

The Taste of Ice Kacang: Xiaoqingxin Film as the Possible Prospect of Taiwan Popular Cinema

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Abstract

Although Xiaoqingxin Film has been widely recognized as a new sub-genre in Chinese-language film circle, it rarely received sustained academic attention in either Chinese or English publications. In this article, I would explore the contours of Xiaoqingxin Film in four aspects: (1) a tentative definition; (2) a style analysis; (3) a cause analysis: why Taiwan has overwhelming superiority in making this sub-genre; (4) a unique distribution mode. To provide a style analysis of Xiaoqingxin Film, I will not only observe its script, sound and cinematography, but also look into its genre bending. To conduct a media capital analysis of Xiaoqingxin Film, I would borrow the concept of “media capital” from Michael Curtin and pay particular attention to the fact that co-productions between Taiwan and Mainland China are popping up as Taiwan has relaxed trade embargoes with Mainland China. As shown by the successive box-office hits, the pan-Asian commercial success of Xiaoqingxin Film is not a one-hit wonder. Rather, in this sub-genre, I believe, lies the possible prospect of Taiwan popular cinema.

Key Words: Xiaoqingxin, genre, media capital, Taiwan cinema, J-style photography, Pan-Asian Cinema

Introduction: A Fresh Wind on Taiwan Screens

Much has been said about the long-standing sickness of Taiwan's popular cinema. For instance, Yueh-yu Yeh (2006) wrote in a pessimistic tone, "There was a popular Taiwan cinema until 1994" (165). Facing the fact that Taiwan films generated less than one (0.7) percent of the local box-office in 2002, Fan Hong and Wei Zhang (2009) claimed that "In terms of the film industry, Taiwan is already a city of death" (57). Nevertheless, it's noteworthy that a fresh wind has been blowing onto Taiwan screens since 2002, initially feeble but increasingly powerful: *Blue Gate Crossing* (dir. Zhiyan Yi, 2002), *Love of May* (dir. Hsiao-ming Hsu, 2004), *Winds Of September* (dir. Tom Lin, 2008), *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled* (dir. Fu Tien-yu, 2009), *Taipei Exchanges* (dir. Ya-chuan Hsiao, 2010), *Starry Starry Night* (dir. Tom Lin, 2011), *You are the Apple of My Eye* (dir. Giddens Ko, 2011) and *Touch of the Light* (dir. Rong-ji Chang, 2012). All these films, with fresh taste, popular lure and box office success, fall into the sub-genre of Xiaoqingxin Film, a catchword in recent years. The main concern of this paper is to explore the particular contours of Xiaoqingxin Film in four aspects: (1) a tentative definition; (2) a style analysis; (3) a cause analysis: why Taiwan has overwhelming advantages in making this sub-genre; (4) a unique distribution mode.

1. A Tentative Definition of Xiaoqingxin Film

1.1 Xiaoqingxin: from Music to other Art Fields

Xiaoqingxin, is originally an alternative term of Indie Pop, a music genre. As early as 1978, a group of British kids came up with the idea that instead of waiting to be discovered by a big record company, they could record and release music by themselves. From then on, a whole legion of do-it-yourself guitar bands, such as Smiths, Josef K and Orange Juice, started popping up, whose songs embraced all forms of sweetness, earnestness, simplicity and comfort. Indie Pop is different from Indie Rock in the way that it is more melodic, more angst-free, less noisy and less masculine. In contemporary Chinese-language music circles, Sodagreen, Nature Q and especially Cheer, are considered as the representatives of Indie Pop (Xiaoqingxin Music). Cheer, is celebrated for her image as a girl who is forever bumming on campus, carrying a wooden guitar and her act of releasing Demo in her early years. Accompanied by the popularity of Xiaoqingxin Music, Xiaoqingxin, as a style, gradually infected other fields: literature, photography and cinema. Briefly speaking, all kinds of Xiaoqingxin art forms touch on small happiness and slight melancholy in daily life, value a spirit of individualization and testify to the trend of escaping from a dissatisfactory reality and drowning oneself in one's own world.

Xiaoqingxin contributes to anti-consumerism in the sense that it refuses a commercialized, vulgar society. Yet, it should be admitted that Xiaoqingxin art forms are considerably easy-to-digest and thus, are never insulated from mass cultural consumption. When Xiaoqingxin becomes a new gathering arena of popular art, the spirit of individualization might turn into "pseudo-individualization" or "the always-the-same" in Adorno's (1979) sense: consumers purchase the illusion that every commodity is tailored to the individual's personal preference, while cultural goods are in fact just variations on the same theme. How Xiaoqingxin Film becomes Taiwan popular cinema, in a certain extent, confirms Adorno's argument.

1.2 Xiaoqingxin Film: A Variation of Wenyi Film?

When discussing the issue of terminological choice, Yueh-yu Yeh (2009) asserts that, "a step toward de-Westernization and intellectual decolonization can be taken through a tactic of terminological choice, to opt for an endogenous concept (Wenyi Film) over melodrama"

(p.439). For the same reason, I would use “Xiaoqingxin Film”, rather than “Indie Pop Cinema” in this article.

Is Xiaoqingxin Film a variation of Wenyi Film? In the first place, indeed, Xiaoqingxin Film has some type of affinity with Wenyi Film. In the tradition of Taiwanese cinema, Xiaoqingxin Film and Wenyi Film are both genres of sentiment, frequently involving romantic relationships, centering the cultivated heroine and avoiding straightforward sex description. In the second place, a comparison between Wenyi Film and Xiaoqingxin Film in the context of Taiwan cinema, or more specifically, between Qiongyao Film in the 1970s and Xiaoqingxin Film from 2002 to 2012, reveals their prominent differences: (1) Qiongyao Film obviously hammers at overwrought, excessive emotion; however, in Xiaoqingxin film, emotion, no matter positive or negative, is always controlled enough not to cloy; (2) Qiongyao Film is full of conflicts and builds steadily toward a climax, whereas the action of Xiaoqingxin Film is considerably loose and free-flowing; (3) Central to most Qiongyao films is the conundrum of family order in conflict with personal love, while the hero and heroine in Xiaoqingxin Film are entangled in more intimate problems, such as restless puberty, mental instability and sexual ambiguity; (4) In Qiongyao Film, “the female ideal” is characterized by “gentility, kindness, softness and frailty”(Teo, 2006, p. 208); in contrast, in Xiaoqingxin Film, the strong, sometimes boyish female character seems more and more popular; (5) Most importantly, Qiongyao Film tells us countless love stories in order to repeatedly demonstrate the greatness of love, whilst Xiaoqingxin Film involves love stories, especially first love memories, only to express the sentiment of youth, the confusion of growth and the futility of life. To illustrate the above viewpoints, concrete examples will be provided later in this article.

2. Style Analysis of Xiaoqingxin Cinema: A Formal System

The preceding analysis helps us trace the outline of Xiaoqingxin Film, but it simultaneously foregrounds the difficulty of defining Xiaoqingxin Film, mainly due to the overlaps of Xiaoqingxin Film and other genres. I don't want to pretend to be able to give a single definition of Xiaoqingxin Film. Instead, I would argue, Xiaoqingxin Film can be recognized by a series of style elements, or in other words, its formal system. This act of recognizing a film genre works something like looking at a combination lock: “one's combination is distinct from others, not because no one else in the world has the same numbers or sequence, but because the chosen numbers, as well as the reason why the numbers were chosen in a particular sequence bear special meaning to the viewer” (Choi, 2011, p. 181).

A style analysis of Xiaoqingxin Film will be offered in three aspects: script, sound and cinematography.

2.1 Script

As mentioned earlier, Xiaoqingxin Film is still a genre of sentiment- it never abandons the clichés of melodrama, such as “rain” and “flashback montage”. For example, in *You are the Apple of My Eye* and *Love of May*, when Ko Ching-teng quarrelled with Shen Chia-yi, when Xuanxuan had to go back to Mainland China with her Peking Opera troupe, it began to rain. Also, in these two films, “flashback montage”, as a sensational, stereotyped cinematic code, was used when Ko Ching-teng was kissing Shen Chia-yi's husband in Shen Chia-yi's wedding, imagining that he was kissing Shen Chia-yi, and when Ah Lei received Xuanxuan's diary. Nevertheless, different from melodrama, it seems that Xiaoqingxin Film always deliberately avoids the moment of fulfilment and the excessiveness of emotion, which could be best exemplified by the dialogue between Ko Ching-teng and Shen Chia-yi when they were flying a Kongming lantern:

Ko Ching-teng: Someday, I will definitely catch up with you.
 Shen Chia-yi: Do you want to know the answer?
 I can tell you right now...
 Ko Ching-teng: No, I didn't ask you, so you cannot refuse me.
 Shen Chia-yi: You really don't want to know?
 Ko Ching-teng: Please, please don't tell me now... please allow me to continue adoring you!

It is quite obvious that Xiaoqingxin Film prefers youth theme, which is not unfamiliar to Taiwan screens. Youth films in earlier days include *Student Days* (dir. Ching-chieh Lin, 1979), *The Boys From Fengkuei* (dir. Hsiao-hsien Hou, 1983), *A Brighter Summer Day* (dir. Edward Yang, 1991) and so on. These films are overloaded with Chinese memory, Taiwan history and social issues. Therefore, it's easy for the audience of these films to feel oppressive and sad. On the contrary, Xiaoqingxin Film says goodbye to all these heavy topics and chooses to focus on individualized, inner problems: Can I win the heart of that girl (*You are the Apple of My Eye*)? As a girl, can I fall in love with another girl (*Blue Gate Crossing*)? May I travel around the world (*Taipei Exchanges*)? In short, the essence of most Xiaoqingxin films, is a young mind that is in conflict with itself.

Closely related to the youth theme, most Xiaoqingxin films are films of reminiscence. Instead of following a direct causal narrative chain, the action of Xiaoqingxin Film, just like a shattered memory, is considerably loose and free-flowing. What particularly interests me here is, a handful of Xiaoqingxin films, such as *Somewhere I Have Never Travelled*, *Winds Of September* and *You are the Apple of My Eye*, employ childish handwriting titles, whispering the youth theme and the privacy of individual memory to the audience from the very beginning. It should be noted that sweetness and sorrow in Xiaoqingxin Film are always light and trivial. For this reason, Xiaoqingxin film can be called a light-hearted type. In *Ice Kacang Puppy Love* (dir. Ah Niu, 2010), there is a line that depicts the taste of Ice Kacang, which might serve as the description of the taste of Xiaoqingxin Film as well, "Ice Kacang is fresh and sweet... it slightly hurts your mouth sometimes because it's too icy. It dissolves in your mouth even before you start talking about your feeling." It's true that Xiaoqingxin is not so nutrient for our thoughts, but it at least provides young audiences with a shelter where they can have a good relax and heal their wounds.

Considering that Taiwan screen had long been "a screen of sadness", Xiaoqingxin Film has already brought the audience so much "warmth and tenderness" (Li, 2009, p. 42). In *Love of May*, there is a shot in which the window was framed visually to separate Ah Lei and Xuanxuan. This shot seems to owe something to *Taipei Story* (dir. Edward Yang, 1985)- in the opening scene of *Taipei Story*, when Jean took Ah-Long to see her new apartment, a huge window was framed visually to separate them, indicating an unseen split in their relationship. However, in the shot from *Love of May*, Ah Lei soon guessed what was in the mind of Xuanxuan. Seen in this light, we can say the shot from *Love of May* is an allegory of Taiwan screen, which is changing from "a screen of sadness" to "a screen of tenderness".

2.2 Sound

It's quite interesting that in Xiaoqingxin film, music is usually the most important thing engaged in assisting the character construct a sense of age. *You are the Apple of My Eye*, for example, begins with the voice-over of Ko Ching-teng, "1994. I was at the age of 16. Songs of Tom Chang were still popular. More than 1 million tapes of *Take Me to Your Heart* by Jacky Cheung, had been sold out." Also, as Giddens Ko (2012) said in an interview, "In the last scene

of the film, I use the song *Nunchakus* by Jay Chou, what I want to tell the audience is, we have come to the year 2005.” The use of music in Xiaoqingxin Film should be discussed within the tradition of Taiwan pop music and cinema. In Taiwan Wenyi films in the 1970s, a partnership was already well established between popular music and cinema to promote songs in the films as well as compensate for the lack of ambient sound. This partnership was suspended in the 1980s when the New Cinema endeavoured to “alienate itself from commodity apparatus” and emphasize “its high-art quality and great authenticity”- “One specific way to do this was to reduce the use of pop music unless it was used as ambient sound as part of the realist representation” (Yeh, 1995, p. 12) In recent Xiaoqingxin films, we can see the reconciliation of pop music and cinema. Most Xiaoqingxin films make good use of theme songs as well as interludes, but escape the “one theme song, played three times” pattern in Qiongyao films. The reunion of pop music and cinema here manifests that different from New Cinema authors who hold their heads high, these young directors of Xiaoqingxin Film would rather dwell among their spectators.

Most theme songs used in Xiaoqingxin Film fall into the category of College Folk. Flourishing in the 1970s in Taiwan, College Folk privileged its youth identity, which simultaneously connoted a sense of playful sensibility and unthreatening innocence. It reduced its critical quality by making the music less sophisticated in lyrics. “As a result, as compared to modern folk, College Folk was largely transformed to an escapist pop music from 1978 to 1981”(Yeh, 1995, 12). And it’s not difficult to recognize what we call Xiaoqingxin Music today is actually College Folk that appeals for pureness and goes to the extreme. As an interesting footnote, the composer and singer of the theme song of *Blue Gate Crossing*, is not anyone else, but Cheer. Besides, voice-over also plays a vital role in Xiaoqingxin films. Quite appropriate to the youth theme, the endless, discursive and dreamlike voice-over, implicates a desire to pour out innermost secrets as well as a state of mental loneliness, and is dissolved into a murmur of individual memory.

2.3 Cinematography

In terms of cinematography, we could clearly see a set of unique devices gradually developed and are solidified in recent Xiaoqingxin films. The set of style devices is extremely similar to Japanese Style Photography. I will elaborate this point later in this paper.

3. Media Capital Analysis: Why Taiwan?

This section aims to explain why Taiwan has overwhelming advantages in making Xiaoqingxin Film by providing a Media Capital analysis. “Media Capital”, borrowed from Michael Curtin (2012), is a concept that “acknowledges the spatial logics of capital, creativity, culture, and policy without privileging one among the four” (p.183). This concept encourages us to offer dynamic and historical accounts that delineate the operations of capital and the redeployment of talents, at the same time directing our attention to socio-cultural forces and contingencies that might engender alternative discourses, practices, and spatiality.

3.1 Capital, Policy and Creativity

Before examining why Xiaoqingxin Film can grow in Taiwan, it’s necessary to briefly list these factors that caused the long drought at the box office for locally made Taiwanese films: the depletion of generic and star resources, the decline of the Southeast Asian oversea market because of rising national assertion against Chinese business hegemony, a paranoid view of

Taiwan art cinema and most of all, the forced opening of Taiwan's movie screens to the world. Beginning from 1994, all foreign films could be imported with low tariffs. After Taiwan became a member of WTO in 2002, the 58-copy restriction of foreign films was finally cancelled.

It's true that Hollywood movies have dominated Taiwan film market since 1994. However, I would argue, it is not simply because "there is no Taiwanese audience for Taiwan film" (Yeh, 2006, p.156), but because over one decade, Taiwanese distributors poured money into distributing Hollywood films, "sardonically realizing audiences' species being" (Adorno, 2002, p. 116). When Taiwanese audiences could only swallow Hollywood products for a long time, their desire for cinema gradually became uniformed and standardized. It's clear that Xiaoqingxin Film pitches for audiences that are very different from standardized Hollywood spectators. Briefly speaking, typical audiences of Xiaoqingxin films are those who have a strong sense of being independent, different from others and feel it a shame to go to see a standardized Hollywood film. In this sense, the dominance of Hollywood products paradoxically enhances the desire of some audiences to have another taste.

With *Taiwan Film and Television Venture Capital Investment Conference* since 2005 and *Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement* between Taiwan and Mainland China in 2010, film co-productions between Taiwan and Mainland China are increasingly enhanced and Chinese mainland becomes a promising market for Taiwan local films. The key factor that contributes to Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film, is the redeployment of talents in the Taiwanese film circle. Taiwan's eminent producer-critic Peggy Chiao Hsing-ping (2008) uses the catchword "Too Much Generation" ("Tai Chao Guo Shi Dai") to describe the younger generation of directors, mostly born in 1970s: Te-Sheng Wei, Giddens Ko, Tom Lin, Rong-ji Chang and so on. To borrow Peggy Chiao's words, "the Too Much Generation is expected to blow away the dull moods of former generations and to save Taiwanese cinema." At the same time, a younger generation of film stars is also becoming the backbones of Taiwanese screen: Berlin Chen, Lunmei Kwai, Kai Ko, Michelle Chen and so on. Celebrated for their pure smiling face, Lunmei Kwai and Michelle Chen are considered as typical Xiaoqingxing girls.

The policy adjustments of the long-established Taiwan Government Film Fund in recent years also testified a trend to explore young talent and revive the Taiwanese film industry. In 1998, Film Fund started to fund short films. In 2003, well aware of the importance of digitalization, Film Fund gave preference to digital films. In 2005, Film Fund divided applicants into three groups: General Group, Green Hand Group and 3D Group and set down two new rules: first, for the General Group, the budget of the funded film should at least double the fund while for the Green Hand Group, the budget of the funded film can be at least 120% percent of the fund; second, one director can apply for fund for no more than 2 times. In 2012, if the box office of one film was more than 10 million NTD, Film Fund would provide funding for the next film of the company.

3.2 Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and Its Japanese Cultural Affiliations

As previously suggested, it's no doubt that Taiwanese traditions of Wenyi Narrative and College Folk both add credit to the success of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film. A closer examination of the formal system of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film, however, also reveals its cultural and aesthetic affiliation with Japan. To elaborate this argument, a level of interpretation will be offered in three aspects: Japanese Style Photography, Japanese Aesthetics and Iwai Shunji.

3.2.1 J-style Photography

The first thing that should be pointed out is, just like Japanese never calls J-dorama as J-dorama, the term, J-style Photography, is actually not commonly used by the Japanese. Yet, commonly used by other countries, J-style Photography, in a narrow sense, refers to a group of Japanese photographers with relatively consistent style, including Rinko Kawauchi, Kobayashi Kisei, Iwata Shunsuke, Marisa Shimamoto, Tokyo-Eight, Tomo Kohsaka and Nagano Toyokazud. The catchiest characteristic of J-style Photography is its use of undersaturated, pastel, pale washed-out colour. A clean, clear light often permeates images. The result is characterized by a lightness of touch. It's because the colour is less saturated and less aggressive than the real world that, every image is able to withstand a long gaze. Gazing at a J-style photograph, it's easy for the viewer to experience the photography world with a feeling of equilibrium, to enter a state of quiet contemplation. In Xiaoqingxin films, by using the pale washed-out colour, the sweetness and beauty of filmic images are controlled enough not to cloy.

J-style Photography is also famous for its fascination with shallow depth of field. For instance, whenever Nagano Toyokazud takes photos of her daughter, she skilfully employs a shallow depth-of-field to focus solely on her daughter in the foreground by using a large aperture or long focal length. The same technique is usually used when depicting the young protagonists in Xiaoqingxin films. By solely focusing on the character, the large aperture serves as a suggestion of loneliness. The use of long focal length, simultaneously means the camera should keep a long distance from the character, thus conveys a sense of insecurity. In sum, when the entire outside world is dissolved into a fuzzy background, what we could see is a narcissist living in one's own world. As a stereotype in J-style Photography, backlit shot is used to film a sweet moment, slightly overexposed and soft focused. Numerous examples using the same trick could be found in Xiaoqingxin films. For instance, in *Touch of the Light*, whenever Xiaojie is dancing, she is filmed in backlit shots. In *You are the Apple of My Eye*, the moment Shen Chia-yi smiled at Ko Ching-teng, they were again filmed in a typical backlit shot, slightly overexposed and soft focused.

Another significant feature of J-style Photography is to capture the small moments and details of everyday life: an egg, a vase and a photo, these quotidian, small, insignificant of daily life are elevated into something transcendent and mesmerizingly beautiful whisper to us. As Kawauchi (2001) nicely puts it, "I prefer listening to the small voices in our world, those which whisper. I have a feeling I am always being saved by these whispers; my eyes naturally focus on small things" (last page). To be more precise, what Kawauchi is fascinated with is life's transient moments. It's only these extremely sensitive photographers that can lead us to discover these small miracles in everyday banality: creation, destruction, life, and death. Just like touching on pathos of puberty and neurosis, no matter what stage of life they depict in their images, a celebratory tone is offset with a sombre stillness. Although no single image can neatly encapsulate the nuance of temporality, what interests J-style photographers is merely to convey the beauty of all of life's moments, no matter how ephemeral. Here the rhythms of this life are recorded, rather than its set pieces.

Accordingly, in *Ice Kacang Puppy Love*, *You are the Apple of My Eye* and *Touch of the Light*, fixed shots, over ten seconds, are generously given to a fish, a book and a tape recorder. Although these still life shots still have something to do with film narratives, they make possible the emergence of the purely optical and sound situation, for audiences to see, to hear, rather than to react to. In this sense, they approach what Deleuze (2010) calls "pure and direct

images of time”- “This is time, time itself, ‘a little time in its pure state’: a direct time- image, which gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced” (p. 13).

Through the above analysis, these similarities between cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and J-style photography have been quite obvious. However, two things appear similar do not necessarily mean they are causally related. In fact, I have not yet found out any direct evidences that could definitely prove that cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film learns a lot from J-style photography. The juxtaposition of cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and J-style photography here, I think, at least offers a possibility of inter-textual interpretation. To move a step further, I would continue to explore two tentative arguments on the relationship between cinematography of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin Film and J-style photography: First, considering that Taiwan experienced a long occupation by the Japanese, it’s quite possible that Japanese aesthetics has become entrenched in Taiwan and is embodied in Taiwanese arts, including cinema. Second, given the prevalent of Iwai Shunji’s films in Taiwan in post 1995, probably Iwai Shunji served as the intermediary between J-style Photography and Taiwan Xiaoqingxin films.

3.2.2 Japanese Aesthetics

Within Japanese Aesthetics framework, the most important aesthetic notions I would explore here include *Waibi-sabi*, *Mono no aware* and *Shibui*. *Shibui* is an expression of a particular simple, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty. *Shibui* objects appear to be simple overall but they include subtle details, such as textures, that balance simplicity with complexity. This balance of simplicity and complexity ensures that one does not tire of a *shibui* object but constantly finds new meanings and enriched beauty that cause its aesthetic value to grow over the years. The notion of *Shibui* helps to explain why J-style Photography refers a pale washed-out colour and pays special attention to details. *Wabi* (transient and stark beauty) and *Sabi* (the beauty of the natural patina and aging) both refer to a mindful approach to everyday life. Over time their meaning overlapped and converged until they are unified into *Wabi-sabi*, the aesthetic defined as the beauty of things “imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete” (Koren, p. 60). Things in bud, or things in decay, are more evocative of *Wabi-sabi* than things in full bloom because they suggest the transience of things. Closely related to *Wabi-sabi*, is the notion of *Mono no aware*, a poetic mood, or a bittersweet awareness of the transience of things. With notions of *Wabi-sabi* and *Mono no aware*, we can have a better understanding of the fascination with life’s transient moments and the tone of agreeable melancholy in J-style Photography. In short, J-style Photography is suggestive of a Japanese aesthetic that notes simplicity, transience, and at times, melancholy. This, to a large extent, explains why this particular style is regarded as typical Japanese photography style by other countries although the styles of photography in contemporary Japan are actually diversified and hybrid.

3.2.3 Iwai Shunji

For more than two decades, KMT government either banned (1972-1983) or restricted (1984-1994) the import of Japanese films. However, when *Love Letter* (Iwai, 1995) entered onto Taiwanese screens in 1995, it soon became the Pure Love Bible in the eyes of young Taiwanese audiences. A closer look at the beautiful cinematography of Iwai’s films reveals that Iwai does have a good grasp of the visual tricks of J-style photography. For instance, in *Love Letter*, a ten-second shot is left to a dragonfly, dying on ice, which is no doubt an unobtrusive detail and a transitive moment. Iwai is also stuck on pale colour, intentional backlit, slight overexposure and soft focus. One example can be the scene from *Love Letter*, where the high-school female student Itsuki was working at the public library, slightly out of focus, bathed in a clean, clear, white light from the window behind her. An even better example using backlit, overexposure

and defocus, can be the key shot of *All About Lily Chou-Chou* (Iwai, 2001), which shows the central character Hasumi, with big headphones covering ears, standing alone in a wide-open, sun-dappled rice field, lost in Lily's songs. The shot here is indeed very telling in the context of Xiaoqingxin Film. In the first place, it testifies the marriage of cinema and pop music in Iwai's films. Lily's imaginary songs—"Wounds that Heal", "Abyss of Loneliness" and "Wings that Can't Fly", as Tony (2002) notes, "could even serve as alternative titles for the film itself" (p. 36). In the second place, the act of covering one's own ear with big headphones confirms the redemptive power of Xiaoqingxin Music as well as Xiaoqingxin Film: for teens in this film, Lily Chou-Chow is their means of release and escape, their only refuge in an increasing hostile environment.

In terms of film script, Iwai's films have already offered an embryonic form for Xiaoqingxin films. *April Story* (Iwai, 1998), for example, is a story about Nireno, who began her fairly unimpressive college life, and frequently went to a bookstore, hoping to be recognized by Yamazaki who worked there. The plot of the film is elegantly loose and half of the shots are "useless" in terms of advancing the plot. Trivial issues and youthful sentimentality in the girl's mind are taken seriously. Great care is taken so as not to bruise the girl's romantic worldview. Yes, Yamazaki finally recognized Nireno and offered her a left-behind umbrella. They smiled at each other in "rain" - the story stopped here, avoiding being too sweet to cloy.

Given that most directors of Taiwan Xiaoqingxin films were born in the 1970s, almost certainly, Iwai was part of their film memory. When these directors, who grew up in the flood of Qiongyao films in the 1970s and Qiongyao TV series in the 1980s, encountered Iwai, it could be imagined that what ripples were caused in their mind. Seen from the three aspects above, cinematography, music and script, it might be not an exaggeration to say that Iwai is a forerunner of Xiaoqingxin Film.

4. Pan-Asian Distribution of Xiaoqingxin Film

4.1 Xiaoqingxin Film as Pan-Asian Cinema

Central to the idea of "pan-Asian cinema", is "to build a networked market that's actively connected and co-operating rather than fragmented, isolated and antagonistic. 'Connectivity' has been an important business strategy in managing media globalization" (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 94). Formed by Peggy Chiao Hsing-ping in 1996, Arc Light seemed to have the foresight to produce pan-Asian cinemas. It's noticeable that "Pan-Asian Packages: Arc Light Picture", which aimed to "sell six cities to Asian audiences in one package" (Davis & Yeh, 2008, p. 90), included *Blue Gate Crossing* and *Love of May*. It's true that Xiaoqingxin Film is marked with international sales potential, thanks to its universal emotional pursues, easy-to-digest pleasure and isolation from sensitive political issues.

The pan-Asian box office success of *You are the Apple of My Eyes* strikingly reconfirmed the commercial potential of Xiaoqingxin Film. The brochure hidden in the Collector's DVD Edition *You are the Apple of My Eye*, recorded the film's commercial glories: in Taiwan, 460,000,000 NTD, No.3 box-office hit in Taiwanese film record; in Hong Kong, 61,860,000 HKD, No.1 Chinese-language box-office hit over the years; in Singapore, 2,260,000 USD, No.1 Chinese-language box-office hit in 2011; in Malaysia, 1,390,000 USD, No. 4 Chinese-language box-office hit in 2011; in Mainland China, although the film was not released until January 6, 2012, near half of a year later than in Taiwan and a couple of months later than its Internet pirated version, it still set the 75,800,000 RMB box-office record, No.1 Taiwanese box-office hit in Chinese mainland over the years. Angie Chai, producer of *You are the Apple*

of *My Eye*, who once created the commercial miracle of *Meteor Garden* in 2001, afresh miraculously baked a hot topic for pan-Asian audiences and successfully made the actor and the actress in the product become superstars. In 2011, October Film Workshop, was established in Shanghai by Chinese and Japanese filmmakers, including Iwai Shunji. This workshop will start to work on its Pure Love Trilogy in two years, which, to a certain extent, indicates the possible prospect of Xiaoqingxin Film as pan-Asian cinema.

4.2 The Case of *You are the Apply of My Eye*

A new sub-genre would probably give birth to a new distribution mode. As can be observed in the case of *You are the Apple of My Eye*, Xiaoqingxin Film needs to develop a distribution schema different from commercial film and art cinema, a unique mode for itself. When *You are the Apple of My Eye* was acclaimed in Summer International Film Festival, Fox Film (HK) didn't choose to release the film earlier in Hong Kong as expected. Instead, it chose October 20, 2011 as the HK premiere date and held one or two mystery screening every weekend during September 13 to October 20. The time and location for each mysterious screening were successively posted on the Facebook page of *You are the Apple of My Eye*. Just like Cheer's releasing Demo in her early years, the act of holding small-scale mysterious screening, actually satisfied the audience's desire to be distinct from others. The role of social media was also highlighted in this case. Obviously, Xiaoqingxin Film pitches at young audiences who are probably frequent users of SNS. Among Chinese SNS websites, Douban might be extremely important in the context of distribution of Xiaoqingxin Film- as a popular saying goes, "So-called Xiaoqingxin girls, are those girls who bury themselves in Doudan every day." Another approach to reach for young spectators, as illustrated by *You are the Apple of My Eye*, is to hold screening and other related events in universities and colleges. On November 5, 2011, as a prelude to the film's release in Mainland China, Giddens Ko (2011) made a presentation in Peking University, which soon led to the heated discussion and the almost crazy pursuit of the film among college students in the Chinese mainland.

Another unique marketing strategy used in the case of *You are the Apple of My Eye* is to let the film spill over into real life. Giddens Ko repeatedly stressed that the film was merely a record of his personal experience and he made this film only to tell the Shen Chia-yi in his real life that he was still in love with her. More interestingly, fans of the film, motivated by the curiosity to find out who was the real Shen Chia-yi, finally exposed all the prototypes in real life for this film via "cyber manhunt." Seen in this light, *You are the Apple of My Eye* was no more only a novel or a film, but "a behaviour art" that anyone could join, which again proved that Taiwanese audiences "wished to be entertained by storytellers who dwelled among them" (Yeh, 2006, 168).

Conclusion

In sum, on contemporary Taiwan screens, Xiaoqingxin Film has gradually grown into a sub-genre with a systematized style system and a shaping distribution mode. Taiwan's advantages in making Xiaoqingxin Film are engaged with its manifold logics of capital, policy, creativity and culture. As shown by the successive box-office hits, the pan-Asian commercial success of Xiaoqingxin Film is not a one-hit wonder. Rather, in this sub-genre, I believe, lies the possible prospect of Taiwan popular cinema

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