

## **Contested identities: exploring the cultural, historical and political complexities of the ‘three Chinas’**

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### **Abstract**

When facing the political, historical and cultural complexities of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, problematic issues arise in relation to understanding the sorts of national/cultural identities that might be projected by them. With regard to these three Chinese language cinemas, a traditional national cinema approach focussing predominantly upon nation-state as a source of meaning would provide only a limited understanding of the meanings generated. This article, however, draws on what Benedict Anderson (1991) put forward as the theory of ‘Imagined Communities’ which assumes a large body of people regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’ (and here we interpret this term broadly and beyond understandings of geographical borders and political systems) through a variety of historical legacies, cultural memories and acts of consumption. In this article we hold the assumption that there is a shared cultural meaning (namely ‘Chineseness’) that extends across the three Chinese language cinemas and consider cultural affinity as greater than national and political boundaries.

**Keywords:** National cinema, Three Chinas, Chineseness, cultural affinity

### **Introduction: ‘three Chinas’ and the Problematic of ‘the National’**

Over the last two decades, Chinese language film studies (and here we refer to studies of not just mainland Chinese cinema but also of Hong Kong and Taiwan) have become the focus of intense interest in academia in both China and the West. The term Chinese cinema or Chinese national cinema both seem to be problematic when facing the ideological and political differences in the governments of the three areas. For example, there is a lot of discourse within Taiwan regarding the use of the terms *Zhonghua*, *Zhongguo* and *Zhongwen* and which terms are most appropriate to refer to Taiwan. In this article, the term Chinese language cinemas, is not a political claim. As a linguistic category instead of a national category, Chinese language cinemas (including both Mandarin and regional dialects such as Cantonese in Hong Kong and Hokkien and Minnan in Taiwan etc.) should be considered a broader term to refer to the cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The political separation (and of course the re-integration of Hong Kong in 1997 as a Special Administrative Region of China) of the three cinemas has troubled film scholars for years. For some, the history of the separation of film industries in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan has created “quite distinctive national cinemas within each territory” (Yueh, 1998: 74) and, on the whole, the study of Chinese language cinemas has been conducted and organized by means of geographical/political distinction and the notion of ‘three Chinas’ (Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) has dominated in relation to studies of national cinema. This geographical determinism limits and, to some extent denies, the Chinese cultural tradition within the three cinemas. This article, however, draws on what Benedict Anderson (1991) put forward as the theory of ‘Imagined Communities’ which assumes a large body of people regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’ (and here I interpret this term broadly and beyond understandings of geographical borders and political systems) through a variety of historical legacies, cultural memories and acts of consumption. Cultural identity, as Stuart Hall (2004) suggests, is situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation. Thus signifiers of Chinese traditional culture can be considered as a shared culture and history that permeate all three cinemas in their different ways.

Such a model does not mean that this article denies the cultural specificities of three Chinese language cinemas. For example, in Mainland China, the Fifth Generation’s filmmakers (such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige etc.) have always been obsessed with the Cultural Revolution since 1980s. Interestingly, in the context of post-Olympics Chinese language cinemas, Zhang Yimou’s new film *Coming Home* (2014) is again a tragic romance set in the Cultural Revolution. The term *Post-Olympics Chinese language Cinema* originated from “Post-Olympics Chinese Cinema Symposium” hosted by Bader International Study Centre, Queens University between December 10 and 11 2013. The implication of the film’s title *Coming Home* (*Gui Lai* as its Chinese original title means *return*) might well signify Zhang’s *Gui Lai* (return) to his obsession with the Cultural Revolution. The complexity of Hong Kong in terms of national/cultural identity can be seen to be a product of influences from China, Britain and its own Cantonese ‘nativeness’. In Taiwan, in particular under the president Chen Shui-bian between 2000 and 2008, part of the movement toward national and political autonomy was to promote cultural distinctiveness (namely ‘Taiwanese-ness’), and so there has been a promotion of the goddess Matsu, promotion of aboriginal studies, and aggressive promotion of the various Taiwanese languages etc., with the objective to promote the idea that Taiwanese culture is separate and distinct from that of Mainland China. While much of that rift has been diminished under the current KMT (Kuomintang, Chinese Nationalist Party) administration, much of those sentiments still exist within the population.

One of the most recent surveys regarding the national and pan-national identification in Taiwan and Hong Kong conducted by Frank Liu and Francis Lee (2013) confirms that many Taiwanese

citizens prefer to identify themselves as Taiwanese instead of Chinese. The same awareness of self-identification between being ‘Chinese’ or ‘Hong Kongese’ exists among Hong Kong citizens. “Faced with the rise of the PRC’s economic and political power, influenced by the ROC legacy, and having experienced decades of democratization, Taiwanese society has nurtured multiple country and national identifications. Similarly in Hong Kong, a political entity with unique colonial experiences and an independent civil identity, society also faces challenges regarding (re)identifying with the PRC” (Liu and Lee 2013: 1131). Especially in Taiwan, while many within Taiwan share a Chinese cultural heritage (predominantly those who are descended from KMT migrants of 1948), there is a large and vocal group that deny Chinese cultural heritage considering themselves to be distinctly culturally Taiwanese Hokklo, aboriginal or other local identities that have a parallel but separate history with the Mainland. For many in Taiwan, particularly those of the Pan Green Coalition of the Democratic Progressive Party, there is a sense of parallel history, but a history which equally encompasses its Portuguese and Japanese occupations and cultural legacies.

In a post-colonial context it is almost impossible to define what exactly constitutes a nation. When facing the political, historical and cultural complexities of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, a traditional national cinema approach focussing predominantly upon nation-state as a source of meaning becomes problematic. Therefore I am replacing a national cinema framework with a post-national methodology that unifies through cultural signifiers rather than through political or national ones. One of the central benefits of the article is that it is possible to argue that the cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan share and portray a rich cultural heritage in their films despite difficulties and antagonisms that exist in the political relations between them. One way that we will try to approach this problem is by looking for signifiers of Chinese traditional culture and the ways that they might manifest themselves across the three cinemas. In doing so we will place particular emphasis on the connections between the three Chinese language cinemas in terms of Chinese cultures and traditions. We hold the assumption that there is a shared cultural meaning (cultural affinity) that extends across three Chinese language cinemas and I use the term ‘Chineseness’ to refer to expressions of shared cultural, historical and philosophical continuity across especially the three New Wave cinemas.

### **Conceiving National Cinema: National Identity and Political Manipulation**

Prior to the 1980s critical writing on cinema adopted common-sense notions of national cinema. The idea of national cinema has long informed the promotion of non-Hollywood cinemas (Crofts, 1998: 385). The dominance of Hollywood meant that as far back as the 1920s and 1930s, France and Germany formed their national cinemas almost in ideological opposition to Hollywood. In her book *French National Cinema*, Susan Hayward (1993: 5) explains that by the 1920s calls were being made in France for “a truly national cinema as a defense against the American hegemony, all of which (in the implicit concern for the well-being of cinema) points to a historicism and narcissism of sorts”.

It was not until 1989 that Andrew Higson defined *The Concept of National Cinema* in a broader sense: he suggests that national cinema should be defined not only in terms of “the films produced by and within a particular nation state” (Higson, 2002: 132-142), but also in terms of distribution and exhibition, audiences, and critical and cultural discourses. This is one of the first general considerations of national cinema. Higson (2002) indicates that national cinema should not only be considered in relation to where films are made but more especially in relation to what kind of cultural identity they project and how they are consumed globally. In terms of national cinema, ‘Chineseness’ becomes a form of cultural capital that is shaped

through transnational discourses that are negotiated in history. Ideas about degrees of authenticity as Chinese, which are seen as derived from links to territory and knowledge of ‘traditional’ Chinese cultures such as Confucianism and Taoism, have become a basis through which diaspora Chinese define themselves in relation to one another.

Facing the complexities of the three Chinese language cinemas, Zhang Yingjin (2004) feels that ‘the National’ is difficult to define and considers nationalism, instead of any particular cultural or artistic trait, as the most dominant characteristic of Chinese cinema. The political nature of nationalism cannot be disputed whether it is overtly expressed in film projects or not. The concept of nationality is similarly loaded. In the era of globalization, the studies of national cinema have been facing complexities brought by transnational cultural and capital flow. The term ‘transnational Chinese cinema’ in film studies has appeared to be popular since late 1990s. For many (Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, 1997), the ‘transnational’ becomes a tool for them to approach the complex connections among three Chinese language cinemas and Chinese diasporic filmmaking in the era of globalization. However, as Chris Berry and Mary Faquhar point out that Hong Kong was “never a nation-state”. Though diplomatically Taiwan possesses a ‘quasi-national’ status, it has never declared its independence and it is still not an official member of the United Nations at the international stage. Berry’s ‘Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies’ (2011) is a key document for conceptualising the term ‘transnational’ in the Chinese case. By referring to Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim (2010), Berry (2011: 9) articulates the three patterns regarding the usage of the term ‘transnational’ among which the second pattern “focuses on cultural formations that sustain cinemas that exceed the borders of individual nation-states or operate at a more local level within them; for example, Arab-language cinemas, Chinese language cinemas”. Although focusing on the multiple and conflicting meanings of the term ‘transnational’ with reference to internationality and globalization, Berry (2011: 14) does not deny that cultural affinity is a larger force that shapes ‘the national’ in three Chinese language cinemas in certain ways. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (2006) stress the importance of the studies of national cinema and the need to continually revise the theories/concepts of national cinema. I need to further clarify the term ‘the national’. Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) is perhaps the most-cited theory of nationalism. By nationalism, Anderson argues how people in different parts of a territory who have never seen each other conceive of themselves as an intimate community, which in fact, is an imagined identity. Anderson (1991: 4) claims that: “... nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind”.

Consequently this ‘Imaged Community’ functions as a post-Enlightenment organizer of populations, affected by the huge migrations and diasporas resulting from post-Second World War processes of decolonization (Croft, 1998, 386-387). And the constructedness of ‘the National’, or “to construct the history of a nation or national cinema as coherent, unified, homogeneous, is to lend support to its erasure of difference and to the maintenance of a centrist and neo-conservative cultural politics” (Faulkner, 1994: 7). Faulkner’s assertion is useful in supporting this article’s arguments as it simplifies the complexities of Chinese cinemas when the article underpins a homogenous identity projected by three Chinese language cinemas.

However, this homogeneity cannot exclude the differentiation of the three cinemas in terms of cultural specificities, as each of them possesses different political and historical experiences. According to Hall (2004), there are at least two senses of identity: identity as being (which offers a sense of unity and commonality) and identity as becoming (or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in our identity formation). “The first position

defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 2004: 387). This is particularly useful for the article when highlighting the role of Chinese culture and traditions among Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hall (2004) also points out the heterogeneity of identity. His assertion helps to support the cultural specificities of each of the three Chinese language cinemas while arguing their homogeneity and heterogeneity in terms of cultural/national identity. In his *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, Hall (2004: 386) states: “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a “production,” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” This critical discourse may be well applied to the Chinese case where three cinemas are geographically and politically separated but which retain strong cultural connections.

The role of culture in the constructedness of identity in the Chinese case is similar to Hayward’s (1993) argument about French National Cinema. In her study of *French National Cinema*, Hayward states that: “In response to how France was perceived from outside ... it will be useful to retain ... the essential notions of nation as myth and nation as difference and continuity as well as the notion of the enunciative role of ideology” (Hayward, 1993: 5). Hayward emphasizes the role of national culture in the constructedness of national identity. Nation-ness is characterized by its own myth and allegory. It is clear that culture plays an important role in the formation of nation. Arjun Appadurai (1996) highlights the role of culture in the production of nationhood, and it is here that cinema occupies an important position as a mass medium: “Modern nationalisms involve communities of citizens in the territorial defined nation-state who share the collective experience, not of face-to-face contact or common subordination to a royal person, but of reading books, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, and other modern texts together” (Appadurai, 1996: 161).

Anderson (1991:18) calls these collective experiences “print capitalism” and “electronic capitalism”. However, recently Higson (2006) problematises Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined community’ by making the following statement: “The ‘imagined community’ argument thus sometimes seems unable to acknowledge the cultural difference and diversity that invariably marks both the inhabitants of a particular nation-state and members of more geographically dispersed ‘national’ communities” (Higson, 2006: 18). Higson’s statement is also true in the case of the three Chinese language cinemas. From this perspective, while exploring the ‘Chineseness’ represented across the three Chinese language cinemas, like both Hall (2004) and Higson (2006)’s arguments, we also acknowledge the discontinuity and differentiation of cultural identity in the Chinese case where politics has played an important role, especially for Taiwan which is still politically separated from Mainland China. As Schubert (2004: 534) points out, Taiwanese political party system “is conceived of as ideologically divided into pro-independence (“pan-green”) and pro-unification (“pan-blue”) camps that support two diverging concepts of nationalism, one Taiwanese and one Chinese”. A survey conducted by Yun-han Chu (2004) regarding Taiwan’s national identity—independence or unification, also shows that strong ideological differentiations exist among Taiwanese public.

Although Hong Kong and Taiwan have been either geographically or politically separated from Chinese mainland for years, the collective experience remains through the influence of Chinese traditional culture. For example, In Hong Kong cinema, the theme of Confucian ethics has not only constantly appeared in the Shaw Brothers’ productions, but it has also dominated most

Hong Kong martial arts and action films, in which protagonists are always bonded with family and brotherhood, such as John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (1986, 1987) and *The Killer* (1990). According to Confucianism, every social role should strictly abide to his behavioral rules. The representation of Confucianism in Hong Kong cinema becomes evident for the continuity of Chinese traditions and culture in this former British colony. Among the productions of the Shaw Brothers, one typical film of traditional familial ethic is *The Magic Lamp* (Wu Jiangxiang, 1964). The story is popular among Chinese. It is about Chen Xiang who saves his mother by overcoming the toughest difficulties and fighting against evils. This film obviously follows the Confucian code regarding a son's filial piety. Another film, which should be mentioned here, is *My Young Auntie* (Liu Jiangliang, 1980). In this comedy a young lady becomes the aunt of an old man's nephews and at the same time, she has to come to terms with her social position on many levels as the old man's nephews who are also almost the same age as her. As emphasized by Confucianism, young people must respect eldership and eldership must be respectful. Although they are of almost same age, still they must follow the rules according to their positions in a Confucian family hierarchy. Thus comedies happen frequently in this film.

For Taiwanese cinema, the influence of Chinese traditional culture, philosophy and morality is clearly evident in films such as *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, 1993). At the beginning of the film, the parents who represent the dominance of Chinese traditional culture come to New York. Within such a Confucian familial hierarchy, Weitong and Simon, while representing Western culture, show great respect for the parents. However, after the encounter of the two cultures both sides have to make a compromise in order to facilitate an enduring relationship. Ang Lee's control of characters is also influenced by the philosophy of 'the golden mean' of Confucianism which highlights the need to be moderate. His uniqueness lies in the way this philosophy is represented cinematically. In his cinema, he combines more sensitive Chinese cultural characteristics, such as deepness, mystery and tenderness, with freedom and individualism of the West. The narrative, as in many of his films, such as *Pushing Hands* (1991), *Eat Drink Men Women* (1994), possesses the style of Chinese traditional literary narratives: ambiguity, refinement and obscurity.

### **The Encounter between Tradition, Modernity and Politics**

Since the 1980s, three New Wave cinemas emerged in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The history of the New Wave in film scholarship (dating from post WWII Italian Neo-Realism and the French New Wave), is essentially linked to modernity. As John Orr (1993: 6) states "...the neo-modern moment has its origin in the national cinemas of Western Europe and the United States where it engages with Western capitalist modernity". In terms of national cinemas, European art cinemas differ from others through their portrayal of specific class formations. In particular as Ginette Vincendeau (2001) suggests the role of "Heritage Cinema" is to largely query the life-worlds of the upper middle classes. However, the three Chinese language cinemas that I am investigating have arisen out of the clash between the traditional and the modern, between myth and religion on the one hand and political ideologies on the other. Out of the socio-political complexities and geographical separations of these three areas, history, tradition and continuity provide the links in terms of a shared cultural identity across them. Without this key recognition, the whole discourse of cinema and modernity becomes vacuous (Orr, 1993). The great paradox of film and modernization is that the New Wave cinemas in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan often deal with questions, if not always representations, of 'the past'. Any examination of the identity/identities of the three New Wave cinemas in our study must also consider notions of tradition, religion and religious-based philosophies and politics. Thus in approaching ideas of 'national identity' it is profitable to

begin with the concept of ‘tradition’ as we would argue that the concept of national identity as projected by the cinemas that we are investigating are closely associated with concepts of tradition and issues to do with the past.

Traditions are usually regarded as practices, customs, or stories that are memorized and passed down from generation to generation (forming a rich part of oral history and oral culture from societies where the knowledge and means to write were not widespread). However, Eric Hobsbawm (2012: 1) states that “‘traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented”. According to Hobsbawm (2012), some traditions were deliberately invented for one reason or another, often to highlight or enhance the importance of certain institutions. Traditions may also be changed to suit the needs of the day, and the changes can become accepted as a part of the ancient tradition. He states: “Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 2012: 1).

This assumption regarding ‘tradition’ is important to this article because the understanding of the manipulated nature of ‘tradition’ will help us better understand the shared heritage, practices, and filmmakers’ nostalgia that are manifest within films made in different geographical locations. For example, *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000) invented a kind of ‘new Orientalism’ bringing together allegories and symbols with deep Chinese cultural connotations such as Shanghai dialect, Chinese feminine dress *Cheong-sam*, with nostalgia for 1960’s Hong Kong. This nostalgia is also manifest in Taiwanese New Cinema with a different cultural context. There is an interesting plot in *Dust in the Wind* (Hou Hsiao-hsian, 1986) when the fishing boat from Mainland China gets lost and lands on Golden Gate (Taiwan’s territory), in which the fishermen on the boat are received by the Taiwanese army of Golden Gate. These mainland Chinese are afraid of the Taiwanese army but the Taiwanese army warmly welcomes them with an impassioned reception. The army gives the fishermen’s family gifts and in a long farewell scene the army emotionally watches the fishing boat leaving Taiwan. This sequence seems to suggest that the other side of the Taiwan Strait, where the Chinese mainland is situated, is the native land of many Taiwanese people. There is a deep-rooted connection between people on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. This may be viewed as Hou Hsiao-hsian’s cultural feeling towards Mainland China. It is related to his personal diasporic experience and it is also the representation of an emotional longing of many Taiwanese of Chinese origin for Mainland China. For many Taiwanese, Chinese traditions and culture seem to be the memories of their childhood which may fade with years but which are still deeply rooted in their heart. If KMT has attempted to construct Taiwan as a ‘legitimate China’ that is in competition with the People’s Republic of China, Hou sets out to challenge this officialdom by strengthening the remembrance of Chinese mainland as a collective nostalgia.

However, it is equally important to be aware of the fact that Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan have different motivators for nostalgia based on their own socio-political specificities: Hong Kong and Taiwan were both exiled from the Mainland for a long time, which would result in a different motivator for recalling the past that they had lost continuity to. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, many Hong Kong martial arts films looked back to events in Chinese history, especially turbulent historical periods such as the Japanese occupation in the 1930s and Chinese civil war in the 1940s. In these films, the stories of the past illustrated the complicated relationship between individual and nation in terms of fate and destiny. They also praised

loyalty and patriotism. These films, such as *Fist of Fury* (Luo Wei, 1972), *The Way of the Dragon* (Bruce Lee, 1972), touched national memory and cultural emotions and thus they achieved great success in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan. Contrastively, Mainland China went through the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, which was not shared by Hong Kong and Taiwan, and so their post revolution films similarly were impelled by a motivation to ‘rediscover’ the past, such as the films of the Fifth Generation’s Filmmakers: *The Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) and *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1987) etc., a motivation which was not shared by Hong Kong or Taiwan.

When film, both a western technology and an exotic thing for Chinese people, was introduced to Mainland China about one hundred years ago, the idea of film as a medium was also influenced by Chinese traditional thinking. Here our starting point is the idea that because of their shared cultural histories that forms of ‘Chineseness’ will be manifest and represented in the three cinemas constituting at least one dimension of ‘national identity’ (but not necessarily in a unified or homogenous way). Here the term ‘Chineseness’ refers to those historically recognized cultural factors/elements such as the philosophies and belief systems stemming from Confucianism and Taoism and also aspects of folklore, customs, allegories and symbolic cultural emblems as typified by the existence of the martial arts hero across the three cinemas and in many of the transnational films of directors of Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese origin.

The influence of Confucianism and Taoism is represented not only in Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese filmmaking practices (in the case of the latter two in a more complex way because of various colonial influences, such as British, Japanese and Dutch colonial experience) but also as a consistent frame of reference. Chinese traditional philosophy is based on the syncretism of heaven and human beings (heaven here refers to the universe/nature). This philosophical approach makes heaven the object of perception and human beings as the subject of perception. This philosophy provides the backbone of recognised social rules within Chinese cultures. Expressed as ‘harmony’ in Taoist philosophy and ‘the Golden Mean’ in Confucianism, Confucianism and Taoism accentuate the interdependent relationships between nature and humanity. In doing so, this neutralizes the conflict between subject and object, and between human beings and nature. This epistemological basis leads to a preoccupation with reflections on the human condition and the experiences of sadness and joy.

In the article when trying to investigate the presence of Chinese traditional culture and philosophies on filmmaking in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan it is also hard to pin down what Chinese traditional cultures are in an exact sense. On the one hand, there is a sense of the ‘original essence’ of Chinese philosophies and approaches to life (outlined briefly above in terms of ways of thinking, cultural beliefs and traditions). On the other hand, there is also an embodiment of the specific historical, political and social contexts in which such belief systems are created. We are seeking here to present an understanding of Chinese culture that sees it as complex in terms of its connection to and dislocation from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan. This leads me in turn to explore issues such as the relationship between modernity, cultural identities and traditional ways of thinking/belief systems.

The notion of traditional culture as an ‘original essence’ is especially interesting when explored in relation to three national/geographical identities that are distinct but also share strong cultural roots. For instance, for five thousand years the majority of the Chinese populations (mainland Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese) have been made up of peasants, which led to the culture of *tudi* (土地). The Chinese term *tudi* may be translated as earth/land in English.

However, the term embodies a more profound meaning in a Chinese context. It refers to the agricultural civilization which is traditionally considered as the principal part of Chinese civilizations. *Tudi*, or earth, is what has nourished Chinese people for centuries. From this perspective, *tudi* also takes on a similar role to that of *terroir* in French civilization which symbolizes a sense of place/belonging. Unsurprisingly *tudi* is highly venerated and it possesses paramount spiritual position among Chinese people. Symbolically *tudi* is both the mother and the home for Chinese people. Its influence can be seen at the heart of Confucianism/Taoism and the ways that it has shaped Chinese societies for over two thousand years. Confucius (1996: 45) says: “while father and mother are alive, a good son does not wander far afield”. Because *tudi* may be considered as the origin of Chinese civilization its influence on filmmaking can be seen in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (particularly in the films of the Fifth Generation in Mainland China, the Taiwanese New Cinema and Hong Kong New Wave cinema in the 1980s). It is no accident that the title of the first internationally acclaimed film of the Fifth Generation, *Huang Tudi* (*Yellow Earth*, Kaige Chen, 1984), signals a post-cultural revolution reflection on identity based on a return to ‘countryside’. As Chow notes: “...reflecting on ‘culture’ inevitable involves the rethinking of origins—the ‘pasts’ that give rise to the present moment; the narratives, myths, rituals, customs, and practices that account for how a people becomes what it is” (Chow, 1995: 174).

*Yellow Earth* is the first internationally acclaimed film for the Fifth Generation and has received widespread academic attention. The film is set in 1930s’ Shanxi, which is located in Western China where the yellow soil forms a distinctive geographical feature. As mentioned earlier, Chinese civilization is founded on agriculture. Yellow earth (*tudi*) is also symbolic of the home or the mother for Chinese people and Chinese civilization as a whole. The most distinctive success of *Yellow Earth* is undoubtedly Zhang Yimou’s cinematography. This film made Zhang’s reputation as the best cameraman in China. Graduating from the Cinematography Department of the Beijing Film Academy in the same year as Chen, Zhang’s cinematographic style is unique in Chinese cinema and this gave the film *Yellow Earth* a significant character through its artistic composition. Again Taoist painting has influenced Zhang’s cinematography but his style also connected the characteristics of both Eastern and Western aesthetics in his cinematography. For Esther C. M. Yau (2006: 202), “the static views of distant ravines and slopes of the Loess Plateau resemble a Chinese scroll-painting of the Changan School”. In fact, the vast landscape and the yellow earth also symbolise the home and mother of Chinese people and Chinese civilization. It is on such ‘poor’ and vast yellow earth that Chinese people struggled with their fate in the post-Cultural Revolution period. Indeed, the effect of this collaborative aesthetic achieved with Zhang’s elaborate cinematography visually presents a metaphor for the socio-political context of this period.

In Taiwan, the direct reflection of *tudi* may experience a certain transition or variation. The same happened in Hong Kong cinema since it is more a commercial cinema, especially post-1960s. However, the ideology of *tudi* is not excluded to its martial arts films and gangster cinema, which is transformed into the protection of ‘homeland’ and worship of community. The notion of *bao jia wei guo* (to protect our homes and defend our country) has been paramount to Chinese people since ancient times. Among many martial arts films, protagonists constantly feature as a national hero against foreign aggression. Huang Feihong in *Once Upon a Time in China* (Tsui Hark, 1991) and its sequels can perhaps be regarded as one of the most patriotic characters. The notion of *tudi* (here an unseparated unity of both home and country) and the poetical justice are two main themes in the films of Bruce Lee as well as the *Once Upon a Time in China* series. Both Bruce Lee’s characters and the character Huang Feihong show their Confucian morality: wisdom, kindness, braveness, loyalty and forgiveness. These

films also illustrated a spiritual world of Confucianism: Kung Fu is not a resort for conquering others and gaining power or profit. It is in fact a way for cultivating one's morality, self-dependence and practicing poetical justice when necessary.

More pervasive than a particular relationship to the earth is perhaps the dominance of the spiritual and ethical framework for living that is supplied by Confucianism and Taoism which constitute, like Hellenism, Hebraism and Germanic tradition in the West, the core of Chinese culture. They have shaped Chinese societies for over two thousand years and have become the core of Chinese civilization. The influence of Confucianism and Taoism also shaped many Eastern Asian countries such as Japan, Singapore and South Korea. As Mijun Park and Catherine Chesla state: "Confucianism is not merely a Chinese philosophy. As with other great ancient philosophies, such as Buddhism and Daoism, Confucianism was introduced to EA countries and deeply influenced the formation of every aspect of life. Confucianism was the philosophic ground of much of the culture in East and Southeast Asia" (Park and Chesla, 2007: 297).

To understand the role of Confucianism and Taoism in Chinese civilization will help us better understand how Chinese and nations of Chinese origin became what they are. If China does not have its own religion (Buddhism finds its origin in India), then Confucianism and Taoism, the two philosophical schools can be viewed as two 'religions' since ancient times in China. The Confucian ideology of order (more from a moral perspective) plays an important role in the formation of Chinese society and family, and it is important for us to understand the theme of family, father-son relationship from a Confucian perspective in the films of the three Chinese language cinemas.

Taoism also has a significant influence in Chinese thinking. For Taoism, or Tao, the basic idea is that behind all material things and all the change in the world there lies one fundamental, universal principle: 'the Way' or Tao. "The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying way; The names that can be named are not unvarying names. It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang; The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind (Lao Tzu, 1997: 3)". The purpose of human life, then, is to live life according to Tao, which requires passivity, calm, non-striving, humility, and lack of planning, for to plan is to go against the Tao. Different to Taoism, Confucianism emphasizes the way of living in society. If Taoism can be viewed as the way of living in harmony with nature, then Confucianism is the way of residing within society. Confucianism emphasizes disciplines, beliefs and virtues such as loyalty, brotherhood love and filial piety. These Confucian codes have been found useful by Chinese emperors for their feudal governance and it has always been adopted by feudal regimes as the main spiritual belief in Chinese history for more than two thousand years.

The four cardinal virtues of Confucianism are filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, and trust; and the Taoist philosophy of harmony between nature and humanity are paramount in Chinese cultures. The codes of Confucianism and Taoism have shaped and constituted Chinese cultural/national identity in the cinemas of the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, these cultural codes persisting as mythic symbols of national identity and national narratives. Thus in the formation of 'the National' in the three Chinese language cinemas we are investigating, the main tenet/beliefs of Confucianism and Taoism take central place. Despite this centrality, Confucianism and Taoism are not one single unified concept but a series of ancient traditions and approaches that, as I will argue, can endure across geographical and political separations.

Confucian and Taoist ideologies also act as a cultural core for the aesthetics of Chinese films. This will also be an important element for our arguments regarding the cultural identity of the three Chinese language cinemas and the authorial signatures of certain auteur directors. From an aesthetic perspective, Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar (1999) have explored the relationship between Chinese painting and Chinese films. They note: “sinicization was also applied to the image, with a certain aesthetic decorative style, where the basic socialist-realist style was stuccoed over with Chinese motifs” (Berry and Farquhar, 1999: 83). However, what lies behind Chinese painting is the influence of Chinese traditional culture and what has shaped the aesthetic techniques of Chinese painting includes more profound cultural significances (that is, those that are deeper than the level of technique).

Without the knowledge of Chinese traditional culture, and acknowledging its interaction with modernity in specific historical context, we fail to interpret ‘the National’ with enough cultural significance. If language is well established as a carrier of culture, then a national cinema can be seen as a new carrier of national culture/identity with the medium of film becoming one of the most immediate and popular ways for people to encounter another ‘country’ in the age of globalization. In the case of Chinese language cinemas very few Western scholars and even fewer Western audiences speak Mandarin and an important aspect of meaning is lost in translation.

The quality of the acting is frequently noted as suffering in dubbed films, as the vocal qualities, tones, and rhythms of specific languages, combined with the gestures and facial expressions that mark national characters and acting styles, become literally lost in translation. (Betz, 2009: 50)

This is even more complicated with Hong Kong and Chinese mainland cinema. During the shooting, Hong Kong often uses stars who speak either Cantonese or Mandarin. The final edit will then be dubbed into both Cantonese and Mandarin for two releases in the two areas. For example, Tony Leung (Hong Kong born movie star) would be acting in Cantonese, whereas Jet Li (from Mainland China) would be acting in Mandarin. This means that in both languages, the lips rarely synchronize with the spoken words, as some actors will be speaking in one language and others in the other. Chinese mainland cinema is more complicated, as until very recently films were not allowed to use synchronous sound and all dialogue was recorded and dubbed in post-production, which again, often caused the vocal movements to fall out of synchronization.

For viewers who are not familiar with Chinese traditional philosophies then further nuances of cultural meaning are easily overlooked. However, our emphasis of Chinese traditional culture does not deny modernity in the three countries whose cinemas we are investigating. By the term ‘modernity’, we are speaking of modernity both in and outside of cinema: the modernity in Chinese cinemas and the modernity in Chinese societies. Yau (2006: 212) offers a formulation of China’s relationship to modernity, noting that: “Since the nineteenth century, major historical events in China (wars, national calamities, revolutions, etc) have made four topics crucial to national consciousness – feudalism, subsistence, socialism and modernisation – and discourses are prompted in relation to them in numerous literary and cultural text”.

Although Hong Kong and Taiwan had popular film industries since 1960s, mainland Chinese Cinema, Hong Kong cinema and Taiwanese cinema all underwent their *modernization* in the 1980s which are characterized by the three film movements: the Fifth Generation, Hong Kong

New Wave Cinema and Taiwanese New Cinema. In cross-cultural research, the impact of modernity (and its adjunct globalization) has had on the cultural traditions of Confucianism and Taoism is undeniable. Since 1949, Chinese traditional cultural values in Mainland China have encountered Marxism and socialism, more specifically, Maoism. In fact this encounter has fundamentally shaped Chinese minds and societies in Chinese mainland and though more indirectly (certainly until the re-incorporation of Hong Kong into the People's Republic of China in 1997) that also of Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, the anxiety for Hong Kong's return to Mainland China in 1997 has not only affected individuals' mind in Hong Kong but became a kind of collective cloud of depression hovering over the heads of Hongkongnese during the run-up to being handed back to the Chinese administration. Consequently many films of Hong Kong between 1980s and 1990s have inevitably been read as anxiety for its political 'transaction' in 1997, such as the English title of John Woo's *Ying Xiong Ben Se*, which was translated into *A Better Tomorrow* with obvious political implications for Hong Kong's future.

Between 1966 and 1976 Mainland China's economy was heavily damaged by the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution. When it came to an end in 1976, the CCP realised that China's economy was on the verge of collapse. In 1978 they launched the economic 'Opening Policy' and took economy as the core of the country, with the determination of developing economy by all means. Chairman Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the Second generation of the CCP, made the famous remark regarding the discussions of socialism and capitalism: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice" (Strother, 2006: 36). Although Chinese capitalism was initially developed in China since 1840s following the Opium War and reached its peak between 1927 and 1949 before the establishment of the PRC, it has never been fully developed pre 1949 because of China's political complexities. Capitalism was also completely eliminated between 1949 and 1976 due to the rigid communist/Maoist ideology. Thus Deng's black/white cat remark after the Cultural Revolution was quickly seized by the West for more sensitive political implication. On 6<sup>th</sup> January 1986, Deng appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine as the Man of the Year. Ever since the 'Opening Policy' advocated by Deng, capitalism and Western secularism have interacted with Maoism, communism and Chinese traditional cultures, and the representations of these influences on Chinese cinemas are worthy of further exploration.

Following the end of the ten-year Cultural Revolution in 1976, a cultural movement of searching for roots was initiated in cinema and literature. For many who experienced the loss of faith and ideology, the spiritual vacuum that resulted converged with the emergent commercialism in the 1980s. In response to this, Richard Madsen (1998) describes the situation in post-Cultural Revolution China as follows:

The Cultural Revolution destroyed the religious aura that Mao had created around the Communist movement...even as the state withdrew from its religious pretension, though, the senseless violence of the Cultural Revolution had left the Chinese people with more profound questions than ever before about the ultimate meaning of life. In this moral vacuum, many Chinese were predisposed to look to traditional religion to make sense of the tragedies of history and to sustain new hope for the future. (Madsen, 1998: 39)

In *Red Sorghum* 'my grandma' avoids her arranged marriage by the use of her active sexuality. By having sex with 'my grandpa' in a red sorghum field her life takes a different turn. The bold expression of their sexual act is adventurous in mainland Chinese cinema in the 1980s and

would seem to deliberately suggest the idea of potency and autonomy. This is both sexual and political in terms of the power to break social, moral constraints and with feudal (and communist) society. Zhang directly attacks feudal ideology in this film and indirectly also communist ideology and, in so doing, he also generates a specific idea of nation that is not in line with a political version of feudalism and communism which is current in contemporary China. He draws on notions of loyalty and the collective memory of the Japanese invasion in the 1930s. At the end of the film, when facing the invasion of a foreign enemy, 'my grandma' and the villagers where she lives sacrifice their own lives against Japanese for the sake of the country. The ending ties in with loyalty to the communist state but also expressed the emphasis in Confucianism of loyalty and patriotism to *tudi*. This is an obligation that takes precedence over all other moral obligations. In the film 'my grandpa and my grandma' win the trust of villagers and work hard to turn the wine workshop into prosperity before the Japanese invasion. This is an endeavor demanded by Confucianism. The theme of cultivation lies at the heart of Chinese civilization. As a key film of the Fifth Generation, *Red Sorghum* has a vital role in projecting a complex understanding of past and present mainland Chinese cultural identity.

### Conclusion

With special focus on the new wave movement in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1980s, the article sets up a theoretical framework for the argument that 'Chineseness'/Chinese traditional cultural influences constitute at least one dimension of the shared identity across the 'three Chinas'. The article suggests that there are commonalities of cultures based on traditional Chinese philosophies which surpass their territorial boundaries but which also produce distinctive projections of what Chinese cultural specificities might be in a modern context.

In the case of all three cinemas that we are investigating, political intervention is an enormous influence in the constructedness of their nation-states. Regarding the cultural specificities of the three Chinese language cinemas, there is no way to escape an emphasis on the role of politics and political ideologies in the studies of the 'three Chinas'. This political or government connection is, of course, not that unusual in the formation and shaping of national cinemas. French cinema, for instance is a good case of illustrating this. Like in many other nations, there has been strong government involvement in the film industry in France. The Centre National de la Cinématographie was established in order to serve the need of the state to create a national cinema in 1946 (Hayward, 1993). In the era of globalization, Berry (2011, 12) points out that in a transnational context "corporations have greater relative autonomy from the state in regard to at least the economy and can operate economically across state borders more easily." Emilie Yue-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis (2008, 37-51) propose the term 'hype-national' to describe the 'transnational' in three Chinese language cinemas by emphasizing the roles and functions of the government-owned China Film Group, which, according to them, seeks to implement national consolidation and transnational reach within the three areas.

There is a fundamental question: what particular national identity a national cinema intends to project with the government intervention and nationalism ideologies in a certain historical period? In the Chinese case, the role of the political ideology has played an important role in the construction of national identity since 1949 both in Mainland China, Taiwan and to a lesser extent Hong Kong. The triumph of Communism and Maoism in Mainland China and the retreat of KMT to Taiwan initiated political competition as each tried to construct itself as the legitimate site of China. After the Second World War (especially the Japanese occupation), nationalist ideology was also spread and represented in Hong Kong cinema. As mentioned, this is seen in Hong Kong martial arts films (such as Bruce Lee's films) which were popular both

in the East and the West since 1970s. Thus, national image and national identities shifted according to government interventions and their financial backing as well as different prevalent nationalist ideologies. As Hayward (1993: 6) indicates: “shifts according to which particular nation is being referred to because the concept of a nation’s cinema will change according to a nation’s ideology”. This point of view is similar to Higson’s argument (2002: 132-142): “the concept of a national cinema has almost invariably been mobilized as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance; a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of (usually) Hollywood’s international domination”. This is especially the case in Chinese mainland cinema and Taiwanese cinema post-1949 when both competed to construct themselves as the legitimate site for a Chinese nation-state. For Hong Kong, being a British colony for one hundred and fifty seven years, cinema has also been a particular site for the articulation of identity in a colonial context. Such political intervention in the constructedness of national identity deserves to be further explored in the contexts of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, Government intervention and especially the influences of a Communist ideology are of great importance to the projected national identity in mainland Chinese cinema after 1949.

While allowing for their own political histories and identities the article opens up a debate on, and provides an alternative way, for seeing Taiwan and Hong Kong as ‘*Chinese*’. By replacing a traditional national cinema framework with a post-national and culturally based methodology, the article considers cultural affinity as greater than national and political boundaries, and provides an alternative way for seeing the three areas to continue to have contested political identities, while sharing a singular cultural identity.

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