that accompanied the “economic miracle” Taiwan underwent in the 1960s and 70s, when the countryside emptied out to provide workers for the new factories that sprouted in the growing cities. William Tay, for example, writes of *The Boys of Fengkuei* that it “poignantly epitomizes the fates of many young rural men and women who desert their villages and opt for life in the cities and factories” (153) and sees in both films an opposition between an “unstained and innocent countryside” and cities that are “the embodiment of deception, corruption, and exploitation” (155). However, these films are more than just nostalgic portraits that critique urbanization; they can also be seen as coded recapitulations of the immigrant’s journey from homeland to adopted country, and the representation of both are more nuanced and ambiguous than the stark dichotomy Tay suggests.

Like the Hakka family in *A Time to Live* and the city kids in *A Summer at Grandpa’s*, these films once again hinge on the experiences of outsiders in alien surroundings. What is added is that they begin with portraits of societies where the protagonists are insiders, but are then forced to migrate to places where they become outsiders. When they arrive, they rely on previous arrivals or relatives to find them lodging and employment and then live with fellow migrants from their common hometown in enclaves functioning in the same way as diasporic communities. This is also autobiographical material, as *The Boys from Fengkuei* (also known as *All My Youthful Days*) is mostly based on events from Hou’s life (Udden 65). While *Dust in the Wind* relates the story of writer Wu Nien-jen, once again Hou reframes someone else’s memories as autobiography, in this case through a voiceover narration that directly addresses the audience and details that link it to his other films, notably the presence of



actress Xin Shufen as the young woman the protagonist loves, as she plays similar roles in *A Time to Live* and *A City of Sadness*, while an actress who resembles her plays the part in the earlier *The Boys from Fengkuei*.

If the films are read as versions of immigrant journeys where China and Taiwan are represented respectively as small town and big city, the portraits of “home space” are not merely examples of sweet nostalgia. In *The Boys from Fengkuei*, while much of the action occurs in expansive exteriors or open fields filmed in long shot, they are often interrupted by bursts of violence as an escalating series of confrontations with other gangs of boys chases them out of their nest. During a subsequent road trip to a beach house where the gang engage in mildly homoerotic fun on the beach, a carefree meal is suddenly interrupted by the father of one of them suddenly arriving and attacking his son violently. In this film, it is the open spaces that are associated with confining rules. In the city, most of the action is now set in interior spaces while the exteriors emphasize loud and disorienting traffic, with large numbers of cars crowding the frame and the boys are swallowed by the masses of people, confining them even when they are in the open. Similarly, the factories are simply wide, noisy, alienating spaces. Where he lives, A-ching is separated from the girl he silently loves by a courtyard, watching her from the inside of the flat he shares with the other boys. Even when he eventually crosses the courtyard, he still does not express his feelings.

Paradoxically, these confining urban spaces are in some ways freer than the expansive small town spaces. One of the few scenes where A-ching interacts with natives of the city is when he is tricked into buying a ticket to what he is told will be a spectacular widescreen Technicolor film and ending up on the top of a half-built

skyscraper, looking through the frame of a wall at a view of the city. However, movie references in Hou Hsiao-hsien films are rarely casual. Just as an earlier scene where the boys sneak into a cinema to watch *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960, Luchino Visconti) points to where the film is heading and salutes a stylistic influence<sup>2</sup>, the movie ticket encounter is more than just a comic vignette about country rubes in the city. The “widescreen” they view the city through from the top of the building frames the urban landscape as a place of opportunity. Toward the end of the film, the city is also briefly transformed when A-ching walks through it with Hsiao-hsiang. Instead of the noise of traffic, there is classical music on the soundtrack, the streets seem more spacious, the crowds of people friendlier – this is a sympathetic “intermediate” space shared with the locals.

The time in the city has also transformed A-ching. When he returns home for his father’s funeral, a meal with his family is shot uncharacteristically close and a wider shot that follows when his mother tells him he should move back to take a job in a local factory emphasizes the walls on both sides, equating a return to the town with a prison sentence. Since the film ends with Hsiao-hsiang heading off to Taipei, A-ching’s love still unrequited, and with one of his friends leaving to enter the military, it can be seen as the final step in a “loss of innocence and a process of disillusionment” (Tay 155).

However, the portrait of the city is more nuanced and positive than, for instance, the neorealist films Hou references and there is no indication of any desire to return to the

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<sup>2</sup> An unlikely film to be showing in a small town Taiwan cinema in the mid-1960s, this late example of Italian neorealism concerns a family that migrates from poverty-stricken southern Italy to the industrial north in search of prosperity. Beyond the thematic affinity, it is also a precursor to a scene in *Dust in the Wind* where Wan has his moped stolen and considers stealing someone else’s, a deliberate reference to *Bicycle Thieves* (1949, Vittorio De Sica), the most famous of the Italian neorealist films.

hometown. It is also suggestive that while Ah-Ching speaks Taiwanese in his hometown and with his family and friends, he speaks Mandarin not only with the city residents, but also with Hsiao-hsiang, a migrant from a different part of Taiwan, marking his relationship with her a potentially positive part of the assimilation process. In spite of the nostalgic portrayal of the boys' activities at the beginning of the film and the initially alienating representation of the city, the film is ultimately ambivalent about both, but shows that only the city holds the possibility of progression, making it an assimilationist text.

The portrait of the "homeland" in *Dust in the Wind* is also nostalgic, but it is anything but a straightforward idealization. While there is a sweetly sympathetic treatment of teenage romance and the small town's friendly community, as well as of the natural beauty of the setting, the "home" is also a place of poverty and exploitation resulting in labour unrest. This is not immediately clear. For example, it is only much later in the film that viewers learn Wan's early decision to leave school and seek work in Taipei is due to his father's injury in a mining accident making him unable to provide for his family. However, even though it is only retrospectively that the extent of how dark a narrative portrayal of the countryside is offered by the film, there are clues in the spatial representations. The opening shots of the film begin with a train in a dark tunnel. Even when it emerges into the sunlight, it is hemmed in on both sides by the foliage. On the inside, Wan and his girlfriend, Huen, stand in the middle of the tube-like train, with its walls visible on both sides of them. When they leave the train, they walk along railway tracks under a cloudy sky, hemmed in by houses on both sides and framed by mountains in the background. At Wan's house, figures are often framed in narrow doorways or with

the walls prominent, as when his grandfather talks to his younger brother or when Wan tells his father he is leaving school, while a shot of the family eating only shows a section of the table instead of the whole space. This can be compared to later wide angle shots of Wan and his fellow migrants (including, eventually, Huen), all of them visible as they convivially share a meal in their flat in the back of a cinema or engage in drinking games in an open air restaurant. In an interesting way, although it is not clear Hou would agree with this, the character who seems most liberated by the move to the city is Huen. In Taipei, Wan finds her work as a seamstress in a cluttered space with bars on the window through which she is viewed several times, but she does not stay in this prison. Freed from the traditional mores that rule life at home, she drinks at a party, takes off her outer shirt so that an artist she doesn't know well can paint a design on it and stands up to Wan and refuses to leave or look away when he starts to steal a moped, all actions it is clear by the reactions she gets that she would not have taken in their hometown. When Wan is in the army, she sends him the label from her underwear, which in Taiwan of that time was both risqué and a sign of "total devotion forever" (Udden 79), and then gets pregnant by and marries another man. In several scenes, particularly when things aren't going well, the couple is framed in a narrow passage, as when Wan's moped is stolen or the subsequent scene at the hometown train station, when he decides to not visit his family without money. However, a sequence that indicates that she has adapted better to Taipei than Wan is after she has nursed him through a case of bronchitis. As they leave the back of the cinema where he lives, they walk together down a narrow alley. As she goes into the street, he remains at the gate and watches her back as she walks away down a wider

street. Alone, she does not have the confining restrictions he still has in his diasporic enclave.

*Dust in the Wind* is another Hou film where the family patriarch is displaced. Unemployed because of a mining injury, he is at least still alive, unlike the father who dies half way through *A Time to Live* or the one in *The Boys from Fengkuei*, who a head injury has reduced to a borderline vegetable before his eventual death. However, Wan's father's being undermined leads to alcoholism and his becoming a source of ridicule. To the extent that the Confucian head of the household is identified with the homeland and traditional Chinese values, the portrait is not unsympathetic, but is still critical, and suggests the film is another qualified assimilationist text. The portrait of “intermediate” space in Taipei supports this. Although Wan’s original place of work is a dark place where he is slapped by his employer for not delivering her son’s lunch, the second place where he works features a friendly conversation as Wan is about to go into the army where Wan and his employer are framed with the door open to the street behind them. Despite this, *Dust in the Wind* is even more ambivalent about the city than *The Boys from Fengkuei*, since Wan’s passage to adulthood is harsher. Both films feature exilic situations which destroy relationships, but in the earlier film it was Hsiao-hsiang’s boyfriend who had to leave, clearing the way for A-ching. In *Dust in the Wind*, it is Wan’s military service that separates the lovers. In addition, while letters bridge gaps in journey films, evoking the absent figure’s presence, the unopened and returned packet of letters to Huen are an evocation of Wan’s loss, which is directly associated with life in Taipei. Once again, Hou offers a situation where the Chinese legacy is undermined and fading, associated with the past and not the future, but poses the question of what persists

if the traditions are discarded. Huen is refused entry into her family house when she returns, a successful immigrant completely cut off from her past identity. Wan, a less successful immigrant, retains a foot in the town (as his conversation with his grandfather shows), but faces an uneasy future.

Up to this point, Hou's relationship with Chinese tradition and, by implication, his *waishengren* heritage, is ambivalent. It is an anachronism in Taiwan, but contains elements that could be useful in constructing a new hybridized identity, and the lack of these elements can leave individuals rootless and alienated. This attitude would now shift somewhat, as the positive Chinese values embodied by patriarchal figures are now replaced by situations where characters espouse these values, but learn they have no basis in reality.

### ***A City of Sadness (1989)***

In the early 1990s, Hou noted that "I have lived in Taiwan for over forty years but it was only when I made *A City of Sadness* that I began to learn about Taiwan's history" (Chiao 1995: 44). This bald statement may explain a shift in perspective. Hou's films to this point had detailed the waning of the influence of the Chinese tradition and its absorption into a hybrid Taiwan culture, but the attitude toward this legacy had been ambivalent. This is not the case in *A City of Sadness*. As in the earlier films, a family comes under pressure in the face of a different culture, but this time the family is explicitly *benshengren*, and the portrayal of the alien *waishengren* culture it faces is unremittingly negative. This is not a diasporic film in the ways the other films discussed are, since it shows the disastrous effect the arrival of people like Hou's family had on Taiwan. While his previous work had *benshengren* characters who could be interpreted

as coded versions of *waishengren* immigrants, this film is unambiguous. The *waishengren* here are unvarnished villains.

Although martial law ended in 1987, the KMT remained in power and at the time Hou made *A City of Sadness* films still had to pass a censor board before being shown to the public. While New Taiwanese Cinema films had featured honest portraits of contemporary society and recent history, none had addressed the pre-1949 foundation of the state. As Udden writes, considering “the lingering uncertainty under capricious martial law, this is understandable” (87). Given this, Hou’s decision to address this period and, in particular, become the first filmmaker to explore the 228 Incident was a major challenge to the KMT government’s vision of society. He was only able to bypass the Taiwanese censors by having the film print shipped directly from its Japanese post-production lab to the Venice Film Festival, where it won the Golden Lion. This was a major event for Taiwan, as it was growing increasingly isolated due to diplomatic efforts by the Chinese government, and it put Hou on the front page of every newspaper in the country. The combination of risking the valuable international prestige gained by the festival win and popular curiosity made it impossible for the government to ban or even cut the film, which became an unprecedented success at the Taiwan box office despite its 150 minute length and challenging, elliptical style (Udden 96-98). Besides its unique cultural status in Hong Kong, it is possible that the film gained added resonance from the Chinese government’s violent suppression of protests in Tiananmen Square earlier that year (Marchetti 2006: 8).

*A City of Sadness* tells the story of the native Taiwanese Lin family, which comes to grief as a result of the arrival of the KMT. The patriarch had been an underworld

figure who had led popular resistance to the Japanese. Now old and infirm, he has passed leadership of the family and its enterprises to his eldest son, yet another father figure who is undermined and eventually dies in the course of the narrative. A second son has gone missing, presumed dead, while serving with the Japanese army. A third son returns shell shocked from his military service; upon recovery, he gets involved with newly arrived Shanghai gangsters, which leads to disastrous consequences for the family. The fourth son is Wen-ching, a deaf mute photographer played by rising Hong Kong star Tony Leung Chiu-wai. While the film is not framed as autobiography in the way the other films discussed were, it is possible to identify a “Hou” character. As a deaf mute, Wen-ching is an outsider, unlike the rest of his family. As a photographer, he is an artist and, like Hou, one that uses a camera. In Udden’s biography of Hou, he writes that in gatherings of filmmakers in the early days of the New Taiwan Cinema movement, Hou, one of the few not to attend film school, would sit quietly and listen to the others (58). This description finds a striking echo in the scene where Wen-ching hosts a meeting of his intellectual friends, silently welcoming them and serving food, but unable to contribute to the meeting because of his handicap. It should also be noted that Xin Shufen is back as the feminine ideal, who the Hou surrogate finally gets to marry, but not live happily ever after with. The identification of Hou with Wen-ching is important in what it says about Hou’s relationship with the *benshengren*. Wen-ching is *benshengren* but is attacked by insurgents because he is unable to answer when they ask if he is Taiwanese or Chinese. Later, Wen-ching begs to join his rebel friend hiding in the mountain, but is refused. Just as he lives apart from his family and is not involved in their business and is unable to take full part in the intellectual discussions he hosts, he



cannot become a full insurgent. He remains an outsider, just like Hou, a *waishengren* who identifies with *benshengren* but is not one of them.

There are again two Chinas on view. There is the idealized vision of a “Greater China” championed by Wen-ching’s intellectual friends who initially welcome reunification with the mainland, only to rally opposition to the new administration before finally dying at the hands of the real China, which is represented by unscrupulous Shanghai gangsters, bloodthirsty soldiers, and KMT propaganda radio broadcasts. The only sympathetic mainlander is a journalist friend of the intellectuals who is given little screen time. As Udden points out, beyond disembodied voices mouthing the KMT line over the radio, the film’s mainlanders only talk business. He notes “there are no cut-ins, no gatherings of mainland gangsters where they complain about the Taiwanese” (129). The representation of the mainlanders is so ferociously negative, and is such a contrast with the generally positive portrayal of the departing Japanese colonial masters, that the only conclusion is that the idealized China was a figment of the intellectuals’ imagination.

The representation of space is important in the film, but is not its main binary, which is between native Taiwanese and invading Chinese. The film presents several spaces which are initially positive. The arc of the film is that, one by one, they become infected by the encroaching Chinese and become negative. The Lin family home, despite the frame being crowded with bustling figures, blocked off areas of the frame caused by shooting through doorways, and dim lighting, is still initially positive, livened by red tablecloths and cheerful figures taking part in the family celebration. During the course of the film, the house is invaded by policemen attempting to arrest the eldest son. By the time of a family meal near the end of the film, the family has contracted, with the eldest

son murdered and the second son tortured back into madness. The frame is less crowded, but is now somber and less welcoming. By this time, the lively family-owned restaurant has been forced to close down and sit empty while the eldest son, who had been sinking into alcoholism, is gunned down by the Shanghai gangsters in a rival's gambling club. The village hospital where Hinome, Wen-ching's love, works is first shown as a positive place, where the second son is nursed back to health. It is frequently presented through a shot down its entrance hallway, the open door bringing in light and uniting it with the countryside around it. Here, the invasion takes place through KMT radio broadcasts, where the hospital staff gather in a dark room to listen to the corrupt governor speak. The last space to be invaded is the countryside, where the insurgents hide out. But soldiers roust them out and march them through the landscape, claiming it for the invaders before murdering their prisoners. When Wen-ching and Hinome are shown at the train station, having decided to flee, they decide not to get on the train and return home instead, presumably to wait for Wen-ching to be arrested and executed, because there is no place to go. In presenting this cross section of Taiwanese spaces, Hou turns the whole island into a large "intermediate space" which is contested between two cultures, the far more negative of which prevails.

***Good Men, Good Women (1995) and Goodbye South, Goodbye (1996)***

The negative representation of the Chinese mainland continues in *Good Men, Good Women* and *Goodbye South, Goodbye*. Both these films are concerned with the distinction between idealized visions of China and the less admirable reality. The intellectuals portrayed in the earlier film who, like Wen-ching and his friends in *A City of Sadness*, dream of a "Greater China," find that the real Chinese people they come in

contact with don't necessarily consider them to be Chinese as they think they are.

Similarly, the protagonists who dream of "returning home" to China in *Goodbye South, Goodbye* act out a coded version of this return to the homeland in a disastrous journey to a Taiwanese "home" that is anything but triumphant and again implies that the Chinese "home" dreamed of is far from the reality.

*Good Men, Good Women* cuts between three narrative streams: the life of Liang Jing, a self-destructive actress; Liang Jing three years earlier when she was a waitress in love with a doomed gangster; and a film-within-a-film, in which Liang Jing stars, which recreates the lives of Taiwanese leftist patriots who crossed to mainland China and served with the People's Liberation Army during World War II, and their subsequent persecution in Taiwan during the "White Terror" that followed the KMT takeover of Taiwan. The modern section is in colour and features a lazily roving camera (a significant departure for Hou from his previous static camera aesthetic) following Liang Jin as she drifts through sterile, open spaces such as her apartment. Her love affair with the gangster Ah Wei three years before this, by contrast, is mostly set in much less luxurious cramped rooms with tight framings emphasizing their intimacy, with the moving camera gaining something of a hand-held feel. The historical section is in black and white, but also includes colour sequences, which further the historical narrative, where Liang Jing and fellow actors play scenes from the film-within-a-film. The camera in these sequences is static, in keeping with Hou's previous visualizations of the past. Sylvia Lin argues that Hou parallels the soulless current life of Liang Jing, which can be traced to the murder of her lover and her inability to deal with the trauma associated with it (as seen in her helpless reaction to passages of her diary from three years before mysteriously arriving

on her fax machine), to the aimlessness and drift of modern Taiwan, which Hou traces to the trauma of the White Terror years and the years of “imposed collective amnesia” that accompanied it (Udden 134, Lin 101-112). The years of forcibly repressed memory have made it traumatic for the Taiwanese to face their past and, like Liang Jin trying to bury the memory of her lover in alcohol, they cling to materialist and hedonistic pleasure to avoid dealing with it. One example of how the association between contemporary and historical stories is accomplished is by placing Liang Jing’s voiceover narration over black and white scenes, constructing a parallel to her diary pages that hold equally traumatic and uncomfortable memories.

The untrustworthiness of memory and visual recreations of memory in these circumstances becomes central. Udden criticizes the film-within-a-film as one-note “political hagiography” whose purpose is to “contrast the past replete with idealism versus a crass present full of only indulgence and material comfort” (135). In support of this, he points to interviews given by Hou where he has said this was his intention. Indeed, in an interview from 1995, Hou stated that "with a sense of urgency, I am exploring the values of traditional culture which we have lost, particularly at this juncture of our existence in an inflated materialist and technological age" (Chiao 1995: 53). However, there are elements in the film that question this sort of dichotomy. First of all, while it is unclear whether the black and white scenes are from the finished film while the colour scenes are rehearsals, or whether the black and white is “reality” (or even, as Udden argues, Liang Jing’s imagining of the events to be portrayed in a film yet to be made) (135) and the colour recreations of reality, it seems clear that the intention is to draw attention to the fact that the historical narrative is mediated. Viewers are not

experiencing unvarnished memories or an objective historical record. This is reinforced by having Liang Jing's television showing a scene from a vintage black and white escapist musical romance. As already mentioned, film references in Hou Hsiao-hsien films tend to be meaningful, and it is very possible that an association between black and white and fantasy is intended here.

There is also a distinction that can be drawn in the historical scenes between the ideal of China, as expressed in exterior scenes and the reality shown in the predominantly interior scenes. The opening shot of the volunteers cheerfully marching through the Chinese landscape, coming to the aid of the communist fighters does seem like a heroic framing of their actions. However, this is soon followed by a series of less heroic interior sequences. When they arrive at the army base, the Taiwanese-speaking patriots can barely communicate with the Cantonese-speaking soldiers, who think of Taiwan as a Japanese island and suspect the volunteers are spies, and are therefore reluctant to accept they are Chinese. In fact, the complicated chain of translation between the group of bourgeois intellectual volunteers and the communist militia officer is very reminiscent of the negotiation between the eldest son and the KMT-connected Shanghai gangsters in *A City of Sadness*. While it may be, as Udden suggests, a reinforcement of "Hou's ongoing subversion of the KMT's desired linguistic unity" (135), it also links the communist insurgents and the earlier film's Shanghai gangsters (both, after all, mainlanders) in a way that questions the wisdom of the idealistic "heroes." The volunteers are then subjected to repeated interrogations, eat under armed guard and placed in shackles. During these scenes, the interiors are cramped and while there are sometimes doors and windows open to the outside, the harsh sunlight renders these openings an impenetrable

white, preventing any unity between interior and exterior space. While there are some brief, positive exteriors in the mainland China scenes, such as a scene where their marching while tied up ends with the voiceover comment that they were freed and allowed to join the communist army, a scene at an army hospital, and a long shot of troops accompanying the news of the Japanese surrender, these are overshadowed by a longer, cruel and cold interior scene where the central couple's child is taken from them so that they can be "freed" to fight for China. The matron assures them she is "touched by their patriotism" as she briskly hands them a contract in which they have to sign away all claims to their child in exchange for fifty dollars. Further, the suspicious People's Liberation Army soldiers they initially encounter find an echo in the early 1950s Taiwan scene where a member of the KMT secret police ironically and ominously introduces himself as a member of the People's Liberation Army, since he is there to "liberate" the suspected leftists. This blurring of KMT and mainland Chinese interrogators is followed by interior scenes of Taiwan prisons where the idealistic leftists are tortured and executed, a condemnation of the KMT's White Terror, but also a possible reference to similar events occurring on the mainland during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. The idealized China the intellectuals marched off to was in conflict with the China they found and the brutality the KMT brought with them to Taiwan from the mainland. If the idealized homeland of mainland China is an illusion that masks a dark reality, the film suggests this has implications for contemporary Taiwan. Without the values and ideals associated with Chinese traditional culture, life becomes as aimless and worthless as Liang Jing's after her lover is killed. However, the historical sequences suggest that

popular illusions about that culture aren't that helpful either, leaving viewers with a remarkably pessimistic conclusion. But not as pessimistic as Hou's next film.

In *Goodbye South, Goodbye*, Hou follows the lives of Kao, a low level gangster, and his two young and impressively incompetent apprentices, Flatty and Pretzel. The Taipei shown in this film is a dead end place. Kao's girlfriend wants to emigrate to Canada while Kao dreams of carrying out his father's dream of returning to the "homeland" and opening up a restaurant-discotheque in Shanghai. This dream of returning echoes an important recurring trope in transnational cinema. As Naficy writes: "Return occupies a primary place in the minds of the exiles and a disproportionate amount of space in their films, for it is the dream of a glorious homecoming that structures exile" (2001: 229). In this way, Kao is yet another *waishengren* (or at least the son of one) who shares with his father an idealized vision of China and, like other *waishengren* in Hou's films who feel a sense of unbelonging in Taiwan, his ambitions are centered on the mainland (Marchetti 2006: 104). His ability to finance this dream is tied in with another return journey, that of Kao and Flatty to their rural hometown in the south where Kao can earn a share of the profits of a shady business deal he is managing for his boss and Flatty can collect a family inheritance.

Once again, this can be read as Hou using the south as a metaphor for mainland China. The distinction between the illusion of China and its reality is here expressed by an associate explaining to Kao the difficulties involved in investing in China, which includes massive corruption. This is paralleled by the two versions of the south Taiwan hometown shown in the juxtaposition of interior and exterior scenes. On one hand, there is the almost giddy exterior tracking shot of the trio on motorcycles, driving through the

expansive countryside in a celebration of fun and freedom. This is balanced by an interior scene where Kao attends a family gathering and ends up drunk and vomiting violently in the toilet. Flatty's homecoming is even less triumphant. Cheated out of his inheritance, he argues with his uncle in a dark room. When his cousin, a policeman, arrives, their fight is shot through a doorway, cutting down the exterior space into a cramped rectangle as Flatty is beaten and arrested. At a meeting between local and Taipei gangsters that neither Kao nor Flatty attend, also an interior scene, where the two negotiating teams crowd around a table, the gangsters present divide up both Kao's share of the deal and Flatty's inheritance. In return, Kao and Flatty are released by the police at the edge of town in the middle of the night, their car keys thrown into the middle of a field. Their flashlight is a brief spot of light in the encompassing darkness as they search for them. The illusion and reality of the Chinese homeland are as far apart from each other as the dream of a triumphant return and the reality of what actually happens in the film. Interestingly, neither *Good Men, Good Women* nor *Goodbye South, Goodbye* offer any scenes of what may be considered "intermediate space." There is no process of hybridization or assimilation taking place. It is not so much cultures that meet in these films as two views of a worthless culture, with the realistic view of that culture triumphing over an idealistic one.

The literal translation of the film's title is actually "South Country Goodbye, South Country," and Hou has explained this is a reference to Taiwan's long time status of belonging to someone else, as China or Japan's "South Country" (Udden 140). Taiwan now has a measure of independence, having cut its cultural ties to the mainland, but the possibility of a hybridized Taiwanese culture of the type posited in Hou's earlier films



now appears to be a dead end. Kao and Flatty no longer belong in their hometown and are out of place in Taipei, leaving them lost and alone. In saying goodbye to the “South Country,” they are simultaneously saying goodbye to China and Taiwan, past and present, unrealistic dreams and unacceptable reality. But they aren’t going anywhere, as the film ends with them stuck in the middle of nowhere. This is a bleak vision of Taiwan identity, cut off from traditional China, but with nothing to replace it.

### Conclusion

A curious tension exists in Hou’s attitude toward his *waishengren* heritage. There is a nostalgic yearning for a Chinese heritage and the traditional culture he associates with it expressed in these films. However, the ambivalence that complicated this nostalgia changes in *A City of Sadness*, where the mainlanders are uniformly negative and it is the *benshengren* tradition which is destroyed by the generation of immigrants which included his parents. If Hou’s early films suggested the possibility of a hybridized Taiwanese identity that mixed a variety of influences, his later films seem to emphasize the difficulty of constructing a national identity out of a handful of competing traditions. The result is that the second generation *waishengren* Kao is as out of place in the country as he is in the city, and as alienated from Taiwan as the first generation immigrants of *A Time to Live*. Hou’s preoccupation with his mainland Chinese heritage is ongoing, but increasingly negative. On the other hand, while some of his early films can be read as ambivalently assimilationist, this has become less true as the possibility of progress and, at a cost, freedom associated with urban spaces in *The Boys from Fengkuei* and *Dust in the Wind*, has been replaced by a pessimistic vision of a society cut off from its past with

nothing but materialism and greed to replace it. In the end, the tension between assimilation and resistance is unresolved and Kao, searching for a way to live (along with his car keys) is left to his own resources, stuck in a field somewhere in Taiwan.

## Chapter 2: Mina Shum, an Independent Filmmaker

Mina Shum has tried to avoid the label of a “Canadian filmmaker,” conscious perhaps that this is hardly the most commercial description that can be attached to a director, even among Canadians. Instead, she prefers to be called an “independent filmmaker,” which she hopes will allow people to see her work “without prejudice” (Austin-Smith 203). With its low budget and hip, youth-centred take on romance and generational conflict, it is certainly possible to situate her first feature film, *Double Happiness* (1994), as one of the many “indie” films which flowed from Sundance and other film festivals in annual waves during the 1990s. However, the ethnic subject matter and the way it is dealt with suggest that it will be more informative to place it within two other waves. The first, as described by Jim Leach, occurred during the 1990s, when “English-Canadian cinema was enriched, and complicated, by the work of young filmmakers from the diasporic communities that had established themselves in many cities” (126). The other wave is, of course, transnational cinema, and in particular Chinese diasporic cinema, which in its Canadian manifestation is a subsection of Jim Leach’s wave. Seen as part of an international manifestation, *Double Happiness* provides a contrasting local hybrid to that of Hou Hsiao-hsien’s films discussed in the previous chapter.

Shum was born in Hong Kong to parents who were originally from mainland China, and emigrated with them to Canada when she was a year old. Both Canadian and Chinese, Shum describes perfectly the in between-ness of the transnational filmmaker in a pair of quotes from an interview given in the late 1990s. Of her relationship to her Chinese ethnicity, she says: “I knew I was Chinese, but China was a very far place from

where I was. I knew I could never really be there and belong” (Monk 196). On the other hand, this distancing from her community’s shared vision of a homeland is not balanced by a feeling of acceptance in her adopted home, since she also says that “I can’t deny that I am a part of Canadian culture, but this is a place where people will often judge you by the way you look” (Monk 196). This visible difference is, of course, a major difference from Taiwan’s *waishengren* diaspora, as is the history of racial prejudice faced by Chinese immigrants in Shum’s native Vancouver, and this partly explains the differences between Hou’s and Shum’s versions of Chinese diasporic cinema.

What Shum does have in common with Hou Hsiao-hsien is that they are both acutely interested in the question of identity. They also share the experience of growing up as members of a diaspora, children of parents who identified more closely with an imagined Chinese homeland than with the adopted country in which they found themselves. As a result, both favour protagonists who struggle with the question of belonging. This thesis focuses on writer-director Shum’s *Double Happiness* (1994), a smart and wry small-scale autobiographical film which tells the story of Jade Li (played by Korean-Canadian Sandra Oh), an aspiring actress in Vancouver who must deal with traditional Chinese immigrant parents and a sometimes racist larger community that limits the choices that official government policy seems to promise immigrants who engage with society beyond their diasporic community.

Before making *Double Happiness*, Shum directed the documentary short *Me, Mom and Mona* (1993), in which she appears with her mother and sister and rehearses some of the themes she would return to in her feature debut, as their discussion revolves around Shum’s father, the secrets they keep from him and the tensions that arise from his

strong ideas on the family's need to maintain a traditional Chinese identity in their new country. Shum would return to a Chinese Canadian milieu for her third, and regrettably most recent, feature film *Long Life, Prosperity & Happiness* (2002). A slight, but charming, fable involving a young girl's use of traditional Chinese folklore to aid her assimilated single mother, it has interesting resonances to the Chinese diasporic experience. However, it is in *Double Happiness* that Shum's ideas are most clearly laid out and entertainingly expressed.

To illuminate what is distinctive about Shum's version of transnational cinema, it is useful to place *Double Happiness* in a series of contexts. The first context is the growth in the ethnic Chinese population in Vancouver, particularly since the 1970s, and the legacy of often virulent racism the community has had to deal with. The second context is the Canadian government's policy of multiculturalism, the mixed effects of which is a subtext that runs through the film. Multiculturalism policy also provided the impetus for a series of films that began to appear during the early 1990s in which, for the first time, Canadian visible minority filmmakers were telling stories about their own communities. Comparing Shum's work to the Toronto-set film *Bollywood/Hollywood* (2002, Deepa Mehta), and the ways that similar themes and conflicts are very differently addressed in the two films, helps to illuminate Shum's relationship with her community and maps Shum's relationship to transnational cinema as opposed to Chinese or Canadian national cinema models. The third context explores the sparse cinematic legacy of representations of Chinese ethnicity in Canadian cinema. A fourth context examines how Shum's film presents Vancouver's Chinese community as a diasporic outpost, part Canadian but also part of a larger transnational community. A discussion of how

Chinese-American films such as Wayne Wang's *Chan Is Missing* (1982) and *Dim Sum* (1985) define their community's relationship to their urban spaces offers a final contrast to Shum's ambivalent relationship to her ethnic heritage.

Even more than Hou Hsiao-hsien's films, *Double Happiness* is an exemplary example of how spatial representations can be used to express diasporic dilemmas. The first of the filmic spaces found in *Double Happiness* is the "home space" defined by its ethnicity, being entirely Chinese and primarily represented by Jade's family's house. Mostly interior sets, these ethnically coded spaces are presented as confined and constricted territory, where everyone feels obliged to act out rigid rules of behaviour in order to live according to a strict and specific definition of "Chinese" identity. The second of the film's spaces are those "intermediate" areas where different ethnicities interact. These are often photographed to emphasize the dark blues and blacks of their settings, which are strikingly different from the bright reds and yellows of the Chinese areas. Where Jade's life in her home space is an ongoing performance of a version of her ethnic identity with which she feels increasingly at odds, the contested space is one where she performs professionally. However, success as an actress within this space must be achieved while dealing with racist assumptions which attempt to place limits on her ambitions and talent which are different, but analogous to those of her home environment. The third space Shum creates is an idealized Vancouver, a liberated territory where performing is no longer necessary and people can be themselves and fulfill their dreams. These scenes are usually, but not exclusively, exteriors and are introduced by shots which place Jade within a larger open space that emphasizes the possibility of freedom. While these spaces are analogous to those in Hou Hsiao-hsien's work, their representation is

sometimes radically different. To understand these differences, a discussion of the different contexts Shum works in is necessary.

### **Historical Context**

There has been a Chinese presence in the Vancouver area since the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858, or even before there was a Vancouver, which was not incorporated until 1886 (Teo 6). Immigrants in significant numbers arrived from China in the 1880s to work on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway and many stayed on for seasonal work. They were overwhelmingly adult males, and in 1901 there were only 60 women and children out of a population of approximately 2000 (Ng 10-11). Despite this, and a discriminatory “head tax” levied on the Chinese to discourage immigration, their numbers continued to grow, aided by spurts of immigration before and after World War I (Ng 14). This increased visibility led to a racist backlash and the enactment of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1923, which stopped almost all Chinese immigration until the law was repealed in 1947. Steady growth resumed after this boosted the community’s population to over 30,000 by 1971 (Ng 23). The replacing of racially discriminatory immigration criteria with a points system in 1967 opened the way for a wave of new immigrants, increasing the number of Vancouver’s Chinese to 83,000 in 1981 (Jim 334; Ng 122) and to over 300,000 of the city’s 1.8 million population by the time Shum made her film in 1994 (Ng 137).

For much of the period up to the 1950s, the Chinese residential and commercial presence in Vancouver was centered on the downtown area which quickly became known as Chinatown. This ethnic ghetto reflected, as Nicholas Blomley writes, “the generalized racism operative within Vancouver society that curtailed, both informally and formally,

the spaces within which racialized groups could locate within the city” (147). As a result, even though the post-World War II era was relatively more tolerant and was marked by Chinese Canadians gaining the right to vote in 1947, the first attempts of Vancouver’s Chinese to move into largely white neighbourhoods in the late 1940s and early 1950s were met with extreme resistance. However, the central downtown location of Chinatown became a target for urban redevelopment beginning in the mid-1950s, leading to a subsequent more general dispersal of the Chinese community to the new suburbs (Ng 50). Paul Delany argues that the result was an urban development pattern in Vancouver that differed from older North American cities in that “ethnic neighbourhoods like Chinatown . . . are essentially marketplaces, whose customers drive in from elsewhere” (7). He further points out about Vancouver that “residentially, ethnic groups are highly dispersed, with no sharp demarcation lines between neighbourhoods” (7).

*Double Happiness* offers a portrait of Vancouver’s Chinese that partially disputes this. Jade’s family does indeed live in what appears to be a non-racialized suburb. However, it is significant that there is no interaction with neighbours, as Shum’s Chinese, or at least the older first generation immigrants, primarily speak Cantonese, eat only Chinese food, shop only in Chinese stores and socialize only with other Chinese. While Jade’s father Quo (Stephen Chang) presumably interacts with non-Chinese when he works as a security guard, this is never shown. Delany’s version of Vancouver suggests this is a false portrait, as he writes (in the same year the film was released) that in Vancouver, “ethnics do not live a unitary life within an old-world cultural enclave; instead, we all cross and re-cross ethnic borders every day” (7). As Shum has stated that her film is at least partly autobiographical (Gasher 131), even allowing for exaggeration,



the perception of ethnic interaction in Vancouver seems to differ sharply depending on which side of the ethnic divide the observation is made from. It is also possible that the increasingly visible presence of the Chinese in Vancouver may have created a paradox, that their increased population meant that non-Chinese residents experienced an unprecedented level of contact with Chinese residents at the same time as it became much easier for many Chinese to live in an almost entirely Chinese milieu.

This increased presence also provided an interesting context for the making of *Double Happiness* that may have influenced its content. The spike in immigration in the 1980s and early 90s was in part due to an influx of wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong. Related to this was the creation of a new category of “investor immigrant” in 1994 to tap into the flight of wealthy Hong Kong residents emigrating in the face of the imminent handover of the colony to mainland China in 1997 (Levitin 274). These newcomers, not having had to deal with the history of racism that previous waves of immigrants had faced, did not feel the traditional need to keep a low profile. They had a major impact on the city’s skyline through the “Hong Kong High Rise” boom that began in 1988 and in part led to the popularity of the term “Hongcouver” (Jim 335). This in turn led to a series of stories in Vancouver newspapers warning of a “Chinese takeover” of the real estate market and created what Jacqueline Levitin describes as a “climate of xenophobia” at the time *Double Happiness* was made. She argues this explains the film’s cultural politics, which “reaches out to say ‘we Chinese are harmless and essentially just like you’” (2007: 274). The film’s argument is actually more complex, since it draws a distinction between a traditional older generation and a restive younger one. While both are “harmless,” the

film suggests the second generation young adults would be very much like the (white) audience if there were fewer barriers within and outside their community.

In a sense, *Double Happiness* was already dated when it was made. While it was released in 1994, it is actually set a few years earlier. Accepting Shum's characterization of the story as inspired by her own life, *Double Happiness* would then be taking place in 1987, the year Shum turned 22, the age of her alter-ego Jade in the film's narrative. So while the film was made during the storm over the new wave of immigrants, it largely does not deal with this wealthy and self-confident group, with the possible exception of the arrogant Hong Kong film producer, played by Shum, who questions whether Jade can be really called Chinese at all. As Levitin points out, Shum identifies with the 1960s cohort of immigrants to Vancouver "who, in Canada, were lower middle class and had to work their way up in the world" (276). This older generation are security guards, like Jade's father, or shopowners like her employer, Mrs. Mar, who want their children to be (or at least marry, if they are female) doctors or lawyers, which are the professions of the young men who are set up on dates with Jade. The film can be seen as catching a transitional moment, the coming of age and increasing assimilation of the children of the 1960s immigrants who grew up as a self-conscious minority, just before the arrival of the mass of new immigrants beginning in the late 1980s. This may also explain why, in a film about Vancouver's Chinese community, none of the exterior scenes include a single shot of the remade Vancouver skyline that even by 1994 had become synonymous with their impact on the city, because the story takes place before it changed.

## Multiculturalism

The second contextual wrinkle that frames the relationships within the community Shum portrays is the Canadian federal government's policy of multiculturalism, which was inaugurated in 1971 and had both positive and negative effects. The stated goal was to broaden the definition of Canadian identity beyond that of the so-called "founding nations" of English and French to include both minority ethnic groups and the First Nations peoples who had already been here when the "founders" arrived, and was an explicit rejection of the assimilationist model. As Delany writes, multiculturalism is an "official myth" that espouses "the simultaneous preservation of old-country values and affirmation of an encompassing Canadianism" (7). Wing Chung Ng describes multiculturalism as a "nation-building project" that, "by encapsulating the rising ethnic sentiments in the Chinese minority and by reaffirming a sense of belonging to Canada, a Chinese-Canadian identity quickly emerged as a common reference point" (125). In this sense, the policy was a success, although a measure of its success, and the ambivalent nature of that success, is reflected in *Double Happiness* by a generational fissure between the younger characters who feel Chinese-Canadian and the older ones who remain Chinese in Canada. As Mike Gasher argues, Jade and the other young Chinese are largely assimilated, as "they speak Cantonese as a second language, if they speak it at all, listen to Western music, frequent the same Vancouver clubs as non-Chinese, and aspire to professional careers" (131). However, Levitin argues that there was a negative impact of multiculturalism, since it "fossilized the imported culture at the moment of importation" (2007: 275). In *Double Happiness*, this is illustrated by having Ah Hong, Quo's boyhood friend visiting from Hong Kong, being less traditionally Chinese than

those who had not seen China in decades, his openness to change signaled by his learning English and his kissing Jade's mother's hand on his arrival because he had just seen the gesture on the airplane movie and had liked it. This is in contrast to Jade's father Quo who, as Eleanor Ty points out, "has taken a notion of Chineseness, even though this no longer resembles the ethos of his homeland, and attempts to embody this ideal through his daily habits and roles" (80).

Another problem with multiculturalism that Levitin points out is that in practice it turned out to be less inclusive than its rhetoric. She argues that it "often amounted to no more than conserving the folkloric and stereotypic aspects of a cultural diversity" and that inclusiveness as practiced by most non-Chinese Canadians is focused on exotica, and "remains circumscribed to (a rather Westernized) Chinese cuisine; perhaps the ability to recognize a lion dance; and 'dim sum'" (275). The result, as expressed in the movie, is that the theory of multiculturalism gives Jade the belief in the possibility of playing Blanche DuBois or Joan of Arc, but the reality is that a casting director can only see her as Chinese, and asks her to do her lines with a stereotypical Charlie Chan-type Chinese accent. As Ty writes, the film "is supremely self-conscious in the way it makes visible the gap between what Jade herself sees and feels and the different images of her identity imposed by both her traditional Chinese parents and Anglo-Canadian society" (192).

This sensitivity to how the larger white community perceives the Chinese minority speaks to the question of the film's relationship to its audience. Levitin, in keeping with her analysis of the film as a narrative expressing the harmlessness of Chinese Canadians, suggests that Shum seeks to frame Jade's rebellion in a way that non-Chinese audiences can identify with. As Shum says, "I was hoping [*Double Happiness*]

would transcend cultural barriers and it has. The difficulty of leaving home is something everyone has gone through” (Banning 291). In pursuance of this, it turns out that Mark (Callum Keith Rennie), the nerdy white graduate student who Jade takes up with, is also rebelling against his father. As Levitin writes, “all families are found to be patriarchal – her Chinese friend Lisa’s as well as Mark’s; the problem is posed as generational rather than cultural” (277). However, the film’s messages are more nuanced than Levitin suggests. It is important to note that Mark’s single and brief remark about his father is given much less weight than the repeated comments about Chinese parents, particularly fathers, not only by Jade, but also by almost every young Chinese character. As Levitin argues, the “fossilized imported culture” resulting from multiculturalism has “meant the preservation of the patriarchal family” (275). Gasher writes that “the conflict isn’t simply inter-generational,” pointing to the role of Ah Hong, a sympathetic elder who gives Jade the blessing and encouragement her father refused (132). The story is therefore not simply a clash of generations, but the presentation of an oppressive culture which has not evolved as it has in the homeland they left. Leach suggests that the diasporic experience “results in the emergence of hybrid identities rather than the coexistence of distinct cultural identities, as envisaged by multicultural identities” (125). In this way, Jade’s search for a hybrid identity that allows her to be Chinese and Canadian is a critique of a government policy that promotes the retention of problematic cultures unchanged by contact with the host culture.

A view from the inside of a different ethnic diaspora is offered by *Bollywood/Hollywood*, a film containing interesting similarities and differences with *Double Happiness*. An important similarity is their relationship with Canada’s

multiculturalism policy. If Shum was the first Chinese Canadian woman to direct a feature film in 1994 (Ty 69), Deepa Mehta, who was born in India and only moved to Canada at twenty-three after marrying a Canadian documentary filmmaker, was the first Indo-Canadian woman to direct a feature film when she made *Sam & Me* in 1991. The proximity of the dates is not a coincidence. Shum has said she was “very fortunate that the Canadian funding bodies were focusing on people of colour in the early 90s” (Spaner 136), a governmental policy that also benefited directors such as Clément Virgo (*Rude* [1995]), Srinivas Krishna (*Masala* [1992]) and Alanis Obomsawin (*Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* [1993]). Besides their funding, the defining characteristic that *Double Happiness* and *Bollywood/Hollywood* have in common and make them a useful source for comparison is their shared concern with the tensions between ethnic and individual identities from an insider’s perspective.

The idea of relating this concern with ethnic identity to performance is also central to both films. Eva Rueschmann notes about *Double Happiness* that “Jade’s experience as an aspiring actress emphasizes the performance of Chinese Canadian identity inside and outside her household” (191). In fact, Jade’s story can be seen as a series of performances related to finding an appropriate ethnic identity: auditions where she is either too Chinese or not Chinese enough, fantasies where she recites roles her ethnicity will almost certainly prevent her from playing, playing the dutiful daughter at home, pretending to be a shy Chinese girl stereotype when she first meets Mark, and going on a pretend date with Andrew, who it turns out is performing at least as much as Jade. As Edward O’Neill comments, everyone “is impersonating someone or something for some audience, and identity is figured not only as a performance, but as a strategic

one” (58). Andrew is a closeted (when in the Chinese community) gay man; Lisa plays to her boyfriend’s attraction to Chinese-related sexual stereotypes by posing as a Suzie Wong-type playmate; Jade’s mother pretends not to miss her disowned son Winston; Ah Hong has a secret lover and child; and Jade’s sister Pearl pretends to be a “straight A” student. Even Quo seems to be performing a role at times, for example when he does not immediately acknowledge Jade’s standing at his shoulder with a plate of buns even though he is clearly aware of her presence (he also “performs” when he sings a karaoke version of “MacArthur Park”). *Bollywood/Hollywood*, which features Rahul Seth as Rahul, a Westernized Indian man under family pressure to marry who hires a woman to pretend to be his fiancée, shares both the ethnic marriage and masquerading themes with Shum’s film. That the fiancée in question (played by Lisa Ray) is an Indian woman pretending to be Spanish and therefore needing to be coached in “how to be Indian” emphasizes a similar appreciation of the performative component in ethnic identity.

### **Cinematic Portraits of Chinese Canadians**

The preoccupation with exotica and ethnic stereotyping that Levitin notes in her critique of multiculturalism can be traced through previous cinematic portraits of Vancouver’s Chinese community. Although there are extremely few of these to study, films from different eras can be found that reflect their times in interesting ways. An example from the exclusionist era of the Chinese Immigration Act is *Secrets of Chinatown* (1935, Fred C. Newmayer), a cheaply made “quota quickie”<sup>3</sup> heavily influenced by the Fu Manchu and other “yellow peril” stories. The Chinese characters,

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<sup>3</sup> Quota quickies were cheaply made films financed by Hollywood studios during the 1930s in order to provide “British” product that would satisfy a British law that required 15% of films shown in the United Kingdom be produced in the U.K. or a Commonwealth country.

several of whom are played by white actors in “yellowface” makeup, can be divided into those who are dangerous and those who seem friendly and Westernized, but are really even more dangerous; and they split their time between killing people, smuggling narcotics into Canada and enslaving young and blonde white women. Like *Double Happiness*, *Secrets of Chinatown* can be divided into three spaces. The Chinese spaces include a restaurant, a shop and, for those looking for the heights of exotica, a hidden temple used for human sacrifice. More importantly, these spaces are strictly Chinese, and non-Chinese who enter without a gang of policeman by their side are taking their lives in their hands. The public spaces are white, and any Chinese within them, such as a servant lurking by the Police Commissioner’s door, are to be regarded with suspicion. Finally, there are some intermediate spaces, such as dark alleys, which are safe enough as long as there are no Chinese around to kidnap you.

*Vancouver’s Chinatown* (1954, Bernard Devlin), a National Film Board of Canada (NFB) documentary from the relatively liberal post-1947 era, is interesting both in its attempt to undermine the more racist assumptions found in films such as *Secrets of Chinatown* and in its fascination with the “strangeness” of the Chinese. Much more than *Double Happiness*, this film is concerned with showing that the newly-enfranchised Chinese population is harmless and “just like everybody else.” A meeting of a local community organization shows a group of middle-aged men in business suits sitting soberly around a table listening to a speaker. The language spoken may be Cantonese, but the visual message is that the proceedings are as dull and unexceptional as a Kiwanis or Rotary luncheon. In a bizarre interview, the group’s president guilelessly provides a history of anti-Chinese racism in Canada, capping it off with a grateful acknowledgement



that Chinese Canadians now have the right to vote and a cheerful, if startling, concession that in the incidence of racism there “may have been fault on both sides.” This film uses an early shot of a Chinatown street with Chinese-lettered shop signs as a signifier of place, but demystifies it through a visit with Chinese typesetters who explain the intricacies of the language, and follows this up with a chat with a friendly shop customer who turns out to be the world yo-yo champion. Despite this consciously liberal, and occasionally patronizing, attempt to debunk “far-fetched stories told about the Chinese Canadian,” the lure of exoticism remains. There is an extended visit to a pharmacy to examine Chinese medicine (“I never knew such things existed,” the reporter remarks) and the film finishes with a performance of a Lion Dance, which is hilariously mis-identified as a Dragon Dance at the end of the previous segment. Clearly made with good intentions, the film shows that there was still a lot of progress that needed to be made.

Unlike these earlier films, *Double Happiness* expresses an “insider” view that shows awareness, if not of these specific films, then of the assumptions they express. Shum’s younger characters are acutely aware of the stereotypes linked with these assumptions and play with them. Jade’s friend Lisa plays up to her boyfriend’s fascination with Asian “otherness,” while Jade herself pretends to be a sweet Asian girl who doesn’t speak English when she first meets Mark. These instances are made more complex because, besides being part of the series of masquerades that run through the film, they express alternative strategies in dealing with white Vancouverites. Ty points out that “Lisa willingly plays the role of the exotic Oriental for her boyfriend” in order to “assimilate and be accepted by the dominant culture” (71), but Jade’s manipulation of stereotypes is a claim to be accepted on her own terms. As Edward O’Neill writes, she

“performs her assigned ethnic and gender role so that she can destroy that role by revealing it to have been a performance, a stereotype mimicked in advance of the other’s expectations” (57). Many of the typical signifiers are used to denote the film’s Chinese spaces (food, dress, language), although it is significant that there is no view of a Chinatown street and Mrs. Mar’s shop, where Jade and Lisa work, is only seen from the inside.

It should also be noted that even describing *Double Happiness* as a portrait of Vancouver’s Chinese community is to an extent essentialist, since, as Sin Yih Teo points out, there are in fact several different Chinese diasporas in Vancouver, a fact which the film never mentions. While the main pre-1970s source of immigrants was Hong Kong, communities from the mainland, Taiwan and Southeast Asia, each with distinct traditions and cultures, have joined them (Teo 5). Just as Hou Hsiao-hsien’s status as a *waishengren* and Hakka complicate his relationships with other groups in Taiwan, it is important to remember that Shum’s status as an insider relates to a specific diasporic community within the larger one recognized, for example in the “Chinese” category on the Canadian census form, by the host society.

### ***Double Happiness (1994)***

It is reasonably straightforward to situate *Double Happiness* as a diasporic film. Among the characteristics identified by Naficy as being associated with accented cinema found here are Mina Shum’s status as an immigrant conscious of her apartness from both host country and homeland; the inscription of her voice on the text through an autobiographical protagonist who directly addresses the audience; the presence of dialogue in Cantonese and English, with knowledge of these languages being

associated with levels of ethnicity, as when Jade is accused of being insufficiently Chinese because of her inability to read Cantonese; and the use of closed and expansive spaces. There is also the structured absence of a character that recreates the experience of exile, in this case the banishment from the home of Jade's older brother. The main arc of the narrative, which involves Jade's journey from ethnically coded family home in the suburbs to urban downtown apartment is an almost classic coded recapitulation of the immigrant's journey. This is particularly true as it is prefaced by her surrendering her key to the family house, placing her "outside" the family, like her banished brother.

The Chinese spaces in *Double Happiness*, particularly Jade's family home, are a good example of the confining space that offers safety in the face of assimilation, and is also a good example of how diasporic cinema conflates the family household with the larger diasporic community. The frame is often crowded with groups of guests, usually eating one of a multitude of Chinese dishes. Even when it is just the family, they are often seen in tight frames, notably in the dinner scene shot from a revolving lazy Susan in the middle of a table, which frames the family members individually as they eat. Austin-Smith points out that at the climactic dinner scene, "Jade's body is not fully contained in the crowded frame for the first few seconds" (209), her bursting out of the frame a visual metaphor for her imminent declaration that she will leave home. Jade is at times able to exert control over this home environment. When she rehearses, the lighting changes and it is as if she is transported out of her home. Interestingly, this fantasy space is darker and lit by blue spotlights, matching the colour schemes of the intermediate spaces such as the rehearsal room where she is asked to use a Chinese accent, the area outside the club where she meets Mark or, for that matter, Mark's bedroom. Ty describes Jade's fantasies

as “a vision of a theatrical world where there is racially unbiased casting and equal opportunity to work for all ethnic subjects” (78). This is true, but more specifically it is a vision of Jade exerting a control over the intermediate spaces which she does not always have in her encounters with representatives of the host society. It is also significant that both of these fantasy episodes are cut short by members of Jade’s family calling for her.

For Austin-Smith, the exteriors in the film are equally confining, as “very few outdoors scenes in *Double Happiness* take place in a setting that is in any way expansive” (209). Her argument here is problematic, because it is possible to read several exterior scenes, most of which begin in a long shot that emphasizes the space around Jade, as being episodes of liberation. An early example is after her successful audition, when her giddiness over the possibilities she sees before her is expressed through a backward zoom which frames her in an area that includes a railway crossing. As this is accompanied by the sudden intense sound of a passing train, it would be hard not to receive the impression that Jade is going places. The later sequence where she unexpectedly meets Mark at the swings also begins in a wide framing, as does a scene where she meets Mark after an audition and he gives her the encouragement she never gets from her parents. It is interesting that when he shows up at Jade’s door soon after, he is now tightly framed and their embrace is interrupted by her family’s return. The freedom of action available in the liberated area is impossible in Jade’s home (Chinese) space. This is made clear in her second arranged date with an eligible Chinese bachelor. Sporting makeup, a Connie Chung-style hairdo and a respectably feminine dress with pearl necklace, she heads off to her date in a glum daze as her family watches through the window as Jade and her date drive off into a sunset. Suddenly, there is a cut to nighttime a downtown exterior and,

over a long shot, Jade's voice is heard telling her date to stop the car. As she emerges from its confining space, the slow, somewhat bland, music suddenly transforms into something loud and fast, gaining volume and velocity as a tracking shot follows first a close-up of her walking feet and then a full shot of her resolutely striding forward, wiping off her lipstick, mussing her hair and finally breaking into a run. As she rips off and discards her overcoat, it is clear that this is a metaphorical run toward freedom. Another important exterior scene begins in a wide frame showing Mark and Jade by the waterfront. When she tells him they have to break up because of her family, not only does the frame become tighter, but they are standing by some wooden pillars that are certainly intended to recall prison bars, as talk of her family encroaches on the open space, subverting its liberating possibilities and making it as confining as her home.

While *Bollywood/Hollywood* can also be considered an example of transnational cinema, its representation of space is completely different. The home space here is anything but confined, as Rahul splits his time between a spacious downtown Toronto apartment and the family mansion, which has a ballroom, an enormous staircase, an expansive garden and what looks like an Olympic-size swimming pool. Nor is there any real distinction between public and private space. A traveling shot down a commercial Toronto street shows block after block of Indian shops selling luxury goods. While the crowd at the mansion for Rahul's sister's bridal sing song is primarily, but not exclusively, Indian, there is a mix of ethnicities at the groom's party held in Rahul's apartment and the musical number there in which guests of all colours mix Bollywood and Hollywood dance steps can be seen as a celebration of multiculturalism. The conclusion Rahul reaches is also different than Jade. Where she rejects the rigid

definition of Chinese identity which her father insists on, Rahul receives dispensation from his traditionalist grandmother to seek a more relaxed version of Indian-ness. And, unlike Jade with her white boyfriend, Rahul will end up marrying an acceptable (Indian) girl and preserving the traditional family.

One possible reason that the films offer different resolutions to the conflicts over identity can be found in their genre and production contexts. Where *Double Happiness* has a playful experimentation characteristic of North American independent cinema (while borrowing heavily from the genre conventions of romantic comedy), *Bollywood/Hollywood* is a largely satiric variation on Bollywood musicals, which it references relentlessly throughout its running time. Mehta's film can even be related to a Bollywood subgenre that has become increasingly popular, which Brian Larkin describes as "a new genre of films centered on the diasporic experience and an increased awareness of the economic strength of the Indian market abroad" (174). Crucial to these films was not only the prosperous lives that the expatriate Indians were living, but the amount of freedom they had. So while Rahul may wrestle with the same identity questions as Jade, he does it in an idealized Canada where there is no racism or poverty and where people are free to mold their own identities. In a sense, all of Rahul's Toronto is equivalent to the liberated spaces in Jade's Vancouver.

Levitin argues that one aspect of this Bollywood subgenre is "a hybridization of styles and frequently a lack of attention to place, turning precise locales into generic cities" (271). This generic sense of place is actually truer of *Double Happiness*. While informed viewers can spot references to specific places and identify specific locations, there are no shots of Chinatown, the city skyline, the mountains or the harbor. Exteriors

tend to be generic: a city street, a park, a railway crossing, a shoreline, the outside of an anonymous club. Where *Bollywood/Hollywood* featured shots of the CN Tower and other local landmarks and was peppered with references to the Blue Jays and other local ephemera, there is nothing equivalent in Shum's film. This may have been a deliberate strategy to broaden the film's commercial prospects by avoiding pinning it down to a specific place and time and suggesting it could be an entirely contemporary story, or it was perhaps a reflection of the production practices of most of the films made in Vancouver at the time Shum was filming, Hollywood runaway productions in which the city was typically camouflaged to look American. Either way, it is a long way from Hou Hsiao-hsien's detailed rendering of specific locations.

### **Wayne Wang**

An interesting contrast to *Double Happiness* can be found in the early films of Wayne Wang. As Ng writes, "Chinese immigration into Vancouver and the rest of Canada was, and still is, part of a larger regional and then global movement of the Chinese population outside of China" (8), marking Vancouver not only as a city in Canada but as the site of part of a transnational global Chinese diaspora. Given this, comparisons to other parts of the North American diaspora can become useful.

Wayne Wang was born in Hong Kong in 1949 and, like Shum, to parents from mainland China. Unlike Shum, he grew up in Hong Kong and only moved to the United States to attend university. After a sojourn gaining experience in the Hong Kong film industry, he returned to the United States permanently in his late twenties (Marchetti 2012: 168). He began making films in a different context than Shum, benefiting from what Gina Marchetti describes as a "growth spurt in Asian American activity" at the time

of his return to the U.S. and a related infrastructure to support it, including new venues for screening films by Asian American filmmakers and film festivals dedicated to promoting their output (2012: 8-9). Examples of these are New York's Asian American Film Festival, which in 1978 became the first in the U.S. to focus on showcasing Asian and Asian American films, the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, established in 1982, and the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, which followed in 1983. The city where Wang settled, San Francisco, also had a larger and more established Chinese community. There was even a legacy of Chinese filmmakers in California producing movies for the Chinese-American market that extended back to the Silent Era with films like *The Curse of Quon Gwon: When the Far East Mingles with the West* (1916, Marion Wong). Later, Esther Eng made several films dramatizing life in the Chinese diaspora that were shown in Hong Kong as well as to Chinese audiences in the U.S., the most famous being *Golden Girl* (1941) (Marchetti 2012: 6). However, these were exceptions and the extensive representation of Chinese-Americans in Hollywood cinema was consistently stereotypical, most notoriously through the long series of Charlie Chan films, a legacy Wang addresses in *Chan Is Missing* (1982). These, at least, were more positive than the "Yellow Peril" films *Shadows of Chinatown* was emulating and the many other racist portrayals of Asians which can be found in mainstream Hollywood films.

Wang's second film, *Chan Is Missing*, deals with questions of identity as a taxi driver and his nephew attempt to track down a recently arrived immigrant with whom they have a business deal. This slim plotline is largely an excuse to explore the geography and history of San Francisco's Chinese community and the different way their



shared ethnicity is performed. The missing Chan in fact turns out to be a man whose life was a series of performances in which he unsuccessfully tried to fit in to his adopted country. Like *Double Happiness*, the younger generation is shown to be much more Westernized but, unlike Shum's film, there is no cause for rebellion. Instead, Chinese culture is seen as source of strength and celebrated in a manner which is closer to *Bollywood/Hollywood's* treatment of Indian culture than Jade's impatience with its rigid rules. Also, while *Chan Is Missing* features a sharp critique of anti-Chinese racism, no specific racist incident is portrayed in the narrative. On the other hand, also unlike *Double Happiness*, conflict between mainland Chinese and Hong Kong immigrants is mentioned, presenting a more complicated and true to life diaspora than offered by Shum. There is also no division between home and public space, because the film's entire space is Chinese. There are only a handful of non-Chinese faces (mostly in restaurants eating Chinese food) and the many shots of San Francisco's Chinatown show it to be bustling and sprawling.

In some ways *Dim Sum* is more similar to *Double Happiness* than *Chan Is Missing*, as it features a battle of wills between a Chinese mother and daughter (played by real life mother and daughter Kim and Lauren Chew) over the daughter's marital intentions. The film does draw a distinction between Chinese (home) space and public space, but it is nicely understated and summed up in shots of Western shoes that are worn outside the house Geraldine shares with her mother and the Chinese shoes they wear inside. But the home space is not portrayed as being confining, as one of the main reasons the daughter is reluctant to marry is that there is nobody to take care of the mother if she leaves San Francisco and joins her boyfriend (both Chinese and a doctor, so

not a rebellious choice) in Los Angeles. Nor does the public space offer the difficulties needed to be overcome or the possibilities of liberation that it does to Jade. While there are shots of Chinatown (and other prominent landmarks such as the Golden Gate Bridge), this family home is in the suburbs. But it is not the confining and comforting fortress defending against assimilation that is portrayed in *Double Happiness*, or even to some extent *Bollywood/Hollywood*. This film gives a sense that the Chinese characters are at home not just in Chinatown, but all parts of the city. For example, an extended shot of a rippling river accompanied by Chinese music on the soundtrack seems to claim the whole city as a welcoming space. It is an interesting irony that the United States, the country that celebrates the “melting pot” myth is represented as being more accommodating to Asian difference than Canada, whose corresponding official myth is multiculturalism.

Another major difference between Wang’s films and *Double Happiness* is the treatment of the older generation. While the portrait of Jade’s father is not entirely negative, with scenes such as the karaoke party making it impossible to see him simply as a patriarchal tyrant, it is also clear Shum considers him to be in the wrong. As Levitin notes, the early dinner table scene in which he criticizes his daughter Pearl for using the word “fact” (which he confuses with “fuck”) demonstrates from the start of the film that his patriarchal authority is “inappropriate linguistically and culturally; limited English and cultural inflexibility render him blind and deaf to what is happening even at his own dinner table” (279). This is in sharp contrast to the treatment of Geraldine’s mother in *Dim Sum*, who has even more limited English, but makes up for it through her kindness and wisdom. Not surprisingly, the ending of *Dim Sum* is completely different too, and again much closer to *Bollywood/Hollywood*. Geraldine finally follows her mother’s

wishes and marries her Chinese doctor, and everybody is happier as a result and settles down to a nice Chinese meal.

### **Conclusion**

Some of the differences between the films are likely the result of historical circumstances specific to Vancouver, Toronto and San Francisco, but it is striking how much sharper a break is portrayed in *Double Happiness*, and how much more necessary it seems. Part of this is no doubt due to Mehta and Wang being first generation immigrants who grew up in their respective home countries while Shum, like Hou, arrived in her adopted country as a child and feels less connection to a common homeland. The reality of racism is also much more present in Shum's film, as is the double marginality of her lead character as being both a visible minority in a white majority city and a female owing loyalty to a patriarchal culture. It would be difficult not to relate these differences to the relationship between the Chinese and host communities in Vancouver and Shum's own experiences as a Chinese Canadian woman. Eva Rueschmann writes that "Jade's coming-of-age and eventual moving out of her family home can be seen as a miniaturized version of the immigrant journey, a variation on her parents' own migration out of a traditional Chinese cultural context" (191). But it is more than that, as Jade's ethnic identity has an oppressive dimension that is presented almost entirely in satiric terms in *Bollywood/Hollywood* and is completely absent from Wayne Wang's films. *Double Happiness* at times shows uneasiness with the drastic step of cutting ties to family and community, but the ending, which shows Jade sitting in the corner of a wide framing that exaggerates the space of her new apartment, clearly shows her embarking on an adventure. It is no accident that the curtain she hangs up is not something with a Chinese

pattern that might signal a desire to maintain some link to her culture, but has pictures of Marilyn Monroe. She will still have to negotiate the intermediate space to establish a hybrid ethnic identity she is comfortable with, but the haven she will be doing it from will be an expansive space where all things might be possible and both non-Chinese (her boyfriend Mark, who she is seen leaving a message for at the end) and Chinese (her second generation friends Alan and Lisa, who she says will be coming over) are equally welcome.

## **Conclusion**

Hamid Naficy, writing about Luis Buñuel, not usually discussed as a diasporic director even though almost all of his films were made outside his native Spain, argues: “If one thinks of Buñuel as an exilic filmmaker . . . further understanding about his films, hitherto unavailable, will be produced” (2001: 39). It is the suggestion of this thesis that while it is possible to examine the work of Hou Hsiao-hsien and Mina Shum in a variety of ways, analyzing them as diasporic films provides a lens that illuminates aspects of both that other avenues might not deal with.

This thesis has been particularly concerned with a specific kind of transnational film, that in which second generation immigrant filmmakers with a looser connection to the ethnic diasporic homeland than the initial immigrant generation produces autobiographical texts which explore the tension between the resistant culture of their parents, whose main emotional connection is with the home they left behind and the assimilationist pressures of the adopted country in which they find themselves. While there have been films about the immigrant almost as long as there has been cinema, the effects of globalization and related mass migrations of population that have created new diasporic communities in various parts of the world has led to a growth spurt in transnational and diasporic films. The main focus when discussing these films becomes their shared stylistic characteristics that challenges traditional categories of studying film, particularly the national cinema model, which groups films according to the country in which they were made.

Chinese diasporic films are those made in various parts of the world by filmmakers identifying themselves as ethnic Chinese that are set among diasporic

communities that share a common vision of a Chinese homeland, but made outside of the umbrella of mainland Chinese national cinema. By examining films made in two distinct Chinese diasporas, this thesis hoped to map out the local factors that produce films that are both local and international, hybrids that contain elements of national and transnational cinema that are each specific to the time, place and culture in which they are made but share themes and styles that cross these boundaries.

Influenced by the work of Hamid Naficy, this thesis proposed a model to perform a close analysis of the representations of space in these films to illuminate how they express their main concern, which is the negotiation between host and homeland cultures and the new identity this negotiation produces for the immigrant. This model looks at how the filmmaker depicts “host space,” which are those spaces in the film associated with the culture of the adopted country; “home space,” which are those spaces associated with the culture of the immigrant homeland, typically symbolized by the family household; and “intermediate space,” those areas in which the two cultures interact and often where the process of hybridization of immigrant identity occurs.

Hou Hsiao-hsien, a Taiwanese filmmaker who arrived there from mainland China at the age of two, expresses a sense of unbelonging in a series of films in which he examines, often in coded form, the process of assimilation of an immigrant culture in the face of an assimilationist host society. Although Hou is not usually discussed in terms of diasporic cinema, this thesis argued that his films of the 1980s and 90s shared many characteristics associated with transnational cinema and that using the proposed analytical model illuminated ideas and attitudes toward Chinese and Taiwanese culture and the search for a Taiwanese identity in the wake of the years of martial law and in the

face of modern, soulless society. In particular, this thesis suggests that Hou's attitude to his mainland Chinese heritage has undergone a progression from a nostalgic wish to hold on to some elements of it, even as the emotional ties to the homeland associated with his parents' generation prove to have little use in their adopted country, to a recognition that the idealistic view of Chinese culture he learned as a child has little relationship to reality. This is matched by a pessimistic view of contemporary materialist society divorced from these ideals with nothing to replace them except greed and hedonism.

Mina Shum, born in Hong Kong to mainland Chinese parents who arrived in Vancouver as a year old child, shows an ambivalence toward both Canada and her Chinese heritage, but she is ultimately less nostalgic than Hou Hsiao-hsien. An interesting difference between them is that while most of Hou's films feature a patriarchal figure associated with Chinese culture being undermined and displaced, Shum's film features a heroine who can only make a life for herself she can be happy with by breaking with her rigid patriarchal father. Perhaps Hou would be less nostalgic if his father had not died when he was young, or if he had been a woman contending with a patriarchal culture. Another important difference is that Shum does not share Hou's pessimism about modern society. Her ambivalence toward her country is essentially a reflection of its ambivalence toward her. If it weren't for the racism she encounters, *Double Happiness* would be very close to a straightforwardly assimilationist film.

A question remains of whether two such dissimilar filmmakers as Hou and Shum have much in common other than the stylistic characteristics associated with transnational cinema that are also shared by a number of non-Chinese filmmakers. This thesis argued they shared common cultural references, notably concerning the central role

of the father in the patriarchal family and the concept of “inside” vs. “outside” which can be traced to Confucian philosophy. Beyond that, it is striking how similarities surface in unexpected ways. An example of this is in a story related to her daughter by the mother in *A Time to Live, a Time to Die* concerning another daughter who died of neglect because she wasn't a boy. This finds an echo in a very similar story told directly to the camera by Jade's mother in *Double Happiness*. However, while this thesis suggested that it is important to not dismiss the shared cultural concerns, what is most interesting about them is how this shared cultural root is transformed into distinct hybrids through contact with local historical and societal contexts. In effect, Naficy's insight is ultimately convincing, that these films, notwithstanding the interesting ways they colour aspects of Chinese culture, do share more characteristics with non-Chinese transnational films than they do with other Chinese films.

The main limitation with this thesis is that is limited to two diasporas. A study that includes Hong Kong, Australia, Malaysia and other Chinese diasporas would be more comprehensive, as well as fascinating, in studying how local factors produce their hybrids and what these hybrids look like. This is clearly a subject too large for an M.A. thesis, but offers interesting avenues to explore for the future. Indeed, there is no reason the analytical model proposed in this thesis can only apply to Chinese diasporic films. With the proliferation of diasporas in our globalized world, all sorts of possibilities exist for its application.



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