

Taiwan's Lost Commercial Cinema: Recovered and Restored The Symposium

Date: Saturday 7 October 2017

Venue: The Council Room, 2.29 King's Building, Strand Campus, King's College London

Schedule:

10.00 – 10:15 Registration

10:15 – 10:30 Welcome by Ms. Cheryl Lai, Director, Taipei Representative Office in the UK.

Session 1:

10:30 – 11:10: Professor Gene-Fon Liao (National Taiwan University of Arts) "A Cinema of Living Fossil."

11:10 – 11:50: Professor Chris Berry (King's College London) "Taiwanese-Language Films (*Taiyupian*): An Alternative Cinema of Poverty?"

11:50 – 12:30: Dr. Ming-Yeh Rawnsley (SOAS) "Politics of Everyday: Taiwanese-language cinema of the 1950s–1960s."

Lunch break: 12:30 – 13:30

Session 2:

13:30 – 14:10: Ms. Teresa Huang (Taiwan Film Institute), "The Restoration Effort of *Taiyu Pian* of Taiwan Film Institute."

14:10 – 14:50: Ms. Evelyn Shih (University of California, Berkeley), "No Longer Bond's Girl: Female 007 in 1960s *Taiyupian*."

Tea & Coffee Break: 14:50—15:10

15:10 – 15:50: Associate Professor Jeremy Taylor (University of Nottingham), "Beyond Nativism: Examining *Taiyupian* from a Regional Perspective."

15:50 – 16:30 Associate Professor Wang Chun-Chi (National Dong Hwa University), "Sinophone Stardom: The Hong Kong Experience of *Taiyu Pian*'s Female Stars."

16:30 – 17:00 Final Reflections & General Discussion

Evening Screenings (Nash Lecture Theatre, 2.31 King's Building)

18:15 *Fantasy of the Deer Warrior*; 20:10 *The Lost Kingdom*

Sunday Screenings (Nash Lecture Theatre, 2.31 King's Building)

14:00 *The Best Secret Agent*; 16:10 *Early Train to Taipei*; 19:00 *Brother Wang and Brother Liu Tour Taiwan*

Full details of Screenings at: www.taiyupian.uk

Abstracts and Biographies (in order of presentation):

Professor Gene-Fon Liao (National Taiwan University of Arts) “A Cinema of Living Fossil.”

Abstract:

Taiwanese Language Cinema (TLC) emerged in the years between mid-1950s and early 1970s in Taiwanese film history. In retrospect, it stands out as a somewhat atypical film production practice in the dominant Chinese Mandarin filmmaking before the abolishment of Martial Law in 1987. The fact that it was a film trend inspired by the popular reception of the imported Amoy-Dialect films in Taiwan, which triggered a rush of venture capital investment in film production sector; that TLC in its 20-year or so history, beside a few worth mentioning films, there is little achievement in term of its artistic practice. It's the Taiwanese language, or its close affinity to the Amoy dialect, makes the central imaginary significance in shaping particular cultural identities evolved through times.

At the time the TLC appeared in the already booming movie going scene in Taiwan, adding to the language, these filmmaking demonstrates certain traits: sadness/comic combination plot treatment, a familiar group of actors/actresses, a farewell remark at the end of each episode (talking to the camera/audience) in series films, and all shown in specific movie theaters around the Island, make TCL a kind of “our cinema” and undoubtedly construct a strong sense of “imagined community”. When the Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) government tightened its cultural policies in enforcing Mandarin as national language, the TLC was gradually phased out in Taiwanese cinema. Almost at the same time, filmmakers, technicians, and actors/actresses, sought opportunities in the just established TV station, and most resettled as the main production forces in Taiwanese Language TV drama.

If the TLC possesses its historical significance in contrasting to Mandarin Cinema, the significance remains today, could be mainly as collective memories for a certain group of older generation. If there is any legacy left by the TLC, we could hardly detect traits traced to the TLC since dominant Mandarin filmmaking in the mid-1960s. When the industrial-reviving *Cape No. 7* (海角七號, 2008) portrays characters with dialogues in Mandarin, Taiwanese, Hakka, Aboriginal language, and Japanese; the rationale behind this multi-language treatment could very much be a cultural localization strategy in the age of globalization. The “imagined community” aroused by the TLC could be disappear forever, and the TLC's significance would only be a reminder of Taiwanese filmmaking in specific and cultural history in general in the recent past.

Biography:

LIAO Gene-Fon, currently professor/chair of the Motion Picture Department at National Taiwan University of Arts. He is the author of *The Disappeared Images: Cinematic Representation and Cultural Identities of Taiwanese Language Films* (in Chinese, 2001), chief editor of *The Shaw Brothers' Empire: An Imagined Cultural China* (in Chinese, 2003); and just published *Benjamin Brodsky and Company: A Transnational History of Chinese Early Cinema*, (in Chinese, 2015).

Professor Liao also has been responsible for many student short films and a couple of feature length documentaries as producer/story/writer.

Professor Chris Berry (King's College London) "Taiwanese-Language Films (Taiyupian): An Alternative Cinema of Poverty?"

Abstract:

The cycle of over 1,000 low-budget, Taiwanese-language films made between the mid-1950s and early 1970s was neglected and forgotten for many years. By the time people became interested in reclaiming them as Taiwan's heritage, only 200-plus survived. One reason for their low regard has been their low production quality. In this paper, I propose approaching Taiwanese-language films as an alternative "cinema of poverty." Recently, Song Hwee Lim has adapted Jerzy Grotowski's idea of a "theatre of poverty" to analyse Midi Zi's films. But where Lim and Grotowski see poverty as encouraging a high modernist stripping down to the essentials of the medium, Taiwanese-language cinema is another kind of cinema of poverty. It is characterised by the adoption of methods designed to maximise audience appeal in the shortest production time possible and at a low budget. These methods include sensational plot twists, emotive acting, and an exuberant practice of what Lu Xun in the 1930s called "grabbism" (拿来主义) – borrowing music, plot and anything else that works from overseas to create a locally distinctive bricolage.

Biography:

Chris Berry is Professor of Film Studies at King's College London. His academic research is grounded in work on Chinese cinema and other Chinese screen-based media, as well as neighboring countries. His publications include: (co-edited with Luke Robinson) *Chinese Film Festivals: Sites of Translation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); (co-edited with Koichi Iwabuchi and Eva Tsai) *Routledge Handbook of East Asian Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2016); and (co-edited with Feii Lu) *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

Dr. Ming-Yeh Rawnsley (SOAS) "Politics of Everyday: Taiwanese-language cinema of the 1950s–1960s."

Abstract:

Taiwanese-language cinema of the 1950s and the 1960s was composed primarily of commercial films that were produced cheaply to make a quick profit. As the government imposed many restrictions on the making of dialect cinema, local filmmakers and producers generally avoided social and political critiques. They either relied heavily on Taiwanese opera troupes for material, or sought inspiration from a variety of additional sources, including modern theatre groups, folklore, myths, news stories, local and foreign novels and foreign movies. However, these commercial dialect films clearly struck a chord with local audiences because they were extremely popular just as the island was changing from a rural to urban economy. What can we learn from this cinema about the everyday politics of the 1950s and

1960s? This paper will make use of the recently restored Taiwanese-language films available as a part of the “Taiwan’s Lost Popular Cinema: Recovered and Restored” project and analyze cinema’s representation of, and perceived challenges to, modernity, such as the breakdown of the kinship systems, the emergence of commodity society, and the prejudice against different social groups.

Biography:

Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley is Research Associate, Centre of Taiwan Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She is also Secretary-General, European Association of Taiwan Studies (EATS, 2012–present). She has published widely in both English and Chinese on Chinese-language cinema and media and democratisation in Taiwan. She is a founding member of *The International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, jointly supported by EATS and Academia Sinica in Taiwan. Her most recent publications include (eds with Gary Rawnsley) *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media* (2015) and (eds with Kuei-fen Chiu and Gary Rawnsley) *Taiwan Cinema: International Reception and Social Change* (2017).

Ms. Teresa Huang (Taiwan Film Institute), “The Restoration Effort of Taiyu Pian of Taiwan Film Institute.”

Abstract:

Taiyu pian had its hay day in 1950s and 1960s. Over 1,000 titles were produced between 1956 to 1981, but due to the lack of awareness of film preservation, most of taiyu pian were deserted after screening. So when the Chinese Taipei Film Archive was first founded in 1979, the former director, Ray Jiing, tried his best to collect as many Taiyu pian as possible. The film archive has salvaged 167 titles since then. But these titles were not seen widely, because it is expensive to produce new negatives and prints using the traditional photochemical process. Over the years, CTFA duplicated when we could get the funding.

Thanks to the digital age, we get funding to digitize and restore our collection. So the restoration efforts of Taiyu pian starts in 2014 when CTFA was first commissioned “Taiwan Cinema Toolkit” project by the Ministry of Culture. After two years, The restoration continues with another 4-year projects, “Taiwan Film Classics Digital Restoration and Value-Adding Project” with grants from the Ministry of Culture.

Our selection criteria is firstly the important directors and classical films, and we try to showcase various genres, films with innovative styles and challenged the social norms that the pioneers of taiyu pian filmmakers dared to adventure with their limited resource. I will also talk about the difficulties in restoration, including the deterioration of film material and serious damages of most of the prints when we first saved them.

Biography:

Teresa Huang received Master of Arts in Cinema Studies of College of Staten Island, City University of New York. She worked as international coordinator in Chinese Taipei Film

Archive from 1996 to 2015. After the upgrade of CTFA to Taiwan Film Institute (TFI) in 2015, she transferred to lead the digital restoration project and currently is the Head of Digital Restoration Department, TFI. She also serves in the selection committee of Women Make Waves Film Festival, Taiwan since 2009.

Ms. Evelyn Shih (University of California, Berkeley), “No Longer Bond’s Girl: Female 007 in 1960s *Taiyupian*.”

Abstract

When the 1960s Bond craze reached Taiwan, the *taiyupian* (Hoklo cinema) produced a hugely popular new archetype: the female 007. Although the films in this sub-genre evoked Bond’s code name of 007, Bond gadgets, and high-stakes espionage, it reversed the gender of the top spy. This was dramatized in the narrative through the hidden identity of 007, who is often a glamorous female figure embedded in enemy ranks and swoops in to save her team of agents in masked attire. Meanwhile, the top male spy remains in the dark and believes it is his role to take responsibility for the team. Often 007’s lover, he is ultimately proved incompetent and dependent upon her prowess as top spy; his role, too, is a reversal of gender and agency.

This paper explores the cinematic history and context for this gender irony, including the co-presence of Mandarin and Hoklo cinema; the opera tradition of *taiyupian*, which spawned many strong actresses straddling the gender line; and the popularity of the female knight-errant (*nüxia*) in 1960s Sinophone cinema. With close readings of 1964’s *Female Agent No. 7* and *Top Spy Number One*, I argue that the female action lead had a radically different meaning in *taiyupian* as compared to British and American cinemas, or even Mandarin and other East Asian cinemas, due to its opera film legacy. Furthermore, the reversal of 007’s gender points to the *taiyupian*’s sense of irony regarding its marginal status among other cinemas, and its embrace of the element of surprise inherent in the outsider’s role.

Biography

Evelyn Shih is a scholar of Chinese and Korean literatures, media, and cultures. She is currently a Ph D Candidate in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at UC Berkeley. Her current project focuses on the evocation of public affect through comic culture during the Cold War in Taiwan and South Korea, two post-colonial states aligned with the United States. Particular objects of study include drawn cartoons, genre films and *taiyupian* (Taiwanese Hokkien cinema), new literary journals of the 1960s, and recordings of stage entertainment. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *Room One Thousand*, and the *Journal of Korean Studies*.

Associate Professor Jeremy Taylor (University of Nottingham), “Beyond Nativism: Examining *Taiyupian* from a Regional Perspective.”

Abstract

Much of the academic literature on *Taiyupian* has thus far focused on the place of this cinema in Taiwanese society. Studies have interpreted *Taiyupian* in relation to changing theatre-going practices in postwar Taiwan, the enduring legacy of Japanese colonialism on the island in the post-1949 era, or the role of *Taiyupian* in challenging the cultural dominance of the Nationalist Chinese state.

The development and evolution of *Taiyupian*, however, needs also to be understood in its wider regional context. *Taiyupian* was but one of a plethora of new cinema industries which developed in East and Southeast Asia in the early Cold war period. Some *Taiyu* films were circulated throughout Southeast Asia (rather than simply within Taiwan), while others betrayed a clear influence from other cinematic movements in other parts of Asia. Celebrities who started their careers in *Taiyupian* even moved seamlessly to other industries in the late 1950s.

In this paper, I will therefore be arguing that we need to move beyond the nativist approaches that have so far shaped the study of this form. By comparing *Taiyupian* with cognate cinemas such as Cantonese cinema, Amoy-dialect cinema and Teochew cinema, I will be suggesting that *Taiyupian* can be understood in quite different ways. I will also be suggesting that this cinema shared much more in common with other forms of cinema (outside Taiwan) than has hitherto been acknowledged.

Biography

Jeremy E. Taylor is an associate professor in modern Asian history at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of *Rethinking Transnational Chinese Cinemas: The Amoy-dialect Film Industry in Cold War Asia* (Routledge, 2011), as well as over 25 journal papers and chapters on the cultural history of East and Southeast Asia.

Associate Professor Wang Chun-Chi (National Dong Hwa University), “Sinophone Stardom: The Hong Kong Experience of *Taiyu Pian*’s Female Stars.”

Abstract:

This talk aims to explore the transnational career of female stars of *taiyu pian* who, during the first downfall of *taiyu pian* in the late 1950s and early 1960s, expanded their career options to make Amoy-dialect films produced in Hong Kong but released theatrically in Southeast Asia. Such career path was made possible by the political coalition between the Nationalist regime in Taiwan and the right wing pro-Nationalists in Hong Kong, which propelled the emergence of a transnational sinophone capitalist network for film business. Yet, their mobility across different Hokkien-speaking communities is not without tensions, and the clash with Hong Kong modernity exemplified in both work and life styles appeared to be the thorniest. The goal of examining star discourses surrounding figures such as Xiao-yan-qiu (小豔秋), Xu Ming-li (徐明麗), Bai Hong (白虹), and Bai Lan (白蘭) is twofold. First, it sheds light on the regional dynamics between Hong Kong and Taiwan during the Cold War era and the subordination of Hokkien to Mandarin’s linguistic dominance. Second, it demonstrates the competing discourses over gendered modernities affected by different

colonial histories. I argue that while the stateless ethnic collectivity of Hokkien-ness allows female stars of *taiyu pian* to rise to sinophone stardom, their fluidity is not infinite; rather, it is still subject to a cold-war sensibility, the standard of modernity, and the Nationalist Party's project of Sino-nationalism. In other words, they symbolically embodied the inter- and intra-national cultural and political struggles in which Taiwan had involved in the 1960s.

Biography:

Dr Chun-Chi Wang is Associated Professor of English Department at National Dong Hwa University in Taiwan. She received her Ph.D. in Critical Studies from the School of Cinematic Arts at University of Southern California. Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Route: A Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, *Journal of Art Studies* and anthology books such as *Perverse Taiwan* (edited by Howard Chiang and Ying Wang, published in 2016) and *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts* (edited by Wang Lingzhen, published in 2011). Her research areas include *taiyu pian* and the history of Taiwan cinema; gender and sexuality in cinema; community-based participatory media-making.