

New Taipei Women's Images in Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the development or transition of women's images in Taiwanese cinema during the 1980s. The central aim of the thesis involves examining the characteristics of Taipei women by identifying the way in which they are positioned, imagined, and represented in three films. Chapter One examines object/setting motifs, which contributes to the understanding of character traits. Chapter Two specifically discusses the typical image of Taipei women through the representation of binary oppositions. In Chapter Three, the study focuses on the common use of voice-over in the three films, reflecting upon the directors' concerns with women's inner voices and women's desire for independence. In the field of ideological film studies, this close analysis of new Taipei female characteristics uncovers the individualism vs. familism binary opposition constructed by New Cinema film directors and their consistent concern with humanism when portraying Taipei women.

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Introduction

Objectives and Contexts

Today, Taiwan remains a post-colonial region that struggles to fully reconcile its independent status. Film directors in Taiwan seek to negotiate the different forms of understandings and manifestations of the nation. Taiwanese films, rooted in Taiwan's unique and rapidly-changing history, serve as fascinating chronicles that convey Taiwan's recent socioeconomic and political transformation. Before the 1980s, Taiwanese cinema was constructed as a highly propagandistic or commercial cinema with few distinctive products.¹ As filmmakers received increasing freedom to make films and explore cinematic form and social problems, the “heroic” period of Taiwan cinema started in the 1980s, with many works known for their realistic, down-to-earth, and sympathetic portrayals of Taiwanese life.

In 1982, the government-run Centre Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) produced the four-episode film, *In Our Time* [光陰的故事], which initiated the rejuvenation of Taiwanese cinema, known as the New Cinema Movement.² In the 80s, many Taiwanese directors, including Hou Hsiao-Hsien [侯孝賢], Edward

¹ Douglas Kellner, “Exploring Society and History: New Taiwan Cinema in the 1980s,” *Jump Cut*, 1998 (42): 101.

² There are still disputes over the start of the movement. Douglas Kellner considered *In Our Time* (1982) as the start of the New Cinema Movement, while Chris Berry and Feii Lu argued that the New Cinema was confirmed by *The Sandwich Man* (1983) [兒子的大玩偶].

Yang [楊德昌], Kun-hou Chen [陳坤厚], Te-Chen Tao [陶德晨], I-Chen Ko [柯一正], and Yi Chang [張毅] explored the tensions between tradition and modernity, urban and rural, and specific conflicts and problems of contemporary Taiwanese life. As Douglas Kellner argues, the new Taiwanese cinema represents “a linked set of probings of Taiwanese history, society and identity that explore the conflicts between tradition and modernity and that deal with the concerns of the present moment – a conjuncture fraught with problems and perils, but also possibilities.”³ In the New Cinema Era, Taiwan’s major filmmakers share certain concerns about their subject matters. By occasionally collaborating on each other’s projects, they have produced a body of work with lasting significance and have also enabled the introduction of diverse national film productions in the 90s. As a film movement, new Taiwanese cinema of the 1980s requires significant consideration.

The year 1982 also contained important implications for Taiwanese women. During this time, women started to foster greater awareness of their own status and fight for their rights. According to Yenlin Ku [顧燕翎], a prominent feminist, the modern Taiwanese women’s movement can be divided into three stages: the pioneering period (1971-82), the *Awakening* period (1982-87), and the post-martial-law period (1987-present).⁴ In 1982, Lu Hsiu-Lien [呂秀蓮], known as

³ Ibid., 101.

⁴ Yenlin Ku, “The Changing Status of Women in Taiwan: A Conscious and Collective Struggle Toward Equality,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol.11, No.3, 1988, 186.

the pioneer of this movement, served prison time in connection with the “Kaohsiung Incident” (gaoxiong shijian [高雄事件])⁵. Several of her associates in the modern women’s movement united together to establish a monthly magazine, *Awakening* (funü xinzhī [婦女新知]). This periodical purported to “raise female consciousness, encourage self-development, and voice feminist opinions.”⁶ Consequently, Taiwanese women gained increasing awareness of their subordinate status and started to recognize their rights for equality.

Since the film and feminist movements happened almost simultaneously in Taiwan, several research areas arose regarding the intermarriage of these developments. Subjects for study include the way in which women are positioned, imagined, and represented in the aesthetic shape of Taiwanese films during the new cinematic period as well as the differences between the image of traditional women and that of new Taiwanese women. Another research question involves the way in which Taiwan’s urbanization process influences the image of women in films. However, contemporary scholars have paid little attention to these questions; while the significance of Taiwanese films has been recognized in both film criticism and cultural history, the image of women in films has been largely neglected and requires further research. Accordingly, this thesis purports to

⁵ The Kaohsiung Incident was the result of pro-democracy demonstrations that occurred in Kaohsiung, Taiwan on December 10, 1979. It is well-recognized as a critical and important event in the post-war history of Taiwan and regarded as the watershed of the Taiwan democratization movement.

⁶ Marc J. Cohen, *Taiwan at the Crossroads: human rights, political development, and social change on the beautiful island* (Washington, DC: Asia Resource Center, 1988), 113.

examine the characteristics of the new Taiwanese woman by identifying how women are positioned, imagined, and represented in the aesthetic shape of Taiwanese films during the 1980s.

“Traditional” and “New”

The first step of this research involves elucidating the differences between the images of traditional Taiwanese women and those of new Taiwanese women.

In the postwar period, cinema mainly comprised an instrument of the KMT’s authority. Thus, the ruling government focused on political rather than cultural functions in filmmaking. Under these circumstances, the major directors of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Li Xing [李行] and Bai Jingrui [白景瑞], operated within a state-sponsored film style, known as “healthy realism” (jiankang xieshi [健康寫實]). These films aimed to “undertake a new, aggressive orientation that served the party’s mission to make a good Chinese national cinema,” whose main point purported to “establish that malevolence does not really exist in Taiwan society.”⁷

These conventional films conveyed the characteristics of traditional Taiwanese women. Bai Jing-Rui’s 1969 film, *Home Sweet Home* [家在臺北], provides outstanding examples of how Taiwanese women are historically positioned in films. Made in the 1960s, this film is considered the “Healthy

⁷ Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 26.

Realist” genre, which reflects the traditional Confucian ethics. These beliefs viewed women as subordinate individuals that foster strong family values and relinquish material desires. In these early films, traditional values provided a clear distinction between “positive” and “negative” images of women. Positive images of women portrayed females that adhered to the mainstream social values, while negative images involve women that disobeyed or opposed these conventional social values. In *Home Sweet Home*, the main characters, Leng-lu and Shu-yuan, correspond to these categories. In need of material luxuries, Leng-lu leaves her lover Wang-fu for another man who can bring her to the United States. After she returns to Taiwan, she spends all of her time playing mahjong. In contrast, her former lover, Wang-fu, is portrayed as a righteous man, who lives for his spirituality. Being rich, Leng-lu asks Wang-fu to quit his job and offers to support him financially; however, Wang-fu rejects this proposition and decides to leave Leng-lu. The film portrays a scene with Leng-lu on her knees, begging Wang-fu to stay, while Wang-fu stands confidently and rejects her. The high pitched music directly conveys the director’s moral judgment about the two characters: Leng-lu’s low position indicates her immorality while Wang-fu’s high stance expresses his righteousness. In the end, Leng-lu sells her house and donates the money to a nursery, while Wang-fu watches her with admiration. The film neglects to devote much concern to the complexity of Leng-lu’s inner world; instead, she serves as a symbol for society’s expectations of women. The educational value behind this

film implies that women must behave in an obedient way and follow the rules in order to gain respect from others.

In contrast to Leng-lu, Shu-yuan provides an example of how women should behave. With her husband gone abroad for ten years, Shu-yuan takes the responsibility of raising the whole family. In the film, her father-in-law states that “Shu-yuan is so virtuous, and the whole family depends on her in these ten years. Without her, I don’t know what will happen to our family.” Although Shu-yuan realizes that her husband has had an affair in the United States, she chooses to forgive him and he finally decides to return to their family. The moral message of this film insinuates that women should remain obedient and faithful despite their husbands’ infidelity. Also, the negative portrayal of Leng-lu indicates that women should forgo material pleasures. While this film neglects to depict the complexity of women’s private thoughts, the female images in this film represent projections of patriarchal values.

In contrast to the traditional women’s images as projections of patriarchal social values, portrayals of the new Taipei women show their complexity as modern social beings. For the purpose of analyzing these modern representations of women, three films have been selected, including *That Day, On the Beach* (1983) [海灘的一天], *My Favourite Season* (1983) [最想念的季節], and *Kuei-meí, A Woman* (1985) [我這樣過了一生].

When New Taiwan Cinema was first developed, many of the works focused on women's experiences and developed the narrative from the perspective of women. *That Day, on The Beach*⁸, the first feature-length film directed by Edward Yang, provides an excellent example of the modern Taiwanese woman. Starring Sylvia Chang [張艾嘉] and Terry Hu [胡茵夢], this film has a reputation as “the first “women’s film from Taiwan.”⁹ This movie depicts the various stages of a woman’s arduous efforts against patriarchal values on the path to pursuing her own autonomy. As one of the key figures of the New Taiwanese Cinema, Edward Yang constantly emphasizes the conflict between modern and traditional values. Unlike previous government-controlled cinema, he considers his films to constitute works of art and created them for aesthetic rather than commercial reasons. In this film, he successfully employed a fragmented pattern of storytelling to dramatize the story of a woman’s pursuit of independence. Yang’s debut work won Christopher Doyle [杜可風], the cinematographer, an award for the Best Cinematography in the Asia-Pacific Film Festival of 1983.

Similarly, *My Favorite Season* (1983) reveals the early awareness of women’s gender consciousness and follows a woman’s efforts in search of her independence. Also starring Sylvia Chang, this film centers on the romantic relationship between the hero and heroine, who agree on a contracted marriage in

⁸ *That Day* in later paragraphs for short.

⁹ Zhiwei Xiao, “That Day on the Beach,” in *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Cinema* ed. Yingjin Zhang (New York: Routledge, 1999), 332.

order to provide the heroine's child with a family name. The film director, Chen Kun-hou [陳坤厚], is most recognized for his film, *Growing Up* (1983) [小畢的故事], one of the main films that initiated the New Cinema Movement. He was also the cinematographer for several of fellow director Hou Hsiao-hsien's earlier films. After Chen's success in the new era of Taiwanese film, he shot and directed *My Favorite Season*, written by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Chu Tian-wen [朱天文], Hsu Shu-chen [許淑真], and Ding Ya-min [丁亞民]. Although this film failed to win any awards, the leading character, Liu Xiang-mei, became a distinctive new woman's figure that emphasizes the independence and courage of new Taiwanese women.

Produced in the same year as *My Favorite Season*, *Kuei-mei, A Woman*¹⁰ provides a powerful study documenting the plight of Taiwanese women. Adapted from the novelette of famous Taiwanese writer Xiao Sa [蕭颯], this film is considered as the most powerful portrait depicting the experience of Taiwanese women.¹¹ The protagonist's image, which provides a metaphor for the suffering woman, is commonly used in Taiwanese cinema to critique women's oppression under the patriarchy. As one of the New Cinema's key figures, director Chang Yi [張毅] produced his trilogy about Taiwanese women from 1984 to 1986, which included *Jade Love* (1984) [玉卿嫂], *Kuei-mei* (1985), and *This Love of Mine*

¹⁰ *Kuei-mei* in later paragraphs for short.

¹¹ Zhiwei Xiao, "That Day on the Beach," in *Encyclopedia of Taiwan Cinema* ed. Yingjin Zhang. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 208.

(1986) [我的愛], all of which are adapted from literary works during the same time period. *Kuei-mei* experienced unexpected box office success. However, many critics maintained that the success largely resulted from the publicity of its female star, Yang Hui-shan [楊惠珊], who gained a significant amount of weight over the course of the production to accurately depict the entire life of a suffering woman.¹² Despite the controversy surrounding this film, it received four awards in the 1985 Golden Horse Film Festival, including Best Film, Best Director, Best Actress, and Best Screenplay.

These three films raise one intriguing issue: the awakening of gender consciousness for Taiwanese women. Throughout most of Taiwanese history, women were considered inferior to men and were encouraged to stay at home. They lacked the right or freedom to express their own ideas or to choose the life that they desired. In addition, they had to live with unfair and unequal gender expectations. However, increasing educational opportunities at all levels have helped Taiwanese women to acquire the ability and knowledge to organize and ameliorate their situation; yet, Taiwanese women still struggle to achieve complete gender equality with men.

This discrimination against women was manifest in the realm of film studies. The “Health Realist” genre depicted men as performing all of the important actions and propelling the plot forward. In contrast, women were portrayed as

¹² James Udden, *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 71.

passive objects of desire that were gazed upon and pursued by male protagonists. The filmmakers and audiences placed strong moral judgment on female characters in films. Although several contemporary critics have discussed the role of gender in Taiwanese films, this project focuses specifically on the early gender awareness of Taiwanese women in three films: *That Day*, *My Favorite Season*, and *Kuei-mei*.

These three films have been selected because they share a considerable number of similarities. Although they were made at different times and by different film directors, they share a common theme: the spiritual growth of Taiwanese women searching for independence and dignity. Furthermore, they invite audiences to identify with the female protagonists. In these three films, women no longer represent objects of desire; rather, they perform the actions that control the plot. Instead of motivating or influencing the actions of men, these female leads undertake the actions themselves. Aside from these thematic similarities, these films possess formal likenesses. The three directors all use several object and/or setting motifs to depict the character traits of the leading female protagonists. In addition, the films use binary oppositions to form comparisons and contrasts between the characters and use voice-overs to show the inner voices of modern women. Lastly, all three women reside outside of Taipei initially and then move to Taipei, providing them with the challenge of settling down and searching for their identity. Hence, these three films reflect the gender consciousness and spiritual growth of Taiwan women. The following thesis aims

to provide a comprehensive analysis of women's images in the New Cinema and to search for a more persuasive understanding of the society and culture that the New Cinema directors endeavor to portray.

Literature Review

Scholars have provided minimal attention to the representation of women in Taiwanese films. Liang Liang [梁良] briefly introduced the transformation of women's roles in such films from 1950 to 1990. In his article, he specifically mentions the successes of Yang Hui-shan and Sylvia Chang in shaping the new women's image. According to Liang, the life experience of Kuei-mei reflects the transformation of Taiwan society from 1950 to 1980. He also asserts that Sylvia Chang's role in *That Beach* shows the director's attempt to create new images of Taiwanese women although the role itself involves a lot of uncertainty.¹³ Despite Liang's comprehensive introduction, his study neglects to provide an in-depth analysis of the films mentioned in the article.

Unlike the representation of women's roles in Taiwan cinema, the New Cinema itself, as a significant movement in Taiwan film industry, elicits considerable attention from scholars. Among these researchers, Douglas Kellner discusses the innovation and the profound impact of the New Cinema. According to Kellner, the New Cinema is "new" because it rebels against previous cinematic

¹³ Liang Liang 梁良, "Taiwan dianying ban bian tian – nüxing juese 40 nianlai de zhuanbian" 臺灣電影半邊天——女性角色 40 年來的演變軌跡 [The Transformation of Women's Role in Taiwan Cinema in the Past 40 Years], *dangdai dianying* 當代電影, 1996 (03): 92-96.

genres and attempts to produce a socially critical and aesthetically innovative cycle of films that are appropriate for exploring contemporary Taiwanese society. He also introduces the special characteristics of New Cinema, including the filmmakers' preferences for shooting outdoors rather than in studios, utilizing natural rather than artificial lighting, and casting non-professional actors instead of professional ones. At the end of his article, Kellner emphasizes the filmmakers' special interests in the problems of the underclass, women, youth and other marginalized and oppressed groups.¹⁴ His introduction of New Cinema films offers several ways to understand the method by which directors portray the image of Taiwanese women; however, he overlooks the details of how marginalized groups are portrayed.

Some scholars comment on the connection between the French New Wave movement and the Taiwanese New Cinema. For example, Peng Hsiao-yen asserts that the main feature of New Cinema film language is "anti-drama," which was inherited from the French. To achieve this effect, filmmakers use techniques such as ellipses, long shots, filming complexity formed by space and depth, and quiet, reserved performances. However, these directors possess "excessive" faith in auteurism, and "it is their indulgence in the self that, made the auteur film persona non grata in Taiwan."¹⁵ As a result, these directors have two choices in order to

¹⁴ Douglas Kellner, "Exploring Society and History: New Taiwan Cinema in the 1980s," *Jump Cut*, 1998 (42): 101-115.

¹⁵ Hsiao-yen Peng, "Auteurism and Taiwan New Cinema," *Taipei: Journal of Theater Studies*, Vol. 1, 2012, 125-148.

maintain a film career: learning from Hollywood or from France. After all, the French auteur theory has made them globally-celebrated auteurs.

While the previous studies on New Cinema provide background information that creates a deeper understanding of the theme and style of the three films, the following studies provide a social background of each film. Among all three films, *That Day* receives the most attention from Chinese scholars. In a 2009 article, He Lixin uses the method of Lacanian psychoanalysis to discuss how the film examines the decisions of the female protagonists. In his view, the female protagonists pass through the “mirror stage” in order to achieve their personal growth, and, at the same time, they are forced into the state of being constantly anxious due to the repetitive act of decision making.¹⁶ Their anxiety is rooted in their lack of subjectivity, or self-identity. Through the false recognition of their own image and the wrongness of their decision making, their narcissism is finally broken, which enables their subjectivity to emerge.

In the first part of his article, Lixin mentions how the film shows female protagonists’ personal growth. Ching-ching and Jia-li are both women who are trapped in the mirror stage. Lixin elaborates that “a very profound shot is that when Ching-ching was playing the piano, the surface of piano reflects her figure. It indicates that she uses piano to construct her own image – an elegant and beautiful pianist.” However, her narcissism becomes broken by Jia-li’s

¹⁶ Lixin He 何李新, “Nüxing de xuanze - lun dianying haitan de yitian” 女性的選擇——論電影《海灘的一天》 [Women’s Choices: An Analysis on Film *That Day, On the Beach*], *Hubei Jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 湖北教育學院學報, 2009 (09): 17-18.

appointment, which reminds her of her unsuccessful love affair. She cancels the rehearsal and chooses to meet Jia-li. Lixin shows that Jia-li's own ego is constructed through the gaze of others' mirror images. In the second part of the article, Lixin argues that Jia-li's life changes are all associated with her own choices. Specifically, she chooses to escape from an arranged marriage, to exercise patience towards her own marriage, and to leave when facing the uncertain death of her husband. The limitation of Lixin's study concerns its concentration solely on women's choices without any interpretation of their cultural and social background. In addition, his analysis occurs only from the perspective of the film plot instead of the film style.

Besides using the method of psychoanalysis, Yang's film can be interpreted from the perspective of essentialism. In a 2013 article, Jun Deng uses the essentialist approach to analyze the cinematic representation of life and death in Yang's films and the related thoughts of existentialist thinkers about the meanings of life. Deng maintains that "Jia-li is like a rebellious and passionate Sisyphus."¹⁷ In the pursuit of an ideal marriage, Jia-li conquers the difficulties in her life only to realize that she has not made progress. Her marriage turns out to be a failure, but her courage to challenge her destiny gives audiences hope. While Deng offers a new perspective for analyzing the characters in this film, his article lacks sufficient length to fully discuss the characteristics of women's roles.

¹⁷ Jun Deng, "The Weight of Being: Representation of Life & Death in Edward Yang's Films," *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, 2013, 46.

Apart from journal articles, several books about Edward Yang relate to the topic of New Cinema. John Anderson's 2005 biography of Yang, entitled *Edward Yang*, represents the only book written in English. This book focuses specifically on Edward Yang's film works. In this book, Anderson mentions the similarities between *That Day* and *Citizen Kane*, paying particular attention to the aesthetic aspect of these two films. According to Anderson, "the most important similarity is this: the film presents a filmmaker fully formed, one as adept with the stylistic facets of storytelling as he is with storytelling itself."¹⁸ In explaining those similarities, Anderson mentions two key characteristics in Yang's works: the use of a minor or even marginalized character and Yang's focus on the predominant role that Western culture plays in Taiwan. In his analysis of *That Day*, Anderson basically summarizes the main plot and shows the way in which Yang moves gracefully between characters and time frames. He also mentions Yang's use of music to develop themes.

Apart from Anderson's book, other valuable academic studies provide relevant insight about Yang's films. In *Speaking In Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (2005), Michael Berry offers a significant amount of first-hand information on the production of Edward Yang's films. Additionally, his interview serves as a guide to the development of Edward Yang's film career, including the cultural and social background in which Yang lived, his cinematic awakening, and the development and changes of his personal

¹⁸ John Anderson, *Edward Yang* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 26.

interests. At the beginning of the chapter on Yang, Berry mentions several distinct features of *That Day*: the bold use of voice-over and extensive flashbacks as well as Taipei's image as a counterpoint to the rural locales. However, Berry neglects to mention or analyze these aspects in his interview with Yang. When discussing the production of *That Day*, Berry was curious about Yang's interaction with the cinematographer Christopher Doyle, the sound engineer Duu-chih, and all of the actors in his films. This discussion provides an important clue that throughout Edward Yang's film career, he combines his early interest in comics and architecture with filmmaking; thus, Yang's perspective of modern society can also be understood from his portrayal of the architecture in Taipei. In addition, Berry pays strong attention to the perspectives and experiences of women. In his words, "I feel that approaching these subjects through the female perspective provides a better angle for understanding what is going on. It allows the audience to keep in better touch with the sensitivity of the subject matter."¹⁹ Although Berry's interview provides a general guide for Yang's film career, he does not analyze Yang's films from the perspectives of film studies or social studies.

In order to address the gaps in Berry's interview, other research provides social and historical insights into Yang's work. Yeh Yueh-yu commented that Edward Yang's works are attuned to European high modernism. According to Yeh, Yang's films have always been known for their tangled connections with the

¹⁹ Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 282-288.

First World.²⁰ Yang's practice of high European modernism reveals a poignant post-colonial condition in Taiwan. On the one hand, Yang's attachment to modernist forms represents the cultural phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s, when modernism was worshipped in Taiwan's intellectual circles; on the other hand, Yang deliberately chooses modernist techniques as an effective form for articulating a post-colonial, self-reflective hybridity. However, Yeh's discussion of Yang focuses only on Yang's overall style rather than analyzing specific films.

While these previously-discussed studies on *That Beach* and Edward Yang offer different perspectives for analyzing the film, they possess inadequacies in their interpretation of women's roles. Compared with scholars' interest in Edward Yang and his works, *My Favorite Season* and *Kuei-mei* draw less attention in academic field. Most discussions on these two films focus mainly on the plot, providing very little in-depth analysis of these two films.

While greatly indebted to the studies of different researchers, this thesis distinguishes itself from the existing literature by focusing exclusively on the portrayal of women in three films as well as the techniques in which filmmakers use to create such images. Unlike previous studies, this thesis does not represent an ambitious endeavour to exhaust all of the New Cinema films on various subjects or provide a monographic account of filmmakers' artistic achievements. Relying upon Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction* (2003), this

²⁰ Emilie Yeh Yueh-yu, "New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics," *Jump Cut*, No.42, 1998, 73-76.

thesis will ascertain the way in which New Cinema directors use specific cinematic forms and techniques to construct the image of the new Taiwanese woman. It complements current scholarship on the cultural significance of the New Cinema and provides unique perspectives for understanding the gender awareness of Taiwanese women in the 1980s.

Significance and Focus of the Research

The New Cinema has established itself as distinctively Taiwanese by presenting Taiwanese reality in the 80s. This genre is considered as an important turning point since “the cinema that used to speak for the nation could speak for personal and community history.”²¹ Apart from the focus on marginalized and oppressed groups as the subject matter, these films also change the way in which the camera views women. In the New Cinema, a woman is no longer viewed as an “object of desire;” instead, females possess a greater sense of power on screen. An examination of women’s imaging and placement in front of the camera reveals the influence of the 1970s western feminist movement in academia and filmmaking on the Taiwanese cinema, which manifests the interaction between tradition and modernity. Overall, the significance of New Cinema and the development of the feminist movement receive detailed discussion in this thesis.

²¹ Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 6.

Furthermore, this thesis serves as a complement to previous studies on New Cinema as well as on women's studies in Taiwan. The purpose of this study aims to derive an original interpretation from the perspective of Film Narratology and gender studies as well as to provide an alternative understanding of women's images in the New Cinema films. Although much research has investigated the New Cinema, most analyses focus exclusively on the themes and shooting techniques of the films rather than the artistic styles of films. In other words, most scholars focus on the stories and ignore the techniques that convey such stories. In order to address this research gap, this thesis intensively examines the motifs in these three films, combining the in-depth analysis of the elements related to film style with cultural and social interpretations.

In their discussion of film form and meaning, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson present the concept of a "motif," which provides the foundation for this analysis on film style, as it enables the examination of similarity and repetition as formal principles. According to these authors, a "motif" is "an element in a film that is repeated in a significant way."²² By analyzing these repeated elements, the character traits of the leading roles in these three films become apparent. Using Bordwell and Thompson's theory on film form, this thesis provides a greater understanding of the narrative functions of the motifs, which are related to the character traits and other elements that directors use to portray Taiwanese women.

²² David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 57.

Plot Summary

This section provides a general introduction to the plots of all three films that will be discussed in the following chapters.

That Day uses flashbacks to express a story of the reunion between old friends, Jia-li and Ching-ching. Ching-ching is a successful pianist who returns from abroad to her hometown for a piano performance. Before her rehearsal, she receives a note from her old friend, Jia-li, who asks to meet her in a coffee shop. Since Ching-ching was once in love with Jia-li's brother, she decides to reunite with Jia-li. In casual conversation, Jia-li tells Ching-ching of her struggle after the two friends parted following high school. In Jia-li's flashback, her elder brother, Jia-sen, was forced to follow their father's will and marry a woman he didn't love, which made him abandon his lover, Ching-ching. After being abandoned by Jia-sen, Ching-ching achieves great success in her piano career.

The love story between Ching-ching and Jia-sen occupies the early part of the film. After being questioned by Ching-ching about her own marriage, Jia-li looks back at her unhappy situation. After refusing her father's arrangement, she chose to marry the man that she loves deeply: Cheng De-wei. After the brief happiness they once shared, De-wei starts to feel pressured and confused about his work and family life. As the conflict between the couple arises, Jia-li feels hopeless and desperate when she discovers her husband having an affair with another woman, named Liu Xiao-hui. After several conversations with one of her

friends, Xin-xin, Jia-li finally decides to forgive her husband, but in the meantime, she is shocked by her husband's mysterious disappearance on the beach. During the investigation, Jia-li sits on the beach and considers the problems in the marriage. The process of thinking, conveyed through flashback, occupies a significant amount of the film. At the end of her flashback, Jia-li decides to leave her family life and pursue her own career. Overall, the film focuses on Jia-li's spiritual growth; the storyline seamlessly shifts from past to present as she tells her story to her old friend, including the strange disappearance of her husband and the tender bonds within the family that she once left behind.

My Favorite Season centers on two Taiwanese individuals who become involved with a "contracted marriage." Liu Xiang-mei, a young lady who works in Taipei, becomes pregnant after having sex with her boss, who has already been married. In order to find a family name for her baby, she starts her journey to begin searching for a husband. When she meets Bi Bao-liang, she plans to marry him under the contractual stipulation that they must divorce in a year. Although he feels attracted to Xiang-mei, Bi doesn't agree with the contracted marriage. However, Xiang-mei continues to pursue Bi and attempts to help him when he is accused of hiding money in a robbery. Impressed by Xiang-mei's braveness and persistence, Bi finally agrees to the contracted marriage. When they live together, conflicts arise between the couple, especially regarding their values about money. While Bi exercises frugality and tries to save money, Xiang-mei believes that

money serves to people's pleasure. Despite the differences in their value systems, they have a happy marriage. However, a phone call from Xiang-mei's ex-boyfriend creates tension in the marriage; Xiang-mei decides to meet her ex-boyfriend, which makes Bi angry with her. Moreover, Xiang-mei accidentally falls down and suffers a miscarriage, which ultimately results in the couple's separation. After their separation, Bi realizes that he has fallen deeply in love with Xiang-mei, so he tries to find Xiang-mei with the excuse of returning a desk lamp. After seeing each other, Xiang-mei tells Bi that she has cut off the connection with her ex-boyfriend. Finally, the two forgive each other. The ending suggests that they are about to enjoy a real relationship as a couple.

Kuei-mei tells the life story of Kuei-mei, a refugee from Mainland China. She loses her fiancé during the civil war in the 1940s and follows the KMT government to Taiwan after the Communist takeover of the mainland. Initially, her cousin in Taiwan helps her to settle, but she eventually agrees to marry a restaurant worker, who already has three children. Rather than bringing her happiness, Kuei-mei's marriage entails a series of hardships. She not only needs to assume the responsibility of raising several young stepchildren and her own twins, but she also endures her husband's adultery, gambling, and alcoholism. When her husband's gambling debts become severe, Kuei-mei decides to take control of the situation. Under her own will, she goes to Japan with her husband and two children, leaving the other three children with relatives in Taiwan. After

several years of hard work, Kuei-mei returns home with enough money to open her own restaurant.

With a restaurant in operation, Kuei-mei has to confront another problem. Knowing that her stepdaughter is pregnant, she takes her to the abortion clinic with the notion that she is acting in her stepdaughter's best interest. As Kuei-mei approaches her sixties, she begins to suffer from cancer, and Yong-nian takes care of her. When her older son returns from Japan for a family reunion, she divides her property equally among the children, proving herself as a fair and caring mother. Kuei-mei, as the female protagonist, powerfully reflects the experience of Taiwanese women.

Chapter Overview

Focusing on the new image of Taiwanese women in films, this thesis consists of three chapters.

The first chapter examines the object/setting motifs in each of the three films. This discussion combines a close analysis of the aesthetic film languages related to the motifs, with the objective of analyzing the character traits of the protagonists, such as their qualities, experiences, and feelings. By analyzing the implicit and symptomatic meanings of these motifs, this chapter attempts to provide a thorough understanding of the characteristics comprising new Taiwanese women.

The discussion in Chapter Two focuses on the binary opposition in these films. By addressing binary opposition, this chapter will focus on the basic structures and relationships that underlie these literary works and will continue to explore the characteristics of the new Taipei women.

After a detailed review of the motifs and an examination of the binary opposition in all three films, Chapter Three switches its attention to a common technique that is utilized in all these three films: voice-over. An analysis of object/setting motifs, binary opposition and voice-over depicts the characteristics of the new Taipei women and their struggle to adapt to the process of urbanization, which reflects their current state in society.

Chapter One Respective Motifs in Three Films

In each of these three films, the leading characters possess certain traits that are distinctive from those of the traditional Taipei Women. Seymour Chatman emphasizes the importance of interpreting character traits, stating that “we must infer these traits to understand the narrative, and comprehending readers do so. Thus the traits exist at the story level: indeed, the whole discourse is expressly designed to prompt their emergence in the reader’s consciousness.”²³ Therefore, viewers must identify these qualities for the purposes of understanding the whole narrative.

In order to infer character traits in these three films, one must distinguish these characteristics from “any significant repeated element in a film”, which constitutes a motif.²⁴ Although these three films are produced by different directors, all of these movies use significant objects and settings to construct the images of the leading characters. According to Chatman, the setting “sets the character off” in the figurative sense of the expression; hence, the setting represents the place and collection of objects “against which” his/her actions and passions appropriately emerge.²⁵ To some extent, objects and settings can be viewed as a whole that reflects upon character traits. In *That Day*, the scene of Jiali walking on the beach indicates the successes and failures of her marriage, and

²³ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 125 -126.

²⁴ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 125 – 126.

the piano signifies Ching-ching's career aspirations. In *My Favorite Season*, the desk lamp represents Xiang-mei's longing for a warm home and her generosity with money, while the presence of turtles signifies Bi Bao-liang's status as a "green father." In *Kuei-Mei*, the use of honeyed dates, abalone, and jewelry reflects Kuei-Mei's characteristics as diligent, persistent, and unselfish. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter will analyze these traits in each of the three films and examine the new images of Taipei women in detail.

1.1 *That Day, On the Beach*

Moving gracefully and effortlessly between characters and time frames, Yang reveals the various worlds within the upper-middle-class Taipei universe and makes it the stage for *That Day*. By using the beach as one of the most important settings and objects such as piano, broken teacups and dish plates, Yang defines women's roles in his unique way. The repetitions of the specific setting and objects provide hints related to characters in this film, so they are extremely helpful for the comprehension of characters. Generally speaking, the beach symbolizes the loneliness and alienation of Jia-li, piano is a reflection for Ching-ching's personal pursuit as well as her aspiration, the broken teacups as well as dish plates symbolize that Jia-li's family is falling apart. All of these repeated elements together show women's confusion in modern society, and their struggling experiences in the deconstruction and reconstruction of family structure.

1.1.1 Beach: Jia-li's Ups and Downs

The beach, as the main setting in the whole film, is a place for releasing the feeling of desperation, loneliness, and alienation of individuals living in Taipei. In the film, it witnesses the ups and downs of Jia-li's marriage and her spiritual growth. Moving smoothly on timeline, Yang tells the story from Jia-li's perspective and her memories on the beach.

Located in the suburb area of Taipei, the beach belongs neither to the city, nor to the countryside. It is for people who want to be isolated in a very populated area. Therefore, when Jia-li discovers the problems in her marriage, it is the beach where she wants to release her suppressed emotions. Although the narrative doesn't follow ordinary sequence, the beach indicates important moments in Jia-li's life.

Firstly, it witnesses the birth and death of Jia-li's hope. Jia-li starts her memory on the beach with a scene on the street. Before she goes to the beach, she says,

I still remember the morning, which was full of hope. I walked in the fresh air, and that was the first time I got to know the light of happiness, the first time I understood the scent of green leaves. I walked all the way home, and it has been a long time since I felt enjoyable like this. However, once I arrived home, our maid told me, the policeman just called and said De-wei was drowning.

It indicates that after having a conversation with one of her friends Xin-xin, she feels the problems between her and De-wei have been resolved, but her hope arises and dies at the same time. The dramatic conflict reveals the helplessness

Jia-li has gone through, and it is the point when Jia-li starts her spiritual growth. Actually, the scene of Jia-li walking on the street appears twice in this film, which reminds viewers of the sequence and context of the events. The detailed function of this voice-over will be discussed in chapter three.

Secondly, the beach symbolizes freedom and escape. Compared with the life in an urban city, the beach is a free space for Jia-li to escape from all the problems in her life. In Jia-li's memory, she comes to the beach with De-wei after work. Before she comes to the beach, there is a conversation between her and her manager. Working in the publishing company like a machine, Jia-li's facial expression suggests her exhaustion. The manager then comes and points out the mistakes she has made in her work. After this scene, Jia-li and De-wei appear on the beach, walking and laughing with great joy. At that time, the beach is a place for enjoying freedom and happiness.

Thirdly, the beach scene appears when there are problems in Jia-li's marriage, which indicates the trapped freedom. Followed by the scene in which Jia-li walks alone on the beach, there is a scene that Jia-li and De-wei have an argument in their car. The husband complains that the wife doesn't give him enough freedom, while the wife complains the husband doesn't care about their family. It indicates their different values that a man views career as the most important thing while woman puts family at the first place. As the conflict develops, they have another

argument, which ends up with De-wei's leaving and sending letters to Jia-li and his mistress Xiao-hui.

Finally, it witnesses the spiritual growth of Jia-li. It is through the memory on the beach that Jia-li starts to turn from a girl to a woman. During the process, she has gone through several stages: Firstly, her hope suddenly dies down, which puts her into confusion; secondly, she recalls the happiness and sorrow on the beach, and sorts them out from her memory; thirdly, through her memory and the conversation with Ah-cai, she starts to understand the root of conflict between her and her husband. The result of the story is not important anymore, and it is the spiritual growth which empowers the whole story. As Ching-ching suggests at the end of the film, the only important fact is that "the little girl has grown into a perfect woman."

1.1.2 Piano: Ching-ching's Career Pursuit and Aspiration

In the film, piano functions as a reflection of Ching-ching's self-image and her career pursuit. The film opens with Ching-ching's preparation for an evening concert. She requests some adjustments and checks the action on her newly tuned piano. Her facial expression suggests that she is demanding on herself and is deeply engaged in the rehearsal. However, her self-absorption is totally broken when her assistant gives her a note which requests a private talk from Jia-li.

As mentioned above, piano symbolizes Ching-ching's self-image. Before she receives the note from Jia-li, she is fully engaged in the rehearsal. The director

Yang captures the moment when Ching-ching's reflection is on the surface of the piano. In the scene of rehearsal, she herself, her reflection and the piano combine as a whole, which suggests that she treats piano as part of herself. For this scene, Chen comments, "the opening of the film suggests Ching-ching is trapped in her mirror stage. When she is doing the rehearsal, the surface of the piano reflects her image, which indicates that she uses the piano to construct herself - a graceful and beautiful pianist."²⁶

However, Ching-ching's imagined self is broken by Jia-li's request for visiting. After receiving Jia-li's visiting request, she feels confused and falls into her memory. Feeling trapped by her memory, she says to her assistant, "I don't know whether I should go to meet my friend." Facing her confusion, her assistant suggests, "I think you should go. I hate a pianist who can't concentrate." The assistant's suggestion encourages Ching-ching to reconstruct herself and gets her concentration back, which finally turns out a wise choice.

As Ching-ching continues going back in her memory, her action of playing piano functions as a link between the presence and past. In her memory, she is playing piano while Jia-li is reading a book. The first time when she visits Jia-li's home, she finds a piano in her house and opens the cover almost from her instinct. After discovering it is not her piano, she finally covers the piano. Her action of

²⁶ Lixin He 何李新, "Nüxing de xuanze- lun dianying haitan de yitian" 女性的選擇——論電影《海灘的一天》 [Women's Choices: An Analysis on Film *That Day, On the Beach*], *Hubei jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 湖北教育學院學報, 2009 (09): 17-18.

opening and covering the piano may suggest there is little possibility for her romantic relationship with Jia-sen. Her fantasy of living with Jia-sen is broken. Therefore, she uses music to reconstruct herself. As she recalls,

“All I wanted to do was to make a little money by teaching and wait for Jia-sen to graduate. After his engagement to another woman, all that was left for me is music.”

Finally, when she discovers what happens to Jia-li these years, her “self” is reconstructed, and the damaged past is recovered.

In a word, Ching-ching uses piano as a way to construct herself. Unlike Ching-ching, Jia-li’s “self” is constructed through the gaze on others’ mirror image. As a young child, she observes the development and failure of Ching-ching and Jia-sen’s relationship. When she goes to university, she witnesses the romantic relationship between Xin-xin and Ah-cai. After graduation, she witnesses the failure of marriage from her brother, which makes her leave home. When problems exist in her marriage, she starts to observe the relationship between Xin-xin and the young photographer. Finally, she finds out the perfect mirror image from her mother - who forgives her husband after discovering his affairs. However, the mysterious disappearance of De-wei breaks the whole image she constructs through gaze.

1.1.3 Broken Teacups and Plates: The Symbol of Broken Families

Despite his special focus on women's spiritual growth, Yang also presents the transition of family structure in Taiwan's urbanization process. In the film, the motif broken teacups and broken plates indicate the break-up of two families.

With characters all being silent, the film uses a long tracking shot to show the tension between family members. The broken teacups appear when Jia-sen tries to resist his father from arranging his marriage. In this scene, the camera moves from Jia-li into the room, where the father sits on the couch and the son kneels down in front of his father, with several pieces of broken teacups on the ground. Upon seeing this, Jia-sen's mother comes in and picks up the broken pieces while Jia-li first stands still and watch, then leave without a word. Although the film leaves out the conversation between the father and the son, the spectators could feel the strong tension between them. As an obedient son, Jia-sen goes against his father for the first time. However, it ends up with a failure. The long shot also shows Jia-li and her mother's different attitudes towards the conflict. Her mother hopes to solve the problem peacefully, so she picks up the broken pieces quietly, while Jia-li refuses to accept the truth that their marriages are controlled by her father, so she walks away quietly. The scene also foreshadows Jia-li's act of escaping from her old home to a new one.

The motif broken plates appears before the scene in which Jia-li and De-wei quarrel with each other. Since De-wei left home for several days, Jia-li follows

De-wei to the construction site, a wasteland of industrial agitation that lies like a scorched plain on the edge of Taipei. After the couple returns home, Jia-li drops several plates on the ground, which turns into a “debate.” For Jia-li, who has always wanted a warm home, the warmth of family has lost because of the absence of her husband. For De-wei, whose sense of his manhood is linked to his after-hours drinking, his marriage is not just a damaged relationship, but a representation of his inability of controlling over his own life. The broken plates here foreshadow the break-up of the family. Jia-li has been constantly searching for the warmth of a family, but she finally discovers that the real home for her is herself. By using the broken plates as a motif, Yang shows his concern on the familial relationship and Taipei women’s longing for a real home.

1.2 *My Favorite Season*

In *My Favorite Season*, there are several objects or props which indicate Xiang-mei’s attitude towards marriage, and the differences between Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang’s attitude towards money. By using these objects, the director Chen Kun-hou shows a modern Taiwanese woman’s struggle between work and family. Among these objects, the contract shows Xiang-mei’s attitudes towards marriage, the desk lamp and omega watch indicate the differences of their attitudes towards money, and the turtle and birds are symbols of Bi Bao-liang’s status as a “green father.”

1.2.1 The Contract: Liu Xiang-mei's Attitude towards Marriage

The whole story originated from Liu Xiang-mei's pregnancy. In the voice-over, she says, "I want to find a man and marry him, so I could give my child a family name. Once the baby is born, we will have to divorce." It indicates that Xiang-mei is very clear about her ultimate goal. After her pregnancy, the first thing comes to her mind is neither abortion nor breaking up the child's father's family and requesting the man to marry her. Her decision of giving birth to the baby shows her courage to be a single mother and her confidence in raising the child alone.

The first time when she comes to Bi Bao-liang's house, she brings up the issue of signing a contract, which is declined by Bi Bao-liang. After Xiang-mei helps Bi develop business and get him out of the police office, Bi accepts her request with a little bit of hesitance. The contract, or the unborn child, is supposed to be the only link between Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang, and it is the dramatic device which pushes the development of the narrative. The narrative doesn't finish with the end of the contract. After knowing Xiang-mei's child has gone, Bi blames on her and says, "You lose the thing which you should keep, and keep the thing which you should lose." Crying loudly, Xiang-mei decides to end the contract ahead of time. Although there is not any contract between each other, there is romantic relationship which develops between each other.

The above analysis shows the contract's function in the film - a dramatic device for pushing the development, but it also shows the legal awareness of the educated women in 1980s. When Xiang-mei asks Bi to sign the contract, she says, "If we only agree orally, I think it is not credible. Thus, we should first reach an agreement on this matter, and put it in the post office as a proof letter. I don't want to be your real wife if you break your promise and take it as the real marriage." As a woman with formal education and strong will, Xiang-mei's personality shows some of the characters of modern women – independence and braveness. She is good at using legal weapon to protect herself from being hurt, and she is also capable of protecting Bi Bao-liang on some aspects.

1.2.2 Desk Lamp and Cake: Xiang-mei's Longing for a Warm Home

One significant difference between Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang involves their attitude towards material entities. Xiang-mei believes that people should spend money with relative ease while Bi Bao-liang thinks that individuals should maintain strict control over their expenses. Most of the dramatic conflicts between the couple arise from this difference. In contrast to their material beliefs, the desk lamp represents an object that overcomes the differences between the couple and functions as a sign of home, which ultimately reunites this couple.

In total, the couple has three conversations about the desk lamp. When Xiang-mei brings the desk lamp into their home, the notion of family starts to represent a feasible future. The scene in which Xiang-mei talks with her mother, brother, and

Jiao-jiao contains significant harmony. Upon seeing the desk lamp, Bi Bao-liang becomes nervous due to his constant worries about expenses. He requests a private conversation with Xiang-mei, where the two of them discuss the money that they have borrowed from his sister. Xiang-mei tries to comfort him by saying: “Don’t be so nervous, I won’t ask you to pay for it. Could you view it as a gift from me?” However, Bi continues to feel anxious and insists that they should share the expenses. Thus, the first conversation about the desk lamp portrays Xiang-mei’s generosity and Bi Bao-liang’s strict attitude towards expenses.

Their second conversation about the desk lamp indicates Xiang-mei’s longing for a warm home and Bi Bao-liang’s strong desire to share the expenses. When Xiang-mei experiences a numb sensation in her feet, she jumps up from the bed in the middle of the night. While Bi tries to help her by massaging her feet, he immediately states, “I think I should share half of the lamp’s expenses with you.” This statement indicates that although Bi assumes a frugal attitude towards money, he refuses to take advantage of others. In response, Xiang-mei refuses his request: “I already bought it. Life sometimes allows us to be luxurious, or if we save for half of our lives, what’s the meaning of it? I love the light of the desk lamp, and it feels like being at home.” In contrast to Bi, who adheres to a careful attitude towards spending, Xiang-mei believes that money brings people pleasure and should therefore be used to purchase luxurious goods.

Finally, the last discussion about the desk lamp indicates Bi Bao-liang's love for Xiang-mei and his honesty. After Xiang-mei leaves their home, Bi Bao-liang constantly examines the lamps and begins to realize his strong feelings for Xiang-mei. Bi uses the excuse of returning the lamp as a means to meet Xiang-mei and try to rekindle their relationship. When Bi brings the lamp to Xiang-mei's workplace, the security guard questions Bi's choice to return the lamp to Xiang-mei's business, suggesting that Bi could have sent it directly to her house. Since Bi fails to provide an explanation, the viewer understands that Bi's choice merely serves as an excuse for meeting Xiang-mei. However, for Xiang-mei, the lamp is a symbol of home. Since she and Bi no longer share a home, she refuses to take the lamp. Although each member of the couple perceives the lamp in different ways, they both choose to forgive each other due to their longings for a warm home, which creates a "happy ending" for the audience.

1.2.3 Turtles and Birds: Bi Bao-liang's Role in the Family

For depicting Bi Bao-liang's personality, the director, Chen, uses several objects that express Bi's role in contrast to traditional male roles. The role reversal between Bi Bao-liang and Xiang-mei signifies that the feminist movement influences both female and male roles in society. As women begin to assume greater financial responsibility, men seem to lose their male power.

The character of Bi Bao-liang displays traditional feminine caring, similar to the role of a mother. At the beginning of the film, Bi plays with a bird. Upon

seeing his behavior, his landlord says, “You are good on all aspects, except the fact that you like that small stuff. Playing with that small stuff makes you lose your will. You should go out and date many girls, which is what you should do.” The landlord’s view indicates the traditional male role: to produce as many sons as possible in order to perpetuate the family name. However, Bi Bao-liang’s character fails to conform to the standards of a traditional Chinese man. As a man, he also accepts the role of a mother in the family. Before the contracted marriage, he takes care of his young nephew, which shows that he needs to act as a father as well as a mother.

The image of a turtle reflects Bi’s status as a new Taiwanese man. In the film, the turtle appears twice in total. The first time it appears occurs when Xiang-mei hides the turtle in order to welcome her mother. When he discovers that his turtle has disappeared, Bi becomes angry at Xiang-mei. On another occasion, Bi uses the metaphor of the turtle when speaking to Xiang-mei. Assuming Xiang-mei goes out with Henry Wang, he shouts at her, saying: “I am a green turtle, I am a green turtle!” In Chinese culture, the color “green,” especially when applied to a man, indicates that his partner has been committing adulterous actions. By comparing himself to a green turtle, Bi expresses anger that his dignity as a husband has been offended. On one hand, he fosters awareness of Xiang-mei’s stronger-willed role as the decision maker of the family; on the other hand, he feels unsatisfied with his role of as the subordinate person in the relationship.

Furthermore, his use of the term “green turtle” indicates that he perceives Xiang-meï as his real wife rather than as a woman with which he has a contractual arrangement to divorce after one year. The image of the turtle shows that Bi’s loss of Xiang-meï enables him to realize his true feelings towards her.

1.3 *Kuei-meï, A Woman*

In *Kuei-meï*, the main objects that reflect Kuei-meï’s personal traits include honeyed dates, abalone, and jewelries. Although some of them appear only once in the film, they function as reflections of Kuei-meï’s fairness towards her stepchildren and her pursuit of life quality. Besides, these objects together show the complexity of Kuei-meï’s personal traits and make her a round character. On one hand, the film shows her tenderness and tolerance as a traditional Taiwanese woman; On the other hand, the film shows that she attempts to change the traditional male-dominated family structure. In the following discussion, more attention will be paid on Kuei-Mei’s fairness and her braveness in taking the responsibility of raising a family.

1.3.1 Honeyed Dates: Kuei-meï’s Fairness and Nostalgia

Honeyed dates symbolize Kuei-meï’s fairness as a stepmother as well as her nostalgia as an immigrant. In the film, they appear only once, right after the marriage when they are probably still in “honeymoon.” Honeyed dates are sweet, but they are obtained by Yong-nian from gambling, which roots the further disaster of the whole family.

Through the conversation about honeyed dates, Kuei-mei has gone through several stages of emotional change - being surprised, worried and then disappointed. First, when she sees the honeyed dates, she puts down her knitting work and smells the scent of honeyed dates, says “I’ve never seen it since coming to Taiwan!” Honeyed dates are food products from the southern part of Mainland China, and they are very rare in Taiwan. Kuei-mei’s happiness upon the first sight of honeyed dates could be interpreted as her nostalgia as a new immigrant to Taiwan. During the civil war in the 1940s, Kuei-mei follows KMT government to Taiwan after the Communist takeover of mainland. Although the film director Chang Yi doesn’t give much description on her nostalgia, Kuei-mei’s facial expression indicates her happiness upon seeing the honeyed dates from her homeland. According to Chun-Chieh Huang, “the majority of ‘Taiwanese’ are descendants of immigrants from coastal regions of Fujian and Guangdong; Taiwanese initially regarded the Mainland as their cultural and spiritual homeland.”²⁷ In chapter one of his book, he also argues, “the feelings of cultural nostalgia in Taiwan were aroused by Japanese oppression and dissipated by the abuses of her mother country, China.”²⁸ As a new immigrant in Taiwan, it is inevitable for her to have the feelings of cultural nostalgia. However, when facing the serious financial problems, she has to leave Taiwan for Japan to pursue a job. From Nanjing to Taiwan, then to Japan, Kuei-mei is constantly floating and

²⁷ Chun-chieh Huang, *Taiwan in Transformation 1895-2005: The Challenge of a New Democracy to an Old Civilization* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007), xv

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

suffering from financial pressure, her husband's gambling problem, and the complicated relationship between her and her stepchildren. Her first response upon the sight of honeyed dates indicates her nostalgia as a new immigrant of Taiwan.

Apart from being a symbol of Kuei-mei's nostalgia, honeyed dates also indicate Kuei-mei's unselfishness. After Yong-nian tells Kuei-mei the honeyed dates are from Chao's brother-in-law, who brought them from Hong Kong, Kuei-mei asks "are they expensive?" Being worried about the price of honeyed dates, Kuei-mei's family is troubled by financial problems at this stage. However, she later discovers the price of honeyed dates doesn't matter but her husband's gambling habit is what matters. Although her first response indicates honeyed dates are valuable for her, and she is concerned with the price, she still chooses to share them with the family when Yong-nian tells her to have those honeyed dates herself. It also indicates that she treats her stepchildren as her own children, as she repeats in the film twice, "I have five children." Being told that she is only allowed to bring two children to Japan, she requests anxiously, "But, I have five children!" Also, when she is disappointed by Yong-nian's affairs, she leaves him but still cares about the five children, "When I settle down, I will come back and get five children. They all belong to me!" It indicates that she treats all her children equally and gives them unselfish love.

In spite of representing Kuei-mei's nostalgia and unselfishness, honeyed dates also indicates Yong-nian's humanity flaw. For Kuei-mei, honeyed dates are valuable gifts from her husband, but the truth is that they are obtained through gambling. When Kuei-mei asks, "Aren't they expensive?" Yong-nian answers shamelessly, "I just won a little money." Honeyed dates are sweet, but behind the sweetness lie the roots of their poverty.

Above all, honeyed dates function as an important motif in the film, which represent Kuei-mei's nostalgia and fairness, as well as Yong-nian's humanity flaw. As a new immigrant in Taiwan, Kuei-mei needs to face financial problems, Yong-nian's gambling habits and the complicated relationship between her and her stepchildren. Honeyed dates could be viewed as the only comfort to her nostalgia, but they turned out to be a symbol of Yong-nian's humanity flaw.

1.3.2 Abalone and Beef Rice: Kuei-mei's Pursuit of Dignity

Apart from Honeyed dates, abalone and beef rice are two important motifs in that they signify Kuei-mei's independence and her pursuit of dignity. Following the presence of honeyed dates, abalone is the object which sparks the first argument between Kuei-mei and Yong-nian, and it also shows their different values. In addition to abalone, beef rice is another motif that shows Kuei-mei's pursuit of dignity. It is a Chinese dish Kuei-mei learned in Japan, which gives her enough skills to open a restaurant in Taiwan.

Although the abalone appears only once in the film, it indicates their different values. For Yong-nian, the abalone dish is expensive and enjoyable. However, for Kuei-mei, it is just leftovers from others. When Yong-nian hears that Kuei-mei throws the abalone away, he shouts at her,

“How could you throw good food away? You think you belong to higher class? Then you shouldn’t have married a waiter like me. I’m not rich! I already get used to eating leftovers!”

His lines could be interpreted in two ways: First, he is satisfied with the quality of life. For him, the abalone is good and clean, despite the fact that it is the leftover from others. Second, he actually accuses Kuei-mei of ignoring his dignity. In his point of view, Kuei-mei has a higher demand on the quality of life, which is beyond his capability. In traditional Chinese culture, the wife should follow the husband’s will completely, but Kuei-mei’s behavior is out of his prediction. Therefore, Kuei-mei’s behavior of throwing the abalone is offensive to him in some way. It turns out he doesn’t treat his own dignity in a serious way. When Kuei-mei points out his gambling habit, he answers, “I won’t gamble anymore. If I do, you can call me a dog.” However, he is still fired due to his gambling problem and put the entire financial burden on Kuei-mei. The contradiction of his words and behaviors shows his irresponsible attitude towards work and family.

It is the pursuit of dignity and independence makes Kuei-mei throw the abalone away. Although the abalone seems “good and clean” to Yong-nian, she considers it as others’ leftovers and refuses them. Her behavior corresponds to an

Chinese proverb, “Bu shi jie lai zhi shi [不食嗟來之食]”, means “don’t eat leftovers from others.” It implies that one should not give up or change his or her wills when facing poverty or low social status.²⁹ Probably being influenced by the Chinese tradition, Kuei-mei chooses not to eat leftovers. In her conversation with Yong-nian, she repeats the word “own” several times, which indicates her pursuit of independence. For Yong-nian’s complains, Kuei-mei explains in this way:

“I married you for my whole life. I just think we should eat our own food, and we don’t need leftovers from others. You work for somebody else now, but I’m sure if we have the will, we will have our own restaurant someday, even a little one, it will be ours”.

This dialogue first indicates Kuei-mei’s loyalty to Yong-nian despite his social status. In the film, they have gone through poverty together. In order to help Yong-nian get rid of his gambling habit and cover the debt, they have to move from Taiwan to Japan. Even living and working in an extremely hard condition, Kuei-mei doesn’t complain on Yong-nian’s fault. When she is reminded by her cousin that Yong-nian might have an affair, she chooses to believe in him and answer “No, he won’t.” It turns out Yong-nian betrays her, in which situation she finally chooses to leave the family. However, she returns soon for the sake of her children. It is her loyalty and endurance that preserves the family order.

Second, her emphasis on “own” indicates her dream of being independent. The best way for her to remain independent and pursue her own dreams is being

²⁹ This is a famous Chinese proverb. In ancient time, there was a poor man along the road, and he is starving to death. At this time, another man offers him some food and shouts to him loudly, “Hey you, come and eat this!” The poor man refuses to take the food. In Chinese tradition, people think highly of this behavior because it is the behavior of keeping one’s dignity.

self-employed. According to Susan Margaret Belcher and Chyong Ling Hudy Chen, during the 1970's there was a virtual flood of married women into the paid labor force to contribute to their families' economic status as well as to be recognized as productive citizens in their own right. It is because "most women realized that status was defined by one's relationship to paid labor, though women's status was determined by that of their fathers and then their husbands."³⁰ It might be the reason why Kuei-mei emphasizes that they should have their own business instead of working for others. Realizing the importance of having her own business, Kuei-mei learns how to make beef rice from the cook in Ms. Wei's home, and it is also the beef rice which lays the foundation for Kuei-mei's restaurant career.

1.3.3 Jewelries: Kuei-mei's Fairness towards her Stepchildren

According to Peiyong Chen, the image of "the mother of the nation" was successfully created during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Using a nationalist agenda, this idea encouraged women to save the nation by reproducing and inculcating the next generation of Taiwanese children to express blind loyalty to the political leaders and to faithfully serve the state. Traditional images of women embrace the traits of altruism through sacrifice, subservience, and compassion, which apparently constitute the essential virtues of womanhood and

³⁰ Susan Margaret Belcher and Chyong Ling Judy Chen, *Sweet Sweat: Taiwanese Women Entrepreneurs, in Taiwan's Economic Transformation* (New York: Nova Science Publ., 2007), 66.

motherhood.³¹ In the film, Kuei-mei's sacrifice and endurance represent major factors that maintain the family order.

First, as Kuei-mei's private property, jewelry symbolizes Kuei-mei's sacrifice to the family and her compassion to Yong-nian. When Yong-nian loses his job and develops a gambling addiction, Kuei-mei must assume the responsibility of raising the family. Being subservient to her husband, she asks Yong-nian to overcome his gambling addiction. Yong-nian answers her initial requests by stating: "I won't gamble any more, if I do, you can call me a dog." When she gives her jewelry to Yong-nian as a means of paying his gambling debts, Yong-nian conveys some guilt but nevertheless blames his losses partly on Kuei-mei and the children. His dialogue is as follows:

"I just wanted to win. I wanted to buy something for you. I wanted to see you and the kids happy. That would make me feel so good. But I couldn't. You think I can see how this family is and not care about it?"

This speech indicates Yong-nian's irresponsible attitude towards his family. Specifically, Yong-nian attempts to avoid guilt by using his desire to make his family happy as an excuse for gambling. In response to his answer, Kuei-mei replies, "I understand, I understand." As a traditional woman, Kuei-mei shows her subservience and compassion for her husband despite Yong-nian's reluctance to change his habits.

³¹ Peiyong Chen, *Acting 'Otherwise': The Institutionalization of Women's/Gender Studies in Taiwan's Universities* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 41.

Second, when Yong-nian's actions completely destroy Kuei-mei's compassion and trust, Kuei-mei begins to take control of the family. Her character traits begin to change from subservience to independence, with the turning point occurring when Yong-nian steals her money to continue gambling. In this case, her jewelry represents treasure that she has received from her family, so when she exchanges it for money, she says: "if it weren't for the baby. I really couldn't bear it." The director, Chang Yi, uses a long shot to show the sorrow in Kuei-mei's face when she sells her jewelry. When she slowly walks through the gloomy atmosphere, holding Cheng-chuan's hands, audiences can sense the hardship that she has experienced as well as her sacrifices as a mother. The director depicts a significant contrast between her behaviour and Yong-nian's actions. While Kuei-mei tries to support the family and gives birth to her baby, Yong-nian uses her money to continue gambling without any sense of guilt. When she discovers that Yong-nian steals her money, she becomes extremely angry and uses a knife to threaten him. At this point, Yong-nian has completely ruined her trust in him, so she starts to take control of the family. She decides that Cheng-fang should continue studying instead of becoming a nurse, and she chooses to go to Japan in order to improve the family's financial situation. Since she becomes disappointed with her husband, she starts to act as the family's decision-maker. Thus, jewelry signifies Kuei-mei's increasing independence.

Third, jewelry also symbolizes Kuei-mei's fairness as a stepmother. At the end of the film, Yong-nian provides a comment about Kuei-mei's life: "she says it's just souvenirs, she doesn't know if it's fair or not. All her life, she's wanted to be fair. She's had a hard time all her life. It's too late to be good to her now." Although some of Kuei-mei's children are her stepchildren, she treats all five children as if they are all her own. In particular, three events in the film show Kuei-mei's caring attitude towards her stepchildren. First, when Yong-nian tries to persuade Cheng-fang to quit school and become a nurse, Kuei-mei defies him and asks Cheng-fang to continue studying. As a result, Cheng-fang achieves her diploma and starts to understand that Kuei-mei cares about her. Second, when Yong-nian tries to beat Cheng-chuan for fighting with Japanese students, Kuei-mei tries to save Cheng-chuan from his physical punishment and arranges his career as a cook. Third, after Kuei-mei leaves Yong-nian for his infidelity, she returns because she needs to take care of Cheng-hsing, who is burnt, and Cheng-fang, who is missing. In this situation, Kuei-mei's actions convey her care and her fairness. For Kuei-mei, taking care of her children is the most ponderously and at the same time, the sweetest burden in her life.

Overall, the various symbols in the film, including honeyed dates, abalone, beef rice and jewelry, each have their own functions in representing Kuei-mei's character traits. As an immigrant in Taiwan, Kuei-mei has passed through several stages in her life. Being nostalgic and unselfish, she shares the honeyed dates with

all of her husband's family. In pursuing her dream of having her own restaurant, she refuses to take the leftovers from others and learns cooking skills on her own. As a mother, she chooses to sacrifice herself in order to maintain the family structure. These various objects show the way in which her personality reflects both traditional and modern characteristics of women.

The examination of main motifs as objects/settings in these three films, together with the cultural and social background embedded in such movies, provides a detailed account of the main characters' traits. In *That Day*, Jia-li and her husband are both trapped in the city of great transition, where traditional patriarchal principles coexist with the new feminist ideas. She eventually makes the decision to accept the new ideology and starts her own independent career. In *My Favourite Season*, Xiang-mei strives for independence and freedom. Restricted by her pregnancy, she chooses a contractual marriage to solve the problem. However, Bi's love for her interferes with her desire for independence. The couple transitions through the stages of breaking up and reuniting. Disappointed by her husband's gambling habit and alcoholism, Kuei-mei still treats her stepchildren with unselfish love and tries to pursue her own dignity in society. In all three films, these character traits enable the audiences to understand the early awareness of new Taipei women in recognizing their own rights and potential for independence. Based on the discovery of character traits obtained

through the examination of object and setting motifs, the next section discusses the creation of binary oppositions in all three films.

Chapter Two Binary Opposition in Three Films

Among all the literary theories, structuralism has strongly enabled the understanding of narrative structure in films. Binary opposition, which represents one of the guiding theories for structuralism, is widely used in the analysis of dramatic conflicts. This concept represents a fundamental way of organizing human philosophy, culture, and language. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the fathers of semiology, binary opposition comprises the means by which the units of language have value or meaning.³² Since most films start by establishing the conflict, which will determine or motivate the events and actions of the story, binary oppositions can assist in understanding the narrative structure of films because the conflict often occurs between a pair of mutually exclusive opposing forces.³³ By addressing these binary oppositions, we can determine the basic structure and relationships that underlie these literary works and the characteristics of new Taipei women.

Many examples of binary oppositions exist in these three films. In *That Day*, binary oppositions occur between young Jia-li and mature Jia-li, Jia-li and Jia-sen, and Jia-li and Xiaohui: young Jia-li values family warmth, mature Jia-li values career success; Jia-li and Jia-sen have contrasting perspectives of rebellious and obedient towards their decision-making; Jia-li and Xiao-hui convey a spiritual/material and emotional/rational contrast. In *My Favorite Season*, a binary

³² Sorchia Fogarty. "Binary Oppositions." *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 15 February 2005. [http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=122, accessed 08 May 2014.]

³³ Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 105.

opposition exists in the contrasting attitudes of Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang toward money as well as in their personality; while Xiang-mei has progressive values, Bi remains conservative. *Kuei-mei* features binary oppositions between Kuei-mei and Yong-nian in terms of their attitude towards education, family, marriage, and life. By using these binary oppositions, the directors create the films' main conflicts while displaying the traits of new Taiwanese women.

2.1 Binary Opposition in *That Day, On the Beach*

In *That Day*, the genuine film director sets up many examples of binary opposition. The comparison and contrast reflect conflicts in modern Taipei during the period of transition from rural society to urban industrial society, which results in the sense of disparity among human beings. According to Yang, he tries to balance humanity with modern architecture. Actually, this film is composed with many binary oppositions, including the opposition between young Jia-li and mature Jia-li, Jia-li and De-wei, Jia-li and Jia-sen, and finally, young Jia-li and Xiao-hui.

2.1.1 The Binary Opposition between Young Jia-li and Mature Jia-li

As Graeme Turner suggests, the viewers see the “world” of the film as itself made up of conflicting forces, loyalties, or value systems. The problem of the film is to resolve or opt for one side of this opposition.³⁴ Since *That Day* is mainly about the spiritual growth of Jia-li and Ching-ching, the opposition

³⁴ Ibid., 105.

between young and mature Jia-li, as well as that between young and mature Ching-ching, function as the basic set of oppositions, which structure the film in all its signifying systems. The conflict between the young Jia-li's life and mature Jia-li's could be represented as follows:

| Young Jia-li | Mature Jia-li |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Suburban | Urban |
| Family-oriented | Career-oriented |
| Confused | Confident, Independent |
| Emotional | Rational |
| Impulsive | Calm |
| Looking for happiness | Looking for success |

Table 1 - The binary oppositions between young Jia-li and mature Jia-li

The differences between young and mature Jia-li inspire narrative possibility. Jia-li's act of going back to memory and returning to the present is actually a form of communication between the young and mature self. This may seem unusual meeting because they are both the same person, but her personality changes by her life experience.

Among all the above binary oppositions, the most obvious one is the conflict between her personality as family-oriented and career-oriented. This conflict has been resolved in several stages. At the very beginning, she asks her elder brother, "What is happiness." It indicates the early stage of her spiritual growth - searching for happiness. Failing to get an answer from her brother, she decides to make her own decision, leaving family for her lover with the expectation of getting more

happiness. With the hope of being a good housewife, she learns flower arranging and cooks for her husband. However, her efforts don't get any rewards; on the contrary, she feels the problem in her marriage becomes increasingly intense. Finally, after De-wei is missing on the beach, she recalls her memory and finds out she should have her own career. Her confusion has been resolved, and the dramatic conflicts also end at this point. At the end of the film, there is a long tracking shot on Jia-li, who is walking confidently on the road, with Ching-ching's voice-over saying, "The important truth is that the little girl has already grown up into a perfect woman."

Ching-ching's comments on Jia-li summarize the transformation Jia-li has made. Unlike other genre films, the dramatic conflicts in this film mainly come from Jia-li's confusion. It is also her confusion that results in her spiritual growth.

2.1.2 The Binary Opposition between Jia-li and De-wei

As protagonists, the conflict between Jia-li and De-wei reflects their different understanding on marriage. Since she was brought up in a traditional family, Jia-li chooses to play the role of a traditional housewife, but De-wei feels great pressure from the patriarchy male role and gets lost in their marriage. Both of them find it difficult to balance between career and family.

There are several conversations between them revealing their different understanding towards marriage:

De-wei: You can't even imagine; there are too many things to deal with. Every day is like this. I step in my office, and then the day passes quickly before I

have time to take a breath. It feels like there are a lot of things I haven't got time to deal with every day. How about you? Do you prefer going to work or staying at home?

Jia-li: I am not easy at home. Although we have a servant, I still do a lot of things by myself, such as cleaning up the room, preparing for food and laundry. For me, working is doing things for others, and I'd like to work for myself. Lately, I have been learning flower arrangement.

De-wei: It's so unfair. I need to get up early every day, but you could still stay in bed.

The conversation between the couple shows that De-wei is not content with the traditional gender role that men should take the financial responsibility while women should stay at home and mainly deal with houseworks. However, Jia-li values the life quality instead of career success. Just as Kuei-mei's insistence of having her own career, Jia-li prefers to do something for her own, which is raising the quality of life. Flower arrangement symbolizes her longing for life quality. Since Taipei is changing from rural society to urban industrial society, the link between human beings and the natural world is broken, which results in people's feeling of loneliness and alienation. Learning flower arrangement is a way for Jia-li to achieve the balance between nature and human world. However, for De-wei, flower arrangement is useless, and the only important thing is to be successful in career.

Actually, De-wei himself is full of conflicts and complexity. On one hand, he hopes Jia-li behaves like an independent woman so that he could share some financial pressure with her; on the other hand, he still insists the old patriarchal ideology that wife should be completely obedient to husband. When Jia-li goes to

his work place and looks for him, he gets frustrated with her and blames her on not trusting him. His line suggests his frustration:

I told you many times, I need space when I'm at work, and I don't want you to interfere or worry about me. What are you doing in the construction site? You make me feel so embarrassed! I work day and night, where am I? You worried where I was! I was working for our family, but you are doing nothing other than waiting for me coming back and having dinner with you! Flower arrangement! You think I like to eat outside? Don't you know I need to drink a lot and throw out? The next day I feel terrible at work, and you still use your criteria to judge me.

It is Ah-cai who pushes his frustration to the climax. Treating his marriage as a business, Ah-cai considers career to be the most important thing instead of family. When De-wei tells him his problem in marriage, he tells him,

"In this world, if you spend one minute in dealing with your personal matters, others will pass you in this one minute. Honestly speaking, if the company's profit is decreasing because of your personal matters, I won't forgive you."

The double pressure from career and marriage drives De-wei frustrated and finally gets him lost. Unlike De-wei's frustration on work, Jia-li feels confused in her marriage. For her, marriage and love are everything in her life. Since her marriage is a failure, she chooses to merge to the mainstream and becomes a career woman.

2.1.3 The Binary Opposition between Jia-li and Jia-sen

The binary opposition between Jia-li and Jia-sen also functions as an important force of Jia-li's spiritual growth in this film. Born in the same family, the two share the same family environment and both receive formal education. The strong comparison between Jia-sen and Jia-li could be represented as follows:

| Jia-li | Jia-sen |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Brave | Not brave enough |
| Passionate | Conservative |
| Not afraid to change | Afraid to change |
| Believe in herself | Believe in his father |

Table 2 - The binary opposition between Jia-li and Jia-sen

Among all the opposites, the most significant one is the difference on the confidence in mastering their own lives. Most of the time, Jia-li believes in her own decision. Therefore, she chooses to reject the marriage arranged by her father, while Jia-sen, who intends to break their father's order at first, is not as courageous as Jia-li. In the film, there are several conversations between the two, which shows the inner world of them. First, Jia-li fails to get an answer from her brother on the question – “what is happiness.”

Jia-sen: Since I graduated, I have changed a lot. People kept saying that I am getting mature. Probably it is because I was too innocent before. Now I don't think much about future. I just hope that I could get a little satisfaction in my daily life, such as receiving the letter from my previous soccer team members, or listening to good music. I don't have anything to tell you, could I tell you anything?

Jia-li: I just want to ask you, are you happy now?

Jia-sen: You should tell me first, what is happiness? You are a college graduate, so you should know what happiness is.

In this scene, the camera gives several close-ups of Jia-li and Jia-sen. Failing to challenge his father's authority, Jia-sen chooses to reduce his expectation towards life and spend the rest of life following his father's instructions. Young Jia-li, who is eager to ask for advice, looks at her brother with sympathy. As a passionate individual, she is afraid of getting into the same way as her brother, so

she chooses to fight for her own happiness. After many years, the similar conversation scene happens between the two.

Jia-sen: The power of time is so tremendous. Our father died, and our clinic closed. I am also forgotten by the rest of the world. Do you still remember the night when you leave our family? Do you still remember that night we were also chatting like this? I heard that you and your husband were not getting along very well. If I knew what has happened today, I wouldn't have chosen to chat with you that night.

Jia-li: But, things already go this way. I think I already know how to improve the way I communicate with De-wei.

Jia-sen: How?

Jia-li: I think I should give him complete trust.

Jia-sen: Do you believe in De-wei? Perhaps, the most important lesson I learned from my life is not to put all your trust on anyone else. Jia-li, I trusted our father in the past, but it turns out I am all forgotten by time. If you are going to leave our family now, I am going to tell you the same thing. My main purpose is to make you trust in yourself completely, and use your own way to make a decision. I guess you are facing the same problem now.

The two conversation scenes create parallelism and variation. The parallelism lies in their common theme – how to spend one's life in a meaningful way. The variation shows their changing attitudes towards life. In the journey of pursuing happiness, Jia-sen chooses to obey their parents while Jia-li chooses to break the rules. However, Jia-sen regrets about not making his own decision as Jia-li did. For Jia-li, although she was brave enough to escape from her family, she still run into problems on other aspects. Their confusion status is the result of the social transformation as well as their personal spiritual growth. Overall, compared with Jia-sen, Jia-li is more courageous and adaptable to this transition process.

2.1.4 The Binary Opposition between Young Jia-li and Xiao-hui

Apart from the binary opposition between women and men, the film also addresses the binary opposition among women. Liu Xiao-hui, as an important female character in the film, leads a rather different life from that of Jia-li and Ching-ching. Growing up in a competitive environment, she struggles for creature comforts and higher social status by all means. Being De-wei's mistress, she expands her business connections through De-wei and becomes successful at work. After hearing about De-wei's mysterious disappearance from Ah-cai, her first response is to avoid getting involved with the matter, which suggests her direct connection with De-wei's disappearance. Her coldness in struggling for business benefits and young Jia-li's innocence in searching for romantic love form strong comparison, as if they stand at either end of a pair of scales.

In the film, young Jia-li, Ching-ching and Xiao-hui represent the three types of women in Taiwan society during the transition period. In Hakim's book, he puts women's lifestyle into three categories: adaptive, work-centered and home-centered. Adaptive women, who account for the majority of women, are those with children and career. They want to attach equal importance to family and job. Work-centered women are usually fulltime working women without children, and their proportion is getting higher. Home-centered women are full-time household

workers, and their proportion is in decline.³⁵ In the film, young Jia-li stands for the home-centered women, Xiao-hui for work-centered women, and young Ching-ching for adaptive women. Finally, both Jia-li and Ching-ching turn into work-centered women. The binary opposition between Jia-li and Xiao-hui could be represented as follows:

| Jia-li | Xiao-hui |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Innocent | Experienced |
| Family-centered | Work-centered |
| Righteous | Iniquitous |
| Confused | Confident |
| Values family | Values business benefits |

Table 3 - The binary opposition between Jia-li and Xiao-hui

The narrative of this film reflects the process of a home-centered woman turning into a work-centered woman. After witnessing her brother's failure in marriage, young Jia-li runs out her house to search for love and her own marriage. When her marriage fails, she starts to realize the importance of career. Without marriage, a woman could still live with her career.

Compared with Jia-li's idealism, Ching-ching is more work-centered. Apart from the option of getting into marriage, she still has her career option. As she recalls, "All I wanted to do was to make a little money by teaching and to wait for Jia-sen to graduate, after his engagement to another woman, all that was left was the music." To some extent, Ching-ching and Jia-li were taught the same lesson

³⁵ Catherine Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 360.

under different circumstances. Although they go through different stages, they both realize the importance of career and finally become independent women.

It is necessary to mention the misaddressed letters, which brings Jia-li and Xiao-hui together and show their different character traits. When De-wei leaves Taipei for a business trip, he sends two letters to his wife and mistress separately. However, he switches the envelopes for both letters so that the letters are misaddressed. The misaddressed letters result in the conversation between Xiao-hui and Jia-li.

Xiao-hui: I have dated many married men before, but I've never interfered with their marriage. This time I have to get involved because of these letters, so I hope we can face it together. I just want to help you. De-wei is not confident enough. I guess he send these misaddressed letters on purpose. On the one hand, he wants you to know his problem; on the other hand, he informs me that he don't know how to tell you this. Based on our responses, he will make an easy decision when he returns.

I knew De-wei is the one with the least experience in their company. Once I build up a relationship with him, I could use his business connections. Perhaps people will blame me on using De-wei, but during these days, I also helped solve a lot of problems for him. Now he feels in need of me. I should leave, and I must emphasize that you don't need to worry about De-wei's relationship with me. Actually, our relationship already brings me a lot of trouble, and I am afraid of trouble.

Jia-li: Tell me, do you love him?

Xiao-hui: I think you must have grown up in a comfortable environment. The environment I grew up in teaches me there is no love in this world, though there might be temptation.

For Xiao-hui and Jia-li, their different family background and educational background result in their different personality traits. Jia-li is in search of love and happiness in marriage, but Xiao-hui is in search of business benefits. Since the

society is under transition, the home-centered woman feels the pressures and they are changing into career oriented women.

The misaddressed letters show women's different understanding of love and their confusion in modern society. In using this most novelistic device, Yang shows how women are trapped in modern cities, and how men are trapped by peer pressure and patriarchal ideology as well.

On one hand, the mistakenly misaddressed letters show De-wei's confusion and his inability to handle his own life. De-wei is not confident enough, and he tends to escape from problems instead of dealing them in proper ways. Although the film doesn't tell whether De-wei does this on purpose or not, the audience could feel the confusion he has gone through. When Jia-li points out that he always puts his career first, other than family, he accuses Jia-li of not trusting him. Besides, Jia-li's behavior of visiting him in the construction site makes him angry, because he thinks it makes him lose face. In order to behave "like a man", he puts too much pressure on himself, especially on his career; therefore, his life loses balance. To some extent, he is also a victim of patriarchy, which demands man of being "strong" in society. His friend Ah-cai is an example of man who is deeply influenced by the patriarchal ideology, which always pushes him in pursuing his career and ignoring his family life. As Ah-cai suggests, "Your career is the most important thing in your life, if you screw it up, I will never forgive you."

On the other hand, it shows the different understandings of “love.” There is an interesting scene that Jia-li is standing in the elevator in black while Xiao-hui’s reflection is in the mirror in red. “Black” can be viewed as a symbol of being traditional and conservative, and red indicates the power and openness. The color contrast reveals the differences in their personality. Jia-li is growing up in a traditional family in southern Taiwan, where her father takes control of most of the things. Her family background and educational background makes her rather conservative, although she has broken the tradition and runs out of her family once. The film doesn’t tell much about the family and education background of Liu Xiao-hui, but her lines indicate that she grew up with a lot of pressure in life, “I think the environment you grow up must be comfortable and romantic.”

The differences of them are not only indicated by their costume but also reflected in their lines. In this whole conversation, Liu Xiao-hui does most of the talk, while Jia-li only has one line, “tell me, do you love him?” Her line indicates that she puts the romantic love in the first place. Therefore, when she knows the fact that De-wei has an affair with other women, she is too shocked to let out a word. Compared to Jia-li’s silence, Liu Xiao-hui admits that her relationship with De-wei is developed from using each other.

In Xiao-hui’s lines, she emphasizes “I knew” twice. It indicates that she is very aware of what she needs and what she is doing. Her goal is to achieve success and make money. The foundation of her relationship with De-wei are

business benefits. When Jia-li is still trying to find an answer from her life experience, Xiao-hui has already learned the skills of surviving in this modern city. Finally, going through the failure of marriage, Jia-li has also learnt how to survive in this city - women should also have their career in order to achieve their independence financially and emotionally.

2.2 Binary Opposition in *My Favorite Season*

2.2.1 The Binary Opposition between Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang

In the film, it is interesting to look at how Xiang-mei views money. Her general attitude could be interpreted through her line - "money serves people." Her education allows her to pursue a career, thus, what she tries to achieve is freedom. As she tells Bi Bao-liang, if she has enough money, she would like to travel around, instead of buying a house. Therefore, when she finds out that Bi starts to interfere with her personal life and influence her emotionally, she decides to leave him. Creature comforts are never valued too much by Xiang-mei, which one could interpret it from two objects - diamond ring and the omega watch.

The diamond ring is given by Xiang-mei's mother. When giving her this ring, her mother tells her, "You should keep this carefully, and never tell your husband about it. As women, we should keep some secret money, in case that we need it someday. If we ask men for it, then we will have a hard time." In her mother's view, secret money is the way of keeping independence, but for Xiang-mei, it is not important because she is full of confidence on her ability of earning money.

After this scene, Xiang-mei walks with Bi Bao-liang and tells him about the diamond ring immediately, “Mother is always worrying about their children. Look, this is the diamond ring given by my mother.” On one hand, it shows her trust on Bi Bao-liang; On the other hand, she doesn’t care about the value of the diamond ring. Finally, she uses this diamond ring in helping Bi Bao-liang’s sister out of financial problems. It shows her generosity as a modern career woman, and her trust on others.

The omega watch is another object which shows Xiang-mei’s attitude towards money. In the film, it appears only once. At the end of the film, there is a conversation between Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang:

Xiang-mei: I would like to tell you only one thing, in case you are still angry with me. At that night, we went to Jilin road to have some beef. Henry Wang gave me an Omega watch and wished me the happiness after marriage. Then he offered to send me back, I said no. Then I walked a long distance and cried the whole night. Then I throw the watch to the river.

Bi Bao-liang: What? That is expensive!

The conversation between Xiang-mei and Bi Bao-liang indicates their different views on creature comforts. For Xiang-mei, the watch means she still have some relationship with Henry Wang. Keeping it means she misses Henry Wang. Therefore, she should throw it away. However, for Bi Bao-liang, it is a waste of money to throw this valuable gift. The conversation shows their different attitudes towards money.

2.3 Binary Opposition in *Kuei-mei, A Woman*

2.3.1 The Binary Opposition between Kuei-mei and Yong-nian

In the film, Kuei-mei and Yong-nian's personality have great contrast in many ways. To some extent, the author Xiao Sa uses the weaknesses in Yong-nian's personality to show the strengths of Kuei-mei's personality. However, the great contrast between their personalities does create the dramatic effect for the narrative and reflects part of the social reality in Taiwan during 1980s. The binary opposition doesn't only exist between Kuei-mei and Yong-nian, it also occurs between Kuei-mei and her stepdaughter Cheng-fang. By identifying the binary opposition between the leading characters, we could get a glimpse of the gender role in the 1980s and the characteristics of new Taipei women.

As the main source of dramatic conflict, the contrast between Kuei-mei and Yong-nian's personality could be interpreted from two aspects, which are their understandings of life goal and their attitudes towards family responsibility as well as marriage. In the following analysis, I will identify the binary opposition from the above two aspects.

In terms of their understandings of life goal, Kuei-mei is well aware of her destination, which is to preserve her self-identity and dignity, however, Yong-nian doesn't follow any principle. The contrast between them could be concluded as the "presence/absence" of life goal. As one of the leaders of Taiwan new feminism, Lu has made a statement in her book that every person's goal in life

ought to be the preservation of self-identity and dignity. He or she should not be a means for others to achieve their goals. Besides, she asserted that new feminism was a modern and rational ideology that valued universal human rights.³⁶ Kuei-meï's behavior is corresponding to the principle Lu has called on – the preservation of one's identity and dignity.

The film shows Kuei-meï's attempt to preserve her own dignity on many aspects. As analyzed on the last chapter, Kuei-meï repeats the same line “we will have our own restaurant someday” for three times. The first time happens after Yong-nian blames on her of throwing the abalone away, the second time happens after she is asked by Miss Wei about the conversation between Mr. Wei and her, and the third time happens after she hides in the restaurant which she works for because of the lack of identity. These are all the crucial moments in her life which makes her realize the absence of her identity. The behavior of throwing the abalone away reveals her refusing of defining herself as people without dignity. The decision of leaving Wei's family shows her courage of pursuing her independent career, and the decision of returning to Taiwan is strengthened when she needs to hide herself from the police constantly.

In fact, the whole film could be interpreted as a woman's searching for identity. At the beginning, she needs to leave her cousin's house because her cousin suspects she has an affair with her husband. Feeling Yong-nian is someone

³⁶ Doris T. Chang, *Women's Movements in Twentieth-Century Taiwan*, 1st ed. (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 90-95.

she could count on, she marries him, which turns to be a disappointment for her. During the former part of her life, she is floating from Nanjing to Taiwan, then to Japan, and finally to Taiwan and finds her identity after running her own business.

Apart from the differences on their general attitudes towards life, the contrast of their attitudes towards family is also a dramatic device which pushes the plot development. It is Yong-nian's irresponsible attitude which drives Kuei-mei to be more independent and takes the responsibility of helping raise the family. The contrast of their attitudes towards family could be summerized in four events.

The first event that shows the contrast is that Kuei-mei uses her jewelries to pay off the gambling debt for Yong-nian. Being addicted to gambling, Yong-nian repeats his promise of getting rid of his addiction to Kuei-mei. However, he keeps gambling and loses his job. Kuei-mei shows great sympathy and understanding to him, and she brings out her jewelries to Yong-nian though she needs to save money for giving birth to her children. Facing her great sympathy, Yong-nian sighs and says,

I just wanted to win. I wanted to buy something for you; I wanted to see you and the kids happy. That would make me feel so good. You think I can see how this family is and not care about it?

He owes his gambling addiction to Kuei-mei and the children's happiness, which makes him free of guilt. On one hand, Kuei-mei is trying to save the family by pawning her own jewelries; on the other hand, Yong-nian keeps on ruining the future of the family by keeping on gambling. As the plot develops, Kuei-mei gets frustrated and extremely disappointed with the fact that her husband stole her

money for gambling; therefore, she makes her mind in relying on her own strength.

The second event that indicates the contrast is their attitude towards children's rearing and education. After Kuei-mei gives birth to the twins, Yong-nian complains, "twins, we got to pay double price for everything." It indicates that he treats his children as financial burden, which could also be interpreted in the later scene in which he asks Cheng-fang to drop school. The conversation between them reveals the differences in their understanding of education.

Yong-nian: Cheng-fang's always been a smart girl. Uncle Chao said this afternoon... He could introduce you to a dental clinic. You can eat and live there, and get paid.

Kuei-mei: You are crazy! She should stay in school.

Yong-nian: Why do you talk like that? You think I want it? Every day I go kowtowing and begging. You think I don't work on purpose?

Kuei-mei: A job is useless if you keep gambling.

The conversation reveals their different attitudes towards children's education. Kuei-mei understands the importance of education, so she tries to stop Yong-nian from asking Cheng-fang to withdraw from school. It also reflects her fairness as a stepmother, and she cares about all of the five children. However, Yong-nian always puts financial benefits in the first place. When Kuei-mei blames him on his request to Cheng-fang, he changes the subject to himself, which indicates his lack of dignity.

Overall, the binary oppositions in these three films depict the inner complexity of Taiwanese women. An identification of these opposites also provides insight into the similarities shared by the three women. First, they all desire independence, and they turn their desires into actions. Under the great socioeconomic transformations, they realize the importance of independent careers, which gives them dignity as modern women. Second, they all demonstrate adaptability towards change, especially in comparison with the males, who encounter profound identity crises. In conjunction, the three female roles actually display a continuity of women's transformational process in modern society. Kuei-mei, who is still strongly influenced by the traditional Confucian ethics, depicts a woman in the early stage of transformation. Jia-li, who represents the second stage of transformation, shows the struggle that women have experienced in attempting to fulfill new roles; finally, Xiang-mei, who displays confidence and success as a career woman, shows the third and final stage of the transformation.

Chapter Three Common Use of Voice-over

In Chinese tradition, women are more likely to conceal their inner feelings or express them in a relatively implicit manner. How could the audiences understand what is inside the characters' minds? In all the three films we discussed, the directors tend to use voice-over to speak out the characters' inner voices under certain social circumstances. As Steven Katz puts it, voice-over is "the voice of an unseen narrator."³⁷ Although it is commonly used in documentaries and commercials, it is also widely used in fiction films, especially first-person narration. According to Sarah Kozloff, "first-person narration is the most common form of voice-over in fiction films, cropping up in every genre, from Westerns to comedies, from cartoons to science fiction."³⁸ The functions of such narration include "recreating/referring to a novel's narrative voice, conveying expositional information, and aiding in the presentation of complex chronologies." The use of voice-over affects the viewer's experience by "naturalizing" the source of the narrative. And more importantly, embraces a consistent focus on the inner world of new Taipei women.

3.1 Use of Voice-Over in *That Day, On the Beach*

In *That Day*, the uses of voice-over not only allow characters to reflect back on their lives, but also encourage audiences to understand and empathize with the

³⁷ Steven D. Katz, *Film Directing Shot by Shot: Visualizing from Concept to Screen* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1991), 362.

³⁸ Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 41.

leading characters' confusion and isolation. Besides, the film contains a significant shift in narration, from restricted to omniscient, which allows other character-narrators who witness the spiritual growth of the leading character to express their inner feelings.

3.1.1 Jia-li's Interior Monologue

As the main character in *That Day*, Jia-li provides first-person narration in the film. Her narration not only stresses the individuality and subjectivity of perception, but also helps in the presentation of complex chronologies. Her voice-over offers the viewers a special perspective to view the whole story and encourage audiences to understand her confusion and isolation: Her loneliness after graduating from college, her secret love towards De-wei, and her desperation after knowing about De-wei's mysterious disappearance. Jia-li's interior monologue starts at the point when she is isolated from society and her loved one. Over a close-up of Jia-li, who is drinking coffee and having conversation with Ching-ching, her voice turns into voice-over:

After De-wei joined the army, I started to realize that he was no longer there with me. At that time, I was also very aimless and confused about my future. I could hardly believe that my college life ended so quickly. Therefore, like others, I went to take a lot of exams to get certificates, take TOFEL tests and apply for another degree.

Jia-li's voice-over in this scene functions as a link between the present and the past. This part of interior monologue shows her confusion as an obedient daughter, who has followed her parents' demands and finished her education.

However, as she finishes her education, she starts to feel confused about her future and search for the purpose of life. Since Jia-li is isolated from society and her boyfriend, Yang chooses to show her inner thoughts in the form of interior monologue and invites audiences to identify with Jia-li's confusion, which functions as the starting point of her spiritual growth.

With Jia-li's voice-over, the image cuts now from the present to the past, followed by a montage of shots of older days: Jia-li preparing food with her mother and sister-in-law, bringing a dish to the dinner table, looking at her sister-in-law, who is holding her baby with no facial expression, and her father and elder brother coming in. The final shots are especially memorable: first, all the women are waiting for two men quietly; second, the son and the father are changing shoes at the lobby, and the son asks his father to change first; third, men come in and sit down. What is noteworthy here is the sequence of actions – women are waiting, and the dinner doesn't start without the presence of men. This dinner scene indicates the traditional family structure in Taiwan – father is the most powerful figure, and the son is in the second place, while all the women come last. The primary function of women in the family is to do housework, and the primary function of men is to work, which is shown from the men's uniform when they are having dinner.

Having established the opening scene of Jia-li's memory, the voice stops at the point when the family starts to have dinner. Her relationship with her father is

portrayed through a montage of shots: firstly, the maid approaches the dinner table and gives Jia-li a letter; secondly, Jia-li receives the letter with a big smile on her face; thirdly, Jia-li's father looks at the daughter with an unpleasant look; Finally, noticing her father is angry, Jia-li puts down the letter and pretends to stay calm. In this scene, the camera provides close-up shots of both the father and the daughter as they communicate with facial expressions, including point-of-view shots from Jia-li. Point-of-view shots help to explain the way characters experience the world, validate characters' interpretation of events, and provide information about motivation. Here, Jia-li's point-of-view shots show her fear towards her father, the ruler of the family. The shooting angle is also memorable here. When shooting the father, the angle is upper angle; while shooting Jia-li, the angle is normal. By utilizing Jia-li's point-of-view shots and actions, Yang portrays the father's image as superior.

After the dinner scene, Jia-li voice-over continues:

Since De-wei went to the army, he writes to me occasionally. Although he was not good at expressing himself, I felt the great happiness every time when I read his letters. After retiring from the army, there are several times that he asks me to meet him in Taipei.

The voice tells viewers about Jia-li's uncontrollable passion towards De-wei. It functions as a means of winning the viewer's understanding and identification, and it foreshadows Jia-li's action of running away. On one hand, with a strict father, who views his children as his burdens, the family life for Jia-li is lifeless and stressful; on the other hand, the pursuit of happiness drives Jia-li to leave her

family. Actually, “the pursuit of happiness” is an important theme in this film, as this interior monologue suggests, De-wei is the first person that gives Jia-li “the happiness of satisfaction.” As she continues to look for the essence of happiness, she asks Jia-sen for an answer:

Jia-li: I just want to ask you, are you happy now?

Jia-sen: You should tell me first, what is happiness? As a college graduate, you should know what happiness is.

This conversation strengthens Jia-li’s confidence of making her own decision. As a result, she leaves her family and decides to marry De-wei. Throughout Jia-li’s memory, she never stops looking for the essence of happiness. When asked about the current situation of her marriage, Jia-li looks back in her memory again and recalls the happiest moment and the most miserable moment in her life:

I still remember the morning, which was full of hope. I walked in the fresh air, and that was the first time I got to know the light of happiness, the first time I understood the scent of green leaves. I walked all the way home, and it has been a long time that I haven’t experienced this enjoyable feeling. However, once I arrived home, our maid told me, the policeman just called and announced that De-wei was drowning in the sea.

With her voice, the image shows young Jia-li walking across the street while the traffic lights are flashing in yellow. In the next shot, the image goes back to the conversation scene in which Jia-li and Ching-ching are talking about the past. What is strange here is that Jia-li’s voice is still on while her lips are not

moving, as if the voice is from another space and time. Here, by making the voice more obvious and exploitable, the film highlights the double-layering effect discussed by narrative theorists – “the text can now clearly be seen as the interplay between the narrative action, the story and the process of telling it, the discourse. The character who narrates is also doubled, inhabiting the story as the experiencing-I while providing the discourse as narrating-I.”³⁹ Jia-li’s interior monologue here initiates another time and space in which the young Jia-li and mature Jia-li confronting each other.

With a great significance, the scene of Jia-li walking on the street appears twice in this film, which reminds viewers of the sequence and context of the events. However, there is a great difference between these two similar scenes – the use of voice-over. In the first scene, the voice is on while off in the second. It shows Yang’s great ability in manipulating chronology. He first uses voice-over to build the connection between the present and past, and then uses image to reproduce the same moment – the moment when Jia-li’s spiritual world collapses and deconstructs.

Another intriguing issue in this scene is the conflict between nature and artifacts, corresponding to the dramatic conflict in Jia-li’s life. In this scene, the flashing yellow traffic light could be interpreted as the problems in Jia-li’s marriage, which Jia-li believes has been all solved. Therefore, she uses a group of phrases to describe the morning, such as “full of hope,” “fresh”, and “the light of

³⁹ Ibid., 62.

happiness.” The image shows Jia-li walking on the street, with the background of grass and trees among high-rise buildings. Compared with the tall and lifeless buildings, the green trees look vivid yet not powerful. Walking in the small range of trees, Jia-li only takes a small portion in the frame, which shows her loneliness and helplessness in the modernized city. She believes there is still hope; however, her hope suddenly collapses when she gets to know De-wei’s death on the beach. It is the turning point of her life, and the voice-over here not only connects the past and the present, but also exposes Jia-li’s desperation directly to the viewers.

As Jia-li goes deeper in her memory, there is another interior monologue which indicates the change of time:

At that time, Ah-cai suddenly announced his marriage. He has always been a playboy, who could date several girls at the same time. Finally, I got to know the simple reason why he decides to get married - the woman he married was the eldest daughter of Yongli consortium’s boss. As expected, he soon became the chairman of a company which has business connection with his father-in-law’s consortium. In order to expand his business, he asked his old friends to run the business together. De-wei grows up with him, and they were great partners to each other. They used to go to school together, play football together, and even work for the same department in the army. Therefore, De-wei became the general manager in his company.

With Jia-li’s voice, the image cuts from Jia-li, who is making a phone call to Ah-cai, to her memory about Ah-cai. This interior monologue, as the last interior monologue from Jia-li in the film, creates another layer of discourse. With the voice, the time shifts from the day on the beach to Jia-li’s memory of the past.

Above all, voice-over plays a crucial role in reconstructing Jia-li’s memory in a comprehensive level. Besides, it creates a close relationship between the

voice and the viewer, a relationship not really comparable to that between the novel's narrator and the reader. For the viewers actually hear this voice, the voice of a mature woman, soft and reflective, but at times tinged with hardly restrained emotion. In telling the viewer about her past she relieves her loneliness and pain, and through the viewer's attention and sympathy her life story reaches a new level.

3.1.2 Ching-ching and Jia-sen's Interior Monologue

In *That Day*, the focalization is not constantly on Jia-li. Instead, it shifts among several characters, including Ching-ching, Jia-sen, Jia-li's mother and De-wei. Therefore, the story provides many perspectives for viewers to make interpretations. According to Kozloff, voice-over is a prime means of making viewers aware of the subjectivity of perception (focalization) and storytelling (narration). One common strategy to accomplish this aim is to have the narrator be in the story, but not central to it, which is a "narrator witness."⁴⁰ As the most important narrator witness, Ching-ching has several voice-overs near the end of the film:

There is a moment of silence between us. Jia-li looked at the distant place, and it seems she was searching through her memory, perhaps it is because she didn't want to look at me and make me notice her strong emotion. For me, I think the cruelest thing is to ask her what else has happened that day on the beach, and what's the end of her story.

The voice-over indicates that focalization shifts from Jia-li to Ching-ching, whose importance as a character is reinforced when she encounters Jia-li. With

⁴⁰ Ibid., 62.

her voice, the images show several shots and reverse shots from both of them: Ching-ching looks at Jia-li full of tears, while Jia-li refuses to look at Ching-ching in her eyes. In this scene, Yang makes masterful use of restricted narration. “Viewers experience the story from the perspectives of a few major characters. They become aligned with those characters because the film imparts the information, knowledge, and experiences that those characters have.”⁴¹ By focalizing on Ching-ching, the film doesn’t expose Jia-li’s inner thoughts here and leaves space for viewers to interpret. The open ending of Jia-li’s story sparks audiences’ imagination, which adds more complexity to the whole story, as well as Jia-li’s inner world.

Unlike the open ending of Jia-li’s story, the film put a closure to Jia-sen’s story, which is delivered through Ching-ching’s narration:

Jia-li has to return to her company to hold an urgent meeting. At this moment, it suddenly comes to me that I haven’t asked her about Jia-sen’s situation. After all, I was most concerned about Jia-sen’s situation before we meet. Jia-li told me, Jia-sen was diagnosed with liver cancer two years ago and finally passed away last year. His clinic has been reconstructed into an apartment. According to Jia-li, during the last few days in hospital, Jia-sen suddenly woke up from a coma.

With Ching-ching’s voice, the image cuts to the scene when Jia-sen is in the hospital. The voice changes into Jia-sen’s voice and says:

It must be the afternoon sunshine, which doesn’t make me feel this is winter. Actually, it feels like spring. I want to hear birds’ singing, which could wake up the world around me. I’m eager to learn about everything around me. How strong the contradiction is! Everything around me is cold, but my heart, beating fast, feels so warm inside. What kind of invisible strength makes it work so hard in this

⁴¹ Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis, *Film: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2008), 79.

cold world? However, I already own enough happiness throughout my entire life, isn't it? It is a miracle for me to own my tiny life for so long, and I should be thankful.

It is the only voice-over coming from Jia-sen, though he has several conversations with Jia-li in the previous scenes. The image shows Jia-sen lying on the bed, and touching objects around him. Growing up from the same family, Jia-li and Jia-sen choose two different ways of living. Jia-sen, choosing to be obedient and following the traditional way of living, doesn't fit the irresistible trend of modernity. Therefore, his clinic is soon replaced by modern hospital, and his fading career must have impacted his health condition. Spending his entire life on pleasing his family, Jia-sen finally feels relieved at the moment of his death, so he has the hallucination that the winter is like spring and he hears birds' singing. Although the fantasy he described in his voice-over is beautiful, the image of him lying in the hospital makes viewers sympathize with him. Here, Yang makes masterful use of voice-over as creating a contradiction between fantasy and reality, which arouses audiences' sympathy and understanding.

The comparison between Jia-li and Jia-sen is even stronger at the end of the film, when Ching-ching watches Jia-li leave. Here is the self-monologue from Ching-ching:

Until now, I still don't know whether the person who died on the beach is De-wei or not. However, it seems not important anymore, doesn't it? The important truth is, the little girl has already grown up to be a perfect woman. I believe her growth starts from that day on the beach.

With this voice-over, the final shots are especially moving: Ching-ching stands still and looks at the back of Jia-li. Her facial expression and the music work together to arouse strong emotion effect in viewers' mind. Here, the film makes a perfect open closure – Jia-li has grown into a mature and independent woman, and Ching-ching, as a witness of Jia-li's growth, has also learnt a lot from Jia-li's life story. Along with the spiritual growth of the two main characters, viewers might reflect upon their own lives and question on the essence of happiness.

3.2 Use of Voice-over in *My Favorite Season*

In *My Favorite Season*, the film introduces Xiang-mei's life experience by the use of voice-over. According to Kozloff, "film often create a sense of character-narration so strongly that one accepts the voice-over narrator as if he or she were the mouthpieces of the image-maker either for the whole film or for the duration of his or her embedded story. We put our faith in the voice not as created but as creator."⁴² As the "image-maker," Xiang-mei's voice over offers the viewers a special perspective to understand what she has experienced before she meets Bi Bao-liang:

My name is Liu Xiang-mei. How do things go like this? The answer is also the reason why I came to Taipei to search for my career opportunities. To tell the truth, I don't know. My hometown is in Pingdong Neipu, and I am the only girl in my family. When I took the entrance examination, no one expects me to pass it. Therefore, when everyone was studying hard for the exam, I made my mind to give up. However, during the day of examination, all the students around me were

⁴² Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 45.

plagiarizing, so was I. The teacher found out that and stood close to my table. Surprisingly, it turns out none of the most excellent students in my class passed the test, but I was the only one who passed. I was always thinking, if I could also cheat on the English exam, then perhaps I could go to Culture University.

This piece of voice-over is accompanied with a long shot of Xiang-mei walking alone towards the camera, and then changes into another long shot of her walking away from the camera, which intrigues the audiences to wonder the story behind this beautiful woman. From her interior monologue, viewers get the chance to know her family and education background. As for her educational background, she uses her story on the entrance examination to show her personality. She receives fine education, which is achieved by luck. After recalling her experience in the exam, she continues with the description of her work:

After graduating from College of Journalism, I worked for a travel magazine and wrote about wilderness survival. This magazine was funded by a construction company, and the publisher was the chairman of the construction company. We all call him Henry Wang. In my colleagues' mind, he has the manner of the gentleman. One day I rushed into the elevator, and he was also in the elevator, suddenly, the elevator was broke. After this, we always meet each other coincidentally, and he always asked me for dinner. After work, he occasionally invites me for coffee. Those were really my happy days.

This piece of interior monologue presents Xiang-mei's occupation and her love story in front of viewers directly. With her voice, the image cuts to her encounter with Henry Wang, who has given Xiang-mei the "happy days." As Xiang-mei's interior monologue goes on, viewers start to sympathize with Xiang-mei's experience.

Actually, Henry Wang has wife and children. After knowing that, I wanted to fight for myself desperately. However, I soon knew that was not possible. I left the magazine, and left Henry Wang as well. But I don't know why I finally chose to keep the child. Up to now, I am still looking for a man desperately and marry him, give the child a name.

The voice vividly displays the inner world of Xiang-mei after she decides to keep the child, which is the source of the dramatic conflicts in this film. It reveals Xiang-mei's character as being brave and independent. At first, she tries to fight for herself after knowing that Henry Wang actually has a family. As a woman who is still in love, the behavior of struggling for herself is reasonable. However, after discovering it is impossible to keep Henry Wang as her husband, she neither cries for Henry Wang's sympathy, nor gives up her own child. Instead, she leaves Henry Wang and quits her job in his company. It reveals her braveness and confidence of raising the child by herself. Finally, she comes up with a solution – to find a father for her child. Here, Xiang-mei's voice-over gives a reasonable justification for her motivation and her later behavior of looking for a husband, which intrigues the audiences to wonder what kind of husband Xiang-mei will find.

The first man I could think of is Li Yuan, because I always feel that a poet is the most romantic person in this world.

However, after two days, Li Yuan gives me a phone call, telling me that he is unable to help. I feel so relieved upon hearing that, because I find out there are more people in his family than in mine. Though not being able to help, Li Yuan gives me another man's phone number.

Between the two paragraphs of this monologue, Chen inserts the scene where Xiang-mei dates one of her “husband candidates.” The monologue gives the context of her experience of looking for her ideal husband. Though being pregnant, she doesn’t look down upon herself and lower her standard of husband. It shows her high dignity, in that she doesn’t trap herself with the traditional moral judgement, as other women who get pregnant before marriage. By choosing her husband carefully, she tries to be responsible for her child.

Xiang-mei’s narration does not continue when she encounters Bi Bao-liang, until the conflicts between the couple become irreconcilable. That is the time when she leaves a letter for Bi after they quarrel with each other.

Bi Bao-liang, I have been confident to believe that we could get along with each other very well before, which is the reason I chose you as my husband. However, I start to realize how complicated our relationship has become after we get attached emotionally. Now I don’t like the feeling that I need to be responsible for my behavior in order to make you happy, and I guess you have the same feeling. Therefore, I decide to move to Lan Yi-ping’s house, in the hope that we could get our lives back. Once I find my house and give birth to my child, I will come back once to move my belongings out. No matter what has happened between us, I still want to thank you, for offering me with help.

With Xiang-mei’s voice, Bi becomes silent as if he has lost something. The interior monologue displays Xiang-mei’s urge for privacy and independence. With the conditions of contracted marriage in her mind, Xiang-mei doesn’t want to get strong emotion attachment on Bi. In this particular condition, the complicated relationship between the couple makes Xiang-mei confused about her true feelings towards Bi; therefore, she chooses to give each other time and space

to sort out their inner thoughts towards their marriage. All her narration in this film provides the contexts and motivation of the dramatic conflicts, therefore makes a contribution to the discussion on the inner voice of Taiwan women.

3.3 Use of Voice-over in *Kuei-mei, A Woman*

The use of voice-over in *Kuei-mei* functions as a device through which the filmmakers attempt to integrate words with images in the manner of photo montage. With the displays of a group of family photos, Kuei-mei's voice tells the audiences about what has happened to each of the family members, as well as her inner thoughts about her husband's behavior.

No one could bear the shock for Cheng-fang. But she had to grow up. While Cheng-fang was in college, we borrowed money from the bank, to buy our own place for a restaurant. The business wasn't bad.

If your husband has a mistress, it's hard for you, but you have only two choices. Leave him, or forgive him. I think both choices are bad, but I have to choose one.

This is Cheng-chuan, he married a Japanese woman. Cheng-hsing studied international trade. This is his office, and his wife. This is when the twins graduated from college. Only Cheng-chuan was missing.

Everybody has to grow old. When we're young, we don't think about it. And we're subject to illness... (Yong-nian coming in) He never had another mistress outside. But he gambled now and then. Since he learned I had cancer of the uterus, he never gambled again.

The children grew up and went their own ways. After I went into the hospital, Cheng-fang took over the management of Restaurant Chavannes. They say she's more and more like me.

Along with the first three paragraphs of interior monologue, there are eight photos displaying, which takes about two-minute duration in the film. The

displayed photos cover the life experience of Cheng-fang, Yong-nian, other children and herself during the past years. The use of photo montage and voice-over prominently accelerate the story time.

First of all, the interior monologue starts with Kuei-mei talking about Cheng-fang's experience, which indicates that Cheng-fang takes an important place in Kuei-mei's life. From the interior monologue, viewers could learn about Kuei-mei's sympathy towards Cheng-fang. The image on the screen simultaneously shows two photos of the grown-up Cheng-fang, wearing a robe, which indicates her graduation. The reason of putting Cheng-fang in the first place also reveals the importance of Cheng-fang, who shares a lot of similarities with Kuei-mei in the original novelette.⁴³

As Kuei-mei's voice continues, she talks about her forgiveness to her husband. With her voice-over, there are two photos displaying the life of this couple. The first one is a photo of Yong-nian, standing alone in the garden, and the second photo shows the couple standing in front of their restaurant, with big smiles on their faces. The voice shows Kuei-mei's struggle as a wife during all the past years. Though it is hard for her to accept Yong-nian's disloyalty, she finally chooses to forgive him for the sake of her children. In this scene, the voice and the image together create a sense of contradiction: the picture only shows her

⁴³ In the original novelette, the author Xiao Sa mainly puts the focalization on Cheng-fang in the second part.

happiness, while the voice shows her bitterness when enduring the hardship in her marriage.

Finally, Kuei-mei introduces other children's life experience in this photo montage sequence. The last three photos show the status of Cheng-chuan and Cheng-hsing, who are both getting married and a family photo in which Cheng-chuan and his wife are missing. When the voice-over talks about the absence of Cheng-chuan, there is a close-up on Kuei-mei's hands, which are attaching Cheng-chuan's photo to the family photo. Kuei-mei's action here indicates her attempt to keep the family's unity, and it also functions as the connection between memory and reality. At the end of this sequence, the story time shifts from the past to the present.

However, Kuei-mei's voice doesn't stop at this conjunction between the past and the present. Following her voice-over, the image shows the old Kuei-mei, who is in the hospital because of her uterus cancer and Yong-nian, who is taking care of Kuei-mei with great patience. This scene functions as an introduction to the background and context of the second part of the story. With this introduction, Kuei-mei's interior monologue stops at the scene in which Cheng-fang is working hard in the restaurant. It indicates that Cheng-fang is the successor of Kuei-mei's career, as well as her independent spirit. Although Kuei-mei will eventually die, her independent spirit will pass down to the next generation. As at the end, Cheng-fang suggests,

You're tired, Mom. You need to rest.

With Cheng-fang's voice, the film makes a perfect closure, which indicates that Cheng-fang has become the successor of Kuei-mei and continues her pursuit of independence and dignity.

Above all, the use of voice-over in these three films shows the innovation in artistic style which New Cinema directors have made in portraying the image of women. Among them, Yang uses first-person narration to reconstruct the leading characters' memory and creates a close relationship between the voice and the viewers. Besides, he uses two character-narrators (Ching-ching and Jia-sen) to witness the spiritual growth of the protagonist. Chen uses first-person narration to introduce the leading characters' experience and explore their inner thoughts. Chang uses first-personal narration as the transition between two stories. In these three films, women are no longer "object of gaze"; instead, they possess their own subjectivity and perception.

Conclusion

The narrative functions of motifs, binary oppositions, and voice-over demonstrate that the New Cinema directors provide significant attention to detail in film narratives. The meticulously-designed motifs reflect the characteristics of leading roles. Before arriving at the conclusion, this thesis will revisit the questions that were raised in the introduction, including a) the characteristics of the new Taipei women portrayed in New Cinema films b) and the way in which film directors portray such characteristics.

4.1 What is New? New Choices and Spiritual Growth

Most of the motifs in these three films manifest conflicts between and within characters; such conflicts can be generalized as the *Individualism vs. Familism Binary Opposition*. In New Cinema films, all women seem to yearn for family warmth, yet only some women succeed at finding the balance between their individuality and their traditional duties as wives or mothers. With the rapid transformation of Taipei society, women must compromise in order to adhere to the realistic limitations, which results in their spiritual growth. For Jia-li in *That Day*, the repetition of the “beach” setting indicates that Jia-li requires a place for individual thinking rather than fulfilling her conventional role as a housewife. Compared to Jia-li’s home, the beach represents an open area where Jia-li can think as an individual and achieve spiritual growth. In the polarization formed by these two settings, the beach represents Jia-li’s life as an individual with her

longing for freedom and career ambition, thus corresponding to individualism, while her home represents her longing for family warmth, hence denoting familism. Since the warmth of family becomes replaced by distrust and loneliness, Jia-li finally realizes the unrealistic nature of completely trusting her husband. Finally, she decides to completely move beyond her past and devote herself to her career. De-wei also experiences difficulty in balancing career and family life, so he chooses to end his life in a state of confusion. Similarly, in *My Favourite Season*, the heroine feels constant tension surrounding the choice between familism and individualism. On the one hand, Xiang-mei looks forward to the warmth of family, as indicated by the desk lamp and cake; on the other hand, she chooses to leave Bi Bao-liang when he shows an increasing interest in their relationship, which partially interferes with her personal life. Although their relationship is initially based on a contract, Xiang-mei still longs for family warmth. Despite the contrast between their characteristics, Xiang-mei and Bi finally decide to forgive each other. The end of the film indicates they will build a family together, and the conflict between individualism and familism is resolved. The final film, *Kuei-mei*, constructs a more complicated situation among the characters. As a refugee who loses her finance, Kuei-mei strongly needs a family, so she chooses to marry Yong-nian, a man she barely knows. Despite her husband's gambling and alcoholism, she tries to fulfill the role of a fair and caring mother, choosing to leave the honeyed dates for her children. In this instance, she

displays the traits of familism. When Yong-nian asks Kuei-mei to bring back leftovers, she refuses to take them and dreams about having their own restaurant, which meets the criteria of individualism. Although she conquers all of her difficulties, Kuei-mei cannot face her husband's adultery, so she leaves the family and works by herself, choosing individualism over familism. This decision shows that while poverty fails to defeat her, distrust possesses the potential to destroy her belief system. In the end, Kuei-mei chooses to return to her family for the sake of their children. Thus, she balances individualism and familism to save the family and retain her independent career. This decision enables her to gain spiritual growth and pass her independent spirit to her daughter. Overall, the new Taipei women attempt to balance between individualism and familism as a means of completing their transformation and spiritual growth.

Several factors promote the opposition between individualism vs. familism. The first factor involves the misplacement of Confucian values in Taiwanese society. The Confucian dogma, including the values of conformity, discipline, obedience, diligence and sacrifice, dominated Chinese society for centuries. However, these Confucian principles deny the characteristics of imagination, creativity, and critical thinking. The conflict between Confucianism and Western ethics causes an identity crisis for Taiwan women, who strive to find their identity both in their family and at work. In *That Beach*, Jia-li fails to deal with the problems in her marriage; however, she eventually finds her identity as a career

woman. Similarly, Xiang-mei, the protagonist of *My Favorite Season*, succeeds at her work, but she still faces the challenge of creating a family; in *Kuei-mei*, Kuei-mei struggles to be a moral mother and wife while simultaneously pursuing an independent career. In all three films, the New Cinema directors depict the struggle of these women to convey their braveness and intelligence in adapting to the changing society.

Furthermore, the forging of national identity also promotes the binary opposition between family and independence. Taiwanese women constantly question their own values and seek a sense of belonging. As Guo-Juin Hong comments on the New Cinema, “it is clear that Taiwan cinema in this period casts on inward look at the island itself.”⁴⁴ As new immigrants in Taipei, women struggle to find their identity in a constantly changing society. Indeed, their struggle in choosing between work and family shows their status anxiety as well as their longing for a real, spiritual homeland.

In terms of film style, the New Cinema directors distinguish themselves as prominent directors with their special narrative strategies and their genuine use of off-screen narration. Specifically, directors use voice-overs to show the inner thoughts of female roles and invite audiences to identify with these women. Instead of being the “object of gaze” as is the case in classical genre films, women demonstrate their inner complexity in New Cinema films.

⁴⁴ Guo-Juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 137.

In short, the modern image of Taipei women demonstrates the quality of freshness in three areas. First, in New Cinema films, women's images have transformed from unjustly marginalized portrayals to fulfilling active roles that assist in the development and reexamination of Taiwan's culture. The spiritual growth of new women has facilitated Taiwan's socio-economic transformation and urbanization process. Second, women share the common struggle to find the balance between individualism and familism; however, despite facing the same challenge, they still possess significant freedom to make their own choices. This paradox constitutes the center of attention for New Cinema directors. Lastly, New Cinema film directors have started to use the techniques voice-overs and point-of-view shots to show women's subjectivity and share their inner thoughts with audiences.

The "newness" of Taipei women's images and the significance of this transition also require exploration. Within the three films, many different symbols emphasize this issue. In *That Day*, the construction site scene contains great importance. When De-wei works at the site, Jia-li comes to visit him. Upon seeing Jia-li, De-wei's colleagues ridicule him, which makes De-wei feel ashamed. From his colleagues' perspective, females should not enter the construction site, which represents solely a male domain. In a later scene, Jia-li and De-wei converse about gendered spaces; Jia-li comments that "I always feel that the city tears husband and wife apart. Men have male activity zones and women have female activity

zones.” Through these scenes and dialogues, the director, Edward Yang, addresses a common issue in current Taipei society: the new manifestations of the patriarchy. Although the traditional ways of discriminating against women have disappeared, the assumption of male superiority occurs in novel forms. For instance, although Jia-li rebels against her father, she still struggles to establish equality in her marriage.

Similarly, in *My Favorite Season*, Xiang-mei also faces sexual discrimination. Despite her success at work, she still experiences strong societal pressure to find a father for her unborn child in order to avoid social prejudice. In fact, the existence of a “father” functions as the only justification for a woman having or desiring a child. While Taiwan society allows men to exhibit promiscuous behaviors, this culture prohibits women from displaying their sexuality outside of marriage, thus demonstrating patriarchal standards.

In *Kuei-mei*, Kuei-mei deals with her husband’s extramarital affairs. When Cheng-fang tells Kuei-mei, “I always think you shouldn’t tolerate like that,” Kuei-mei answers: “You might be right, but we can’t get divorced anyway.” Since the children depend on her to raise them, she tolerates her husband's extramarital behaviors in order to stay with her children.

By conveying the trapped status of these women, new film directors attempt to show the predicament of new Taipei women; while they fulfill central roles in the film and pursue independent careers, they still experience some forms of

entrapment. Accordingly, the patriarchy still exists in many different ways, as shown through these women's predicaments. Furthermore, the concepts of "traditional" and "modern" women overlap to some extent during this crucial transition period. The complex images depicting the new Taipei women represent manifestations of the combination between "tradition" and "modernity".

4.2 Limitations of Research and Directions for Future Studies

The academic contribution of this thesis lies in its original approach of concentrating specifically on motifs in order to discover the artistic style and thematic significance of how New Cinema films portray women's images. Although the thesis answers some of the initial questions, it still contains a few limitations. First, this thesis chooses only three typical films in the New Cinema movement. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, it only focuses on some of the most typical works, which might affect the overall comprehensiveness of the argument. Second, the thesis uses only a select group of critical theories, including ideological analysis, structuralism, and feminism; thus, it could have employed other literary theories to fully analyze new women's roles. This research has not yet reached the stage where the topic can undergo comprehensive discussion.

Future studies can use more films to strengthen the argument presented in this thesis. Similarly, additional theories, such as psychoanalysis and Marxism, can increase the scope of analysis. With the addition of these two areas, a more

precise conclusion can be reached as to how women are portrayed in Taiwanese films.

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