

HAKKA CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY IN THE CHARACTER OF CHUNG PHIN-MOI IN THE FILM "CHINA, MY NATIVE LAND"

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ABSTRACT

"China, My Native Land", directed by Lee Hsing and released in 1980, was the first film that highlights the life story of Taiwanese Hakka writer Chung Li-fo (1915–1960) and his wife Chung Phin-moi (1914–2008). In reality the Chungs had challenged a contemporary Hakka taboo that couples with the same surname could never tie the knot. Throughout their lives they experienced ridicules, illness, death of a child and extreme poverty. Nevertheless they managed to stay together and remained in love with each other.

On its debut the film was acclaimed a masterpiece of "Healthy Realism", a new trend of cinematic art of the 1980s. Reexamined two decades later, the film turned out a cultural product targeted advocating the Kuomintang (國民黨 KMT) pro-China policy and consolidating its rule of martial law.

Furthermore, Phin-moi's image represented in the film goes through duplex distortion, first by her husband and next by the director with Chinese mentality. Illiterate, Phin-moi could not take the initiative of constructing her image either in creative writing or in film production. At first her husband described her personality. Afterwards the director based on his description to reconstruct her on the screen. In this light Phin-moi is exploited twice, first by Hakka patriarchy and then by Chinese ideology.

Image construction involves complicated knowledge politics. Phin-moi's role in the film exposes the multiple power configurations of male-centered Hakka value and Chinese mindset.

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Towards the end the article explores the prospect of re-envisioning Hakka femininity by younger-generation Hakka women themselves.

Keywords: Hakka, women, image constructing, patriarchy, ideology

INTRODUCTION

The film "China, My Native Land", Yuanxiangren (原纸), directed by Lee Hsing (季行) and starring Joan Lin and Chin Han, was released in 1980 by Ta Chung Motion Picture Co. Ltd. (大塚深文句). Soon after its debut, critics began to claim it as an exemplar of the then-new artistic trend of "Healthy Realism". This is the first movie that has told about the life of Mi-nung (Ch. Meinung 美農) based Hakka writer Chung Li-fo (Ch. Zhong Lihe 鍾野八 1915—1960), highlighting his tumultuous marriage to wife Chung Thoi-moi (Ch. Zhong Taimei 鍾台妹, 1914—2008). Throughout their lives, the couple encountered poverty, prejudice, disease and the deaths of their children; nevertheless, they managed to stay together and remained in love.

Li-fo's courtship with Phin-moi was vehemently opposed by his family, and they became the target of jeers in their small Hakka community. This was because the couple shared the same surname—in contemporary Hakka tradition, there was a taboo against marriage between persons with the same last name. Frustrated, Phin-moi and Li-fo left their hometown in 1940. They found refuge in Manchuria (Ch. 滿州) and Beijing (Ch. 北京) for eight years. After World War II, they returned to Taiwan (Ch. 台灣). Li-fo took a teaching position in Nui-phu (Ch. Neipu 内埔), a town in Phin-tung (Ch. Pingdong 屏東) County; this was an attempt on the couple's part to detach themselves from scornful relatives and individuals from their hometown. Unfortunately, Li-fo contracted tuberculosis, which was at that time a money consuming and nearly incurable chronic disease. Because he was too ill to work, the couple had no choice but to move back to Mi-nung. Phin-moi became the sole breadwinner, working menial jobs and barely supporting a family of seven. Their eldest son contracted tuberculosis from Li-fo and suffered severe backaches for many years, eventually becoming hunchbacked. The family was short of money for proper medical treatment, and as a result, their second son died of an acute infection at the age of nine.

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¹ The term "Healthy Realism" will be discussed further in the fourth section of this paper.

² In this paper, Hakka-related proper names, such as those of Hakka characters or place, are rendered in the Hakka Romanisation System propagated by the late Rev. Fong Kong-sen in the 1950s in Taiwan. Mandarin pronunciation will follow Hanyu transliteration in parentheses, marked with Ch.

In Chung Li-fo's novels and the film, Thoi-moi's first name is changed to "Phin-moi (Ch. Pingmei 平妹). In the rest of this article, she will be referred to as "Phin-moi."

In 1960, Li-fo coughed uncontrollably and collapsed over a pile of manuscripts; his disease had reached the terminal stage. Still, he managed to sit up in bed, leaning against a pillow as he worked on an unfinished novel. Sheets of handwritten paper stained with Li-fo's blood epitomised the writer's tragic life. (Peng 2000: 19–60)

Born into a poor farmer's family in a remote Hakka village, Phin-moi never had the opportunity to receive an education. At age fifteen, as the eldest daughter in her family, Phin-moi had to help her mother raise her five younger siblings after her father's death. Illiteracy denied Phin-moi any access to self-expression in literary form. We learn about her mostly through her husband's works. Based on her husband's description, Director Lee Hsing re-creates Phin-moi onscreen in the image of a conventional Hakka woman. Narratively, Phin-moi seems powerless. She is always an object: watched, studied, written about and reconstructed by another person.⁴

This article aims to analyse how Hakka femininity is built up in the role of Phin-moi through multiple representations, first that of her husband writer and then that of her director. It will explore the film in light of history, politics, society, colonialism and ethnic background to ascertain how these elements interact in the multiple constructions of Hakka femininity through the portrayal of Phin-moi. These elements are illustrated through multiple shots and will be discussed in the second section.

Two main themes of this article are, first, Hakka patriarchy, and second, the relationship between ideology and cinematic cultural policy.

The third section centres on how the representation of Hakka women co-evolves with Hakka patriarchy. Hakka femininity is closely linked to historical and ethnic factors, such as Hakka experiences of multiple diasporas. Over two thousand years, this historical context also had an effect on Hakka women's power relations and location within the male-centric Hakka hierarchy.

The fourth section turns to the interaction between the director's ideology and the *Kuomintang* (國民黨 KMT) cultural policy under martial law. The movie was filmed in the late 1970s and released in 1980, when Taiwan was still under the KMT's colonial rule.⁵ This article will examine how the director reacted to the political status quo and KMT's cultural mechanism through his representation of Phin-moi.

Regarding Chung Li-fo's and Chung Phin-moi's lives we may read Chung Li-fo's collection which I listed in the reference section.

⁵ Chen Fangming (Ch. 陳知) states the KMT regime displayed colonialist qualities and propagated Chinese nationalism to suppress Taiwanese people's consciousness and voice (2002: 27–28).

Finally, the conclusion will discuss alternatives for the reconstruction of Hakka femininity.

In terms of its methodology, the article will take a more Marxism oriented approach in order to access political and social dimensions. Psychoanalysis, though it has in recently years has been broadly applied to gender-related film studies, may not be an appropriate method for this research.

Feminist Jane Gaines suggests that the discussion of females in minority groups should not be confined to theories developed by white middle-class feminists, such as psychoanalysis. Gaines thinks that in addition to considering gender, the major concern of psychoanalysis, feminists and film researchers also need to address issues like class and race. For these purposes, Gaines refers to British Marxist Stuart Hall, stressing that, psychoanalysis aside, researchers ought to seek more "material-related" approaches (Gaines 1986: 208–210).

Likewise, Afro-American feminist hooks (1981: 12–13, 121–123, 129–131, 145–146) has criticised white feminists for preventing Afro-American women from participating in feminist movements and has argued that white feminism simply mirrors white women's racist and middle-class mentality, rarely articulating Afro-American women's status and experience.⁶

Based on the above-mentioned critique on psychoanalysis, this article will adopt a more Marxism-based approach to investigate the multiple power politics that co-engineer the construction of Hakka femininity through the role of Phin-moi in "China My Native Land." For instance, one essential Marxist view is that the cultural world of ideas, arts, religions and laws is greatly influenced by factors such as the economy, political institutes and power structures. In terms of the arts, when we assume a Marxism-based approach, this means that we not only analyse the artistic form of a work or its performance but also the corresponding political and societal conditions and its social context (Barry 1995: 156–158).

SCENES RELATED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY IN THE FILM

The film begins with a high-angle shot of the small town, Mi-nung, as a train runs across green fields surrounded by hills. Director Lee Hsing uses

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⁶ At birth, bell hooks was named Gloria Watkins. She chose "bell hooks" as her pen name and insists on having every letter of her name in small type.

several high-angle shots in the film. In addition to marking a location or a transition in time, these shots imply the historical or societal structure in which Li-fo and Phin-moi are placed. Furthermore, the train is thought to be a metaphor for modernity in Taiwanese literature. In Phin-moi and Li-fo's case, modernity manifests itself through their yearning for freedom in love and their break with the feudalistic Hakka familial traditions, such as that of marriages arranged by elders and the custom that couples with the same surname do not wed.

The next shot shifts to the inside of the train. Li-fo and Phin-moi are escaping from their homes and on the way to Manchuria. In a close-up, we see Li-fo, who is closer to the viewer and occupies most of the frame, sitting on the right and staring at Phin-moi, smiling. Phin-moi, sitting on the far left and appearing much smaller, suddenly senses Li-fo is looking intensely at her. Now the camera zooms in on Phin-moi's face. She meets Li-fo's eyes and sees his smile. She returns the smile, then shyly turns her eyes away. The scene seems to stress the stereotypes of the active male versus the passive female and delineates essential elements of the characters of Phin-moi and Li-fo in the film. A well-behaved lady, Phin-moi does not take the initiative to express her affection for her lover. Instead, she only responds to the man's "active" gaze with a mild smile and quickly retreats into herself. She becomes the object of her lover's gaze and, in this series of shots, is associated with powerlessness and obedience. By contrast, as a man, Li-fo is endowed with the privilege of observing her and unveiling his feelings.

The next scene is a flashback in which Li-fo recalls how he proposed to Phin-moi. They meet by a river after Li-fo returns from a two-year trip to Manchuria, looking at each other in excitement. Li-fo says, "I thought you would marry someone else." Phin-moi turns her head aside and says dejectedly, "Who would want me?" Li-fo quickly raises his hand and turns her head to face his, saying, "I'm coming back to ask you, will you go with me and cook for me?" Phin-moi's face brightens, and she immediately accepts his marriage proposal. The motion of Li-fo's hand implies male dominance: a male has the power to "turn a female's head", to "direct" her, while the female responds to the male's command. Moreover, the proposal suggests cooking as the wife's duty, again reinforcing a stereotyped female role.

Soon after they settle in Manchuria, Phin-moi becomes pregnant and appears with a big belly in a scene stressing women's role in childbirth in the conventional, patriarchal family. One day, Li-fo returns from work in a bad mood. Phin-moi brushes his hair with her fingers, a gesture of intimacy and an attempt to soothe him. Suddenly, Li-fo stops her by grabbing her hand and kissing it passionately. This scene embodies the stereotype that

only a man has the right to express passion, while a woman must wait passively for a token of love.

After Li-fo decides to launch a writing career, he is mostly shown in a seated position, holding a pen, pondering and writing. "Writing has always been my life dream and my ideal," he says. In contrast, Phin-moi usually shown standing, doing a variety of chores; she cooks, chops vegetables, steams buns, stitches, serves tea to Li-fo, takes care of their son and works a part-time job making boxes to help the family pay its expenses. She says to Li-fo, "I followed you to Manchuria just to look after you. What else can I do?" Another time she says sheepishly, "It's a shame that I'm illiterate. I wish I could read what you've written." Phin-moi is reconstructed as a faithful wife and devoted mother whose life is centred on her husband and her family. However, seldom do scenes or dialogues reveal her thoughts or emotions. By showing Phin-moi's regret regarding her illiteracy, the film justifies male dominance—implying that, by admitting her "inferiority", she willingly yields to the construction of her image by a literate/superior male, either her husband or the director, while she remains in a subservient position.

After they return to Taiwan, Li-fo falls ill but continues to write. This means that he is still entitled to give voice to his ideas. Furthermore, he still holds the right to speak on Phin-moi's behalf and construct her image in his works, while illiterate Phin-moi never has a chance to reveal her true self in writing. This difference is further stressed in the latter part of the film. While illness-stricken Li-fo is confined to a chair with his writing board, pondering his work, Phin-moi is always on her feet, picking pineapples or carrying baskets of bricks at construction sites. Once again, the male is linked to the pen (interpretable as the male genitals), which symbolises intelligence and power, while the female is identified with physical labour, instinct, and lack of knowledge and authority.

Another example of gender stereotyping emerges in the scene in which the couple mourns the death of their second son, Lip-min (Ch. Limin \mathbf{DE}). They are in the same room; Li-fo sits at the desk and strokes a clay animal that Lip-min made, while Phin-moi stands at the threshold, her back to the camera, weeping. The shot implies the male has the intellectual ability to associate a toy with his son's memory, while an uneducated, illiterate female only relieves her anguish through instinctive, emotional outlets.

⁷ Based on Freud's psychoanalysis theory, the penis and its equivalents, such as the pen and the stick, stand for masculinity patriarchal authority. (Fromm 1984: 68)

In the film, the male/father image overshadows all else. The death of Li-fo's mother is never mentioned. In contrast, when Li-fo receives a telegram in Beijing informing him of his father's death, there is a close-up of his facial expression. The following shot shows a mourning Li-fo kneeling in front of candles and a worship table. Next, the audience sees a secondslong freeze-frame of his tearful eyes. These shots highlight paternal authority and Chinese-style filial piety. In comparison, the "insignificance" of his mother's death clearly reveals women's low status in the gender hierarchy.

The film ends abruptly with the scene of Li-fo's death. He sits motionless at his desk, with tearful Phin-moi holding his head to her chest. The couple's five children kneel around their parents, sobbing. The final shot of Li-fo's room is also a high-angle shot that portrays a father's death as a major event in the patriarchal construct. Suddenly, the flow of the narration is cut off—Li-fo's death seems to indicate that the narrative must cease immediately. At this point, the viewer recognises with certainty that Li-fo, not Phin-moi, is the film's central concern. How Phin-moi and her children survive his death is of no interest to the director. Though the film focuses on the couple's love story, it is actually male-centric and therefore female-denying. Phin-moi exists purely for Li-fo's sake, and Li-fo is the director's only real concern.

HAKKA FEMININITY AND HAKKA HISTORY

Hakka concepts of femininity were developed over the course of the Hakka's evolution as an ethnic group. As to the origin of the Hakka, some scholars believe that they were Han people who relocated from northern to southern China during at least four mass migrations. Others claim that today's Hakka are mainly descendents of ancient Viet people who were influenced by Han culture or married Han immigrants. Wherever Hakka groups settled, they were called "hak", which means "outsiders" or "temporary inhabitants" (Ch. *kejia*, 客家, "guest families") and hints at tension between them and neighbouring ethnic groups (Siat 2008: 7).

Historically, most Hakka resided in remote mountainous regions. They seldom mingled with other groups and were not incorporated into local communities. Starting a life in the wilderness posed a constant challenge. However, hardships strengthened their will to survive; social ostracism further strengthened their ethnic solidarity. Over thousands of years, the Hakka forebears managed to pass on their cultural heritage.

In the 17th century, a group of Hakka forebears launched another exodus, this time to Taiwan. Again, many of them settled in mountainous inlands. This choice of geographic location is subject to two different interpretations. Some historians, such as Dai Yanhuei (戴姆, Chen Zhengsiang (陳祥) and Chen Shauxing (陳耀) say that Hakka immigrants settled in the mountains because Hoklo (Ch. fulao 福老) residents, who emigrated earlier from southern China and made up the majority of Taiwan's population, had already occupied the plain and coastal areas. Others, such as Shi Tianfu (施森園, attribute the choice to the Hakka's familiarity with mountainous habitats (Ng 2007: 48–49). In the mountainous settlements, in addition to wild animals, they faced another type of threat: Being attacked and beheaded by indigenous groups, who fought against the Hakka newcomers for land and other natural resources.

The collective memory of diaspora has left an indelible mark on the Taiwanese Hakka psyche. As a result of these experiences, the Hakka have created a culture that rewards values such as diligence, endurance, and dedication to family, clan and communities (Liu 1999: 248–255). Concepts of Hakka femininity can also be traced to this source. In the name of consolidating the entire ethnic group, Hakka women were subjugated by the Hakka patriarchy. Feminine virtues such as motherhood, sacrifice and perseverance were highlighted and enshrined as Hakka female characteristics.

In the Hakka tradition, male and female roles were strictly divided. Hakka males were encouraged to pursue a higher level of education, socialise, and leave their impoverished home villages to seek a future in business, politics, literature, the military, or other areas of endeavour. With husbands gone for years at a time, wives had to shoulder nearly full responsibility for their households. They cultivated the lands left by their husbands' ancestors and looked after elders and youngsters, growing vegetables, raising livestock, cleaning, cooking, weaving, knitting, and doing laundry. Above all, they had to work on their farms throughout the year. The strict standards for a "good" Hakka woman are put forth in a Hakka folk song, "A Really Good Daughter-in-law", Chun Ho Ku-ngiong (Ch. Zhen hao guniang 東政政政):

A hardworking daughter-in-law gets up upon the first crow of the cock, combs her hair, rinses her face, cooks tea, shines ovens and pots and fixes the breakfast at the daybreak. She sprays water and sweeps the yard, carries water and fills jars. Having had the first meal, she washes clothes and hurries to collect firewood in the hills. She waters flowers, grows vegetables, simmers soup stock and stays

in her room without stepping out a step. She knits and weaves, sews and puts needles and threads in cabinets. She never fools around or speaks ill of others behind their backs. She loves her children more than herself. She's dedicated to cooking and takes care not to leave shells or bran on plates. She saves every bit of food, such as chicken eggs, duck eggs, salted beans, and preserved ginger, and the household has never run out of rice or wheat. She drinks bitter tea, wears plain clothes. If the harvest falls short, she persists, as enduring as a tree bearing up under frost and ice. She sells wood and never steals a penny. She shoulders her duties and never complains to her in-laws or husband. This is a truly respectable, impeccable woman (Chong, Tian-van 2004: 34).

Hakka women's hard work, however, does not guarantee reward; nor does it give them their fair share of power or higher status in their families or in Hakka communities at large. According to a study by Chong Vi-on (Ch. Zhang Weian 强族), Hakka males still dominate decision-making, and Hakka women do not enjoy higher social status than do their "less hardworking" Hoklo counterparts (1994: 539–52). Hakka females have been brainwashed to conform to the male-centric Hakka tradition. Their labour has been exploited, but rarely have they thought to change the status quo; because patriarchal values are so deeply rooted and internalised in Hakka culture, Hakka women are "willing" to subordinate themselves to "serve" this system. In the past, most Hakka women took overwork for granted. Some of them even thought that women needed less sleep than men and could work longer hours (Chong, Tian-van 2004: 188).

In fact, working as farm labourers, most Hakka women had the potential to be economically independent. Nevertheless, they devoted themselves to their husbands and the enslaving patriarchal system; they believed in such feminine virtues as gentleness, obedience and diligence. As the saying goes, "If a man decides to take a wife, he should marry a Hakka woman" (Chung 1991: 127–130). Hakka language teacher and scholar Chen Chhong-fat (Ch. Zeng Changfa 曾國 has even lamented that the more "recognition" Hakka women receive, the more they are abused and exploited. 9

The features of traditional Hakka femininity have been endlessly acclaimed in literature. Because Hakka women traditionally received little

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⁸ It is a widespread belief in Taiwan that Hakka women are more diligent than their Hoklo counterparts. Chong Tian-van also mentions an American missionary's amazement at Hakka women's hard work in *Taiwanese Hakka Women* (2004: 30).

⁹ My Hakka language teacher, Rev. Chen Chhong-fat, made this remark in class on May, 19, 2005. He has read this article and agreed with this reference.

education, most were illiterate; therefore, images of Hakka femininity were actually constructed by literate Hakka males, the *de facto* beneficiaries of the patriarchal system. Hakka male intellectuals liken Hakka females to Mother Earth, physically strong and full of life. In the work of these male authors, most Hakka heroines come from poor families. Some are deserted at birth or given up for adoption as "daughters-in-law" but actually serve as child slaves. In spite of such hardships, these ill-fated heroines are depicted as energetic, hardworking and cheerful. These images merely reflect the stereotypically idealised women of Hakka male writers' imaginations. Seldom do the male writers raise questions regarding why Hakka heroines are generally presented as menial labourers, why most Hakka male protagonists are not portrayed in the same way?, and why backbreaking labour such as farm work is so praiseworthy in Hakka males' creative writings. Nor do Hakka male authors challenge the power dialectics or ideological engineering behind the drastic gender differentiation.

In Chung Li-fo's novel "Lip-san Farm" (Ch. *Lishan nongchang* 笠山農場 (1955), farm labour seems peaceful, idyllic, and ethereal:

Two young women were planting sweet potatoes on the slopes. Both were wearing traditional Hakka blue shirts, the sleeves and collars embroidered with coloured threads. Their shirts were washed as clean as the clear sky, as spotless as the hearts of young, innocent maidens. Both of them carried baskets to hold potato buds. They bent their backs. The tips of their hoes gleamed. A reddish band encircled one of the women's bamboo hats. At the back of their bamboo hats two blue tassels fluttered high with the wind (1997: 111).

In a story, "Slim Weed" (Ch. Buomang 薄芒) (1944), Chung Li-fo observes a female farm labourer working in the fields:

She bent until her back and her buttocks formed a right angle. Quietly she picked vegetables. The sleeves of her overwashed blue shirt had turned blackish, flapping to and fro with the wind.... She skilfully cut off overgrown vines, leaving the stems just above the top layer of the soil. Then, like a fisherman winding in nets, she drew vines out of the entangled sweet potato fields (1983: 91).

Did he see her sweat and tears, or hear her laboured breathing? Another Hakka male author, Chung Cheu-chun (Ch. Zhong Zhaozheng 鍾筆政, describes Pun-moi (Ch. Bengmei 奔妹), the heroine of his novel "Song of Mount Chap-thian" (Ch. *Chatianshan zhi ge* 插天山之歌) as follows:

Bare-foot and wearing Taiwan-style pants, she strode back and forth on hilly trails, her pigtails stuffed into a bamboo hat.... Her face was stained with mud and sweat.... Before long he saw Pun-moi in that familiar outfit cutting weeds at the edge of the cliff... (1993: 1000).

Renowned male Hakka writer and critic Li Kheu (Ch. Li Qiao 李喬) frequently links Hakka women with the motherland and affirms their perseverance. In his best-known work, Wintry Nights (Ch. Hanye 寒夜, 1980-1982), 10 the heroine Tian-moi (Ch. Dengmei 燈味) is eulogised as a spiritual buttress for her family and for the other villagers. When her husband is leaving her to join a group of anti-Japanese guerrilla fighters, she vows to encourage him:

I will bring the elders and the youngsters of our family to grow sweet-potato leaves. Otherwise, we'll pick weeds and eat them. If the weeds around here are eaten up, we'll keep looking for more elsewhere. If we run out of rice, we'll eat wild potatoes. If there are no potatoes, we'll eat san-fung leaves or just swallow soil ("Remote Villages", Ch. Huangcun 荒村1981: 119).

From these passages we learn that Hakka males tend to write about Hakka females in highly respectful, even admiring tones; however, they still avoid bringing up pointed questions regarding ideological issues.

According to Louis Althusser, "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." Weltanschauung is actually a "necessary imaginary distortion" used to serve a system. "Ideology (also) has a material existence (function)." For instance, it operates and is "reproduced" by ideological apparatuses such as the Hakka family. Furthermore, "ideology interpolates individuals as subjects." When a person accepts and internalises an ideology, she or he is given an identity and a sense of belonging (1996: 53-60). The male-centric ideology of Hakka patriarchal system has been imposed by familial and communal systems and passed on and re-propagated for generations. As a result, the subjects of this ideology have taken it for truth, barely questioning its legitimacy. If an individual challenges it, she or he may be accused of

Wintry Nights is a trilogy made up of three sections: "Wintry Nights" (Hanye 寒夜), "Remote Villages" (Huangcun 荒村) and "Lone Light" (Gudeng 孤鸷). The first section, "Wintry Nights", was published in 1980; the second section, "Remote Villages", in 1981; and the third section, "Lone Light", in 1982.

tainting Hakka identity and social integrity—and, thus, may be ostracised or punished by other members of the Hakka community.

In the beginning, Phin-moi as a Hakka woman in literature is represented by her husband, who sees her through male eyes with the Hakka patriarchal mindset. To a certain degree, her image has been distorted in the process of re-construction in Li-fo's literary world; all her perceptions or emotions are "censored" by his pen. We learn about his vision of his wife, but Li-fo's work never shows us the real Phin-moi.

In the film "China, My Native Land", director Lee Hsing bases most episodes on Li-fo's work. This brings up another question: in second-stage representation in cinema, will Phin-moi's image be distorted again? This question will be discussed in the following section.

THE DIRECTOR'S POLITICAL VIEWS AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE MARTIAL LAW ERA

Born in China in 1930, Lee Hsing moved to Taiwan after the defeated KMT regime fled to this island in the late 1940s. Educated at National Taiwan Normal University—then an institution devoted to training teachers to indoctrinate students with the KMT's China-centric ideology¹¹—Lee launched his directing career in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Tu 1986: 177–178). His first Mandarin film, "Our Neighbours" (*Jietou xiangwei* (1950), was a plain, warm account of the daily lives of ordinary Taiwanese individuals; it won praise at home and impressed Henry Kung, then-general manager of the Central Motion Pictures Corporation (CMPC). Kung, who was about to introduce a new KMT-masterminded film aesthetic known as "Healthy Realism," found Lee's style ideally suited to the new film policy and quickly recruited him. Lee directed a few award-winning projects for the CMPC, all of which paid homage to farmers and labourers in a lyrical, idyllic fashion and were lauded as masterpieces of the "Healthy Realism" era. ¹³

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According to Althusser, schools are educational ideological state apparatuses that propagate the ideology of the ruling class and consolidate their rules. (1969, translated and reprinted in 1996: 53–54) It was understandable that National Taiwan Normal University, as the major training center of teachers in the KMT era, played a key role in reproducing China-centric ideology and educational policies.

From 1958 to1962, Lee filmed movies in the main Taiwanese language, Hoklo (Ch. Fulaohua 福街).

In 1963 he filmed his first movie, "Our Neighbors" in Mandarin (http://movie.cca.gov.tw/people_inside .asp?rowid=7&id=1).

¹³ In the 1970s, Lee Hsing directed CMPC-released films like "Oyster Girl" (*Ernu* 蚵女), "Beautiful Duckling" (*Yangya renjia* 養鴨人家) and "The Road" (*Lu* 路). See Li (1998: 28–29).

A KMT-staged cultural program in the late 1960s and the 1970s, "Healthy Realism" ultimately aimed to consolidate the party's supremacy by transmitting ideologies favouring the status quo. Films in this category, though contextualised in Taiwan, stress "purely" artistic performance and portray "bright", "healthy" pictures of society under the KMT's rule, while concealing "dark", "unhealthy" realities such as human rights abuse, corruption and the inequalities that lay beneath the deceptively peaceful surface. (Li 1998: 28-29) "Healthy Realism" directors highlighted the KMT's economic "accomplishments", which their films implied would lead to a "better" life, at the same time turning a blind eye to atrocities committed by the KMT authoritarian regime during the martial law era (1949–1987).

During "the White Terror" era¹⁴, the KMT controlled all kinds of "ideological state apparatuses", including the film industry, in order to brainwash the Taiwanese people. In 1949, the ROC (Republic of China) Film and Drama Association (RFDA), which took an "anti-communist and anti-Soviet" stance, was founded under the direction of Chiang Ching-kuo (Ch. 蔣經國, 1910–1988), KMT ruler Chiang Kai-shek's 蔣介石 (1887–1975) eldest son. In 1960, the RFDA played an active part in organising parades to celebrate Chiang Kai-shek's birthday. Kung became chairman of the RFDA in 1964, while he was also in charge of the CFC. Both the RFDA and CMPC functioned to reinforce KMT cultural policies, including the "Healthy Realism" school of film aesthetics. "Healthy Realism" films such as those directed by Lee Hsing were in fact cultural products that propagated the ideology of the ruling class and strengthened the KMT's colonial rule (Liu 1997: 143–150).

In the 1970s, the KMT suffered a series of diplomatic setbacks and came under criticism domestically. This prompted the party to devote all of its cultural resources to "awakening" ordinary people's "patriotism". In 1971, the ROC withdrew from the United Nations. In the months that followed, the KMT regime cut diplomatic ties with more than ten allies. In 1972, Japan severed its diplomatic relationship with the KMT and recognised the legitimacy of the PRC (People's Republic of China), as did the Philippines in 1974 and the United States in 1979. (Xiau 2002: 63)

Dissidence had been contained under the KMT's iron-fisted rule during the previous two decades of martial law. However, diplomatic setbacks fuelled domestic dissatisfaction with the regime. Meanwhile, in the

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[&]quot;The White Terror Era" refers to a period from 1949-1987 when the KMT had implemented martial law in Taiwan. During this period, thousands of Taiwanese dissidents were arrested, imprisoned or executed. The people were also stripped of their freedom of speech. See Hu and Lin (2004: 299–304).

Althusser stresses that the ruling class has to control all ideological state apparatuses, including school, church, family and cultural ISA, like film production, to effectuate its rule (1996: 53–55).

wake of the growth of post-war Taiwanese industry, a rising middle class also began to question the legitimacy of the KMT's rule, demanding political reforms and greater freedom of speech.

In the wake of these crises began a new wave of films known as "war and patriotism movies" in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Works of this genre include "The Everlasting Glory" (Yinglie qianqiu 英烈汗秋), "Heroes of the Eastern Sky" (Jianqao yinglie zhuan 冥橋英烈傳) and "Victory" (Meihua 梅花). These films present striking war spectacles in praise of pro-KMT Chinese people, arousing anti-Communist and anti-Japanese sentiment. They were instrumental in subduing criticism of KMT's diplomatic catastrophes and shoring up the party's battered reputation.

At approximately the same time as the KMT's China-centric ideology was encountering more and more challenges, "root-seeking movies", a new genre of films that emphasised Chinese-ness, also emerged. Lee Hsing immediately employed the KMT's new film aesthetics and cultural politics. In addition to "China, My Native Land", "the Heroic Pioneer" (*Tangshan guo Taiwan* 唐比過台灣), directed by Lee and released in 1986, aimed to stir up nostalgia for China—the then KMT-proclaimed fatherland of all Taiwanese – just as the regime was facing calls for Taiwanese self-determination and independence ¹⁶ (Li 1998: 58–64). During his career as a director, Lee worked closely with the KMT ideological apparatus in the film industry, doing his part in propagating the regime's ideology.

Lee Hsing believed in traditional Chinese ethics and moralities, and he put these beliefs into practice in the "Healthy Realism" school in the 1970s. In 1980, he worked with the Ta Chung Motion Picture Co. Ltd., making "China, My Native Land". 17

In an interview, Lee commented on the strict standards for female chastity mandated according to Chinese moral conventions, saying, "I think chastity violates human nature. I don't agree with it. But neither do I intend to express my opinions in my films nor do I plan to say something to my audience" (Li, 1998: 31). Critics said Lee's conservatism prevented him from dissecting core problems in Taiwanese culture, politics and society. He

authoritarianism.

In 1971 Chiang Ching-kuo survived an assassination attempt planned by pro-independence Taiwanese students in New York City. In 1977, the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church called for Taiwan to be reestablished as a new and independent state. In the same year the pro-democracy Chung-lap (Ch. Zhongli 中區 Incident took place, followed two years later by the Kaohsiung Incident. Although the KMT launched an island-wide man-hunt and made scores of arrests at the time, the incident resulted in greater support for Taiwan's democratisation. These phenomena signaled the demise of the KMT

Ta Chung Motion Picture Co. Ltd., a company dedicated to highbrow film arts, was founded in 1968 by CMPC employees, including Lee Shin.

simply adhered to KMT-programmed cultural policies and "overburdened his films with untimely 'feudalistic views'" (Ibid.).

In "China, My Native Land" Lee Hsing uses Phin-moi and Li-fo's love story to reimpose the KMT's cultural manipulation and ideologies. First, the movie was given a very "patriotic", explicitly China-centric title.

Furthermore, in the film, Chung Li-fo is presented as being concerned with the future of his "Chinese" compatriots and anxious to seek his roots in his long-awaited homeland. Actually, Chung Li-fo was already disillusioned with China, even while he was living there, and he expressed his disappointment at the country and its people. In "The Door" (*Men* 門), he described China as "the nation stripped of dignity, morality and belief in God!" (1945). In "The Sadness of Potatoes" (*Baishu de beiai* 白素的表表), he lamented the discrimination that Taiwanese individuals faced in contemporary Chinese society: "Homeland, just like a gust of wind that whirled in from Siberia and disappeared for an instant" (1946).

Additionally, Li-fo's beloved half-brother Chung Fo-min, who is a Japan-educated scholar and had close ties with Li-fo, was executed by the KMT as a "traitor" after the 2.28 Incident (*er-er-ba shijian*二八字件). ¹⁸ Given that Li-fo's family actually fell victim to the KMT's atrocities, how could Li-fo still have positive feelings about the KMT? Nevertheless, Lee Hsing ignored any facts that might embarrass the KMT and wistfully portrayed Chung Li-fo as a "patriotic" "Chinese" writer.

Above all, Phin-moi's subjectivity is removed from the film. Throughout the work, she is shown as an obedient wife, a voiceless follower of Li-fo and traditional moral values. Her appearance on the screen seems merely a decoration intended to enrich the appearance of Li-fo's life. In real life, however, Phin-moi had a strong personality and an independent soul. Despite her illiteracy, she had the courage to fight against Hakka tradition, encountering rumours and ridicule, and finally running away with Li-fo to a foreign country that she knew nearly nothing about. Throughout her life she remained true to what she had chosen, no matter what ordeals she had to endure. As a young woman raised by a widowed mother, she was by no means a stranger to hardship; nor was she ignorant of what her marriage would bring her. Nevertheless, she chose to become Li-fo's life-long partner, and she remained true to this vow. Such persistence and a self-determined spirit were painted as constituting the whole of her subjectivity.

In real life, Phin-moi was not as meek and weak as she appeared to be onscreen. Her eldest son Chung Thiat-min (Ch. Zhong Tiemin 鍾載民)

Materials about Chung Fo-min's life are at the Chung Li-fo Memorial Museum in Mi-nung, Ko-hiung-yan (Ch. 高雄縣 Kaohsiung County).

recalled that his father was more idealistic, but less realistic, while his mother had superb survival skills and an iron will. Once in Beijing, when her family was out of food and money, Phin-moi—who was illiterate and unable to speak Mandarin—hunted along the streets and succeeded in borrowing food from stores. ¹⁹ In reality, after Li-fo was infected with tuberculosis in 1947, Phin-moi shouldered the responsibility of being the sole breadwinner for their poverty-stricken family. After Li'fo's death in 1960, working low-paid menial jobs, she managed to raise their four children and have all of them educated well. (Zhang 1980: 1–7).

Phin-moi had emotions, too. Chung Thiat-min wrote that one day in Beijing, his mother jumped in fury and broke a high-heeled shoe when she saw Li-fo returning from a trip to Henan (河南) with a young woman who she assumed was her husband's new lover. And Phin-moi did complain sometimes, as any individual in her position would do. Once she told Li-fo, "I must have owed you a lot in my last cycle of life. Otherwise, why did I marry you and suffer so much?" Amused, Li-fo said light-heartedly, "Since you owed me so much, you have to repay your debt. No complaint, all right?" Phin-moi raised her brows and rolled her eyes, retorting, "Am I not repaying it? Am I complaining?" Then Li-fo laughed. In the film, however, Phin-moi's emotions and rebellions spirit are erased to construct the image of an ideal lady who matches traditional Chinese values.

As a result of their extreme poverty, Phin-moi was forced to poach lumber, an activity that was banned by the government. One day, she was nearly caught by the police and in fright, she fell into a brook and hurt herself badly. Li-fo recalls this incident with high emotions in the prose text entitled "An Impoverished Couple" (*Pinjian fuqi* **賀美妻**) (1959: 141–147). I regard this event as a model example of the couple's harsh living condition and their tenacity. In the film, however, it was downplayed. It is likely that Lee Hsing was reluctant to expose the "dark" but real element of Li-fo's and Phin-moi's lives, fearing he might be accused of sullying the KMT's reputation and violating its cultural policies. Perhaps Lee Hsing worried that the log-poaching scene would suggest that ordinary Taiwanese people did not have a good life under KMT rule and that, as a result, they were forced to take risks in illegal businesses to make ends meet. Insisting upon "Healthy Realism," the director merely "skimmed" this episode and avoided probing further into the problematic, sacrificing profundity and dramatic effect for the sake of "patriotism".

Chung Thiat-min related this episode to my Hakka class when we visited Minung on December 17, 2004

Chung Thiat-min, "My Father and My Family" (1964), collected in *The Complete Works of Chung Lifo, Vol. 8: Zhong Lihe's Incomplete and Unpublished Works*, 236–237.

Indications that Lee Hsing complied with KMT rules can also be found in another movie he directed in the same period. In 1978, "He Never Gives Up" (Wangyang zhong de yitiao chuan 汪钟的一條的, a movie adapted from the autobiography of a multiple-handicapped, self-made Taiwanese writer Chhang Fung-hi (Ch. Zheng Fengxi 鄭豐喜) and coincidently also starring Joan Lin and Chin Han, attracted Chiang Ching-kuo's concern for "exaggerating" the impoverished condition of the protagonist's family and the backwardness of life in Taiwan's rural areas (Li 1998: 63–64).

Additionally, in order to safeguard Chinese ethics, especially family values, Lee Hsing seems to hide the long-term conflicts within the traditional patriarchal family system. In a prose piece entitled "A Couple with the Same Last Name" (Tongxing zhi hun 同姓之婚), Li-fo depicted how Phin-moi did not get along with his family. During their courtship, his mother called Phin-moi a "fox spirit"—derogatory term that was used to describe immoral women—and blamed her for "seducing" Li-fo and bringing disharmony to the Chung Family. Li-fo also often fought with his father, who vehemently opposed the marriage. Phin-moi wept all the time (1991: 153–154). After their return from China, the couple and their son Thiat-min first moved to Nui-phu; this decision represented an attempt on their part, as mentioned earlier, to distance themselves from Li-fo's relatives. It was only Li-fo's tuberculosis that forced them to move back to their hometown. Li-fo described Phin-moi and his family's relationship as "cold and awkward." (Ibid.: 156). In the film, however, they seem to enjoy warm ties. Li-fo's mother talks to Phin-moi in a kind, loving tone, and Phin-moi responds gratefully and respectfully, as a filial daughter-in-law is supposed to do.

Similarly, the Hakka bias against marriage between a man and a woman with the same surname was in truth what triggered Phin-moi and Lifo's elopement. The nightmare haunted them after their return to Taiwan and, indeed, for the remainder of their lives. Neighbors also ridiculed their eldest son, Thiat-min, for this reason (Ibid.: 159–161). However, Lee Hsing again downplays this real-life conflict, instead conjuring up an image of a warm, peaceful, harmonious society. We see his efforts to consolidate traditional values even at the expense of artistic integrity. Without these conflicts, how can the director reveal the couple's courage and dignity in the context of the predicaments they endured?

Not surprisingly, all of the songs in the film are in Mandarin, most with non-Hakka melodies (there is one Hakka folk melody, albeit refitted with Mandarin lyrics). The singer, Teresa Teng, was a Mandarin pop artist

who did not come from a Hakka background; neither did the leading actor or the leading actress. All the scripts and dialogues are in Mandarin. Not a single word of Hakka is uttered in a film that pays tribute to a Hakka writer and is set in the Hakka village of Mi-nung.

According to Edward Said's theories of knowledge and colonialism, any concepts or remarks on cultures and history have to be examined through the lens of power mechanism or hegemony (1978: 90). In this sense, although the film was praised as asserting "Taiwan-ness", it is actually "de-Taiwanising" and blots out the reality of Hakka identity. What we see is a director taking advantage of Taiwanese material while siding with a colonial regime and portraying the colonised people from the perspective of Chinese supremacy (Chen 2002: 27–28). The film is actually propaganda dressed up in filmic techniques with a thin veneer of Hakka culture. Neither Taiwan nor the Hakka people were the director's true concern. Even Phin-moi's image as a Hakka woman was constructed to fulfil the ruler and director's political purpose. This explains why we hardly find any subjectivity or any Hakka qualities in Phin-moi's character.

After martial law was lifted, Lee Hsing considered filming Phin-moi's and Li-fo's story again. Their children pondered the offer. Chung Thiat-min said, "I've been thinking of ideological gaps. It would be too hard for him (Lee Hsing) to cross over."²¹

CONCLUSION

An illiterate Hakka woman from an impoverished farmer family, Chung Phin-moi had no way to express herself in spheres of writing and film production. Through the duple constructions of her image, first by her writer husband Chung Li-fo and then by director Lee Hsing, her image was distorted repeatedly to meet the needs of the Hakka patriarchy and KMT's China-centric ideology. Her identity was exploited to benefit the two systems, while her subjectivity was repressed in the process of multiple representations, in literature as well as in film art.

Image-shaping involves complicated knowledge politics. In these power deployments, those who gain the right to define or to interpret always have the upper hand. They are endowed with the privilege of representing the less powerful even without consulting them in advance. In Phin-moi's case, because she couldn't read and write (like many Hakka women in the

Chung Thiat-min made this remark in a speech at National Cheng-kung University, Tainan, Taiwan, on May 12, 2005.

old days), the husband and director figures were able to take charge of constructing a woman's image in literary works and onscreen. As a result, she had less and less control over the formation of her image and grew increasingly powerless.

Nowadays, as more Hakka women receive a thorough education and take part in various careers and activities, knowledge formation is no longer a domain dominated by males. As society becomes more diversified and democratised, Hakka communities also face new challenges. Traditional Hakka gender differentiation has become old-fashioned; it is about time to reflect on traditional values and re-define Hakka identity and Hakka femininity. Hakka women now have more alternatives that allow them to enrich their lives and voice their opinions. They can become involved in constructing their own image, speaking for themselves and writing for their own sake. They do not have to rely on their male counterparts to channel their voices any more. Thus, distortions, misrepresentations and exploitations of Hakka women may start to dwindle.

"China, My Native Land," shot during the last decade of the martial law era, was restrained by the political and social milieu of that time. Today, given the improvement in Taiwan's overall conditions, I look forward to seeing a Hakka female director produce a movie about Hakka women, speak up for her lingual-ethnic group and her gender, create her identity and invent her own definition of Hakka femininity. On that day, we may declare Hakka women's subjectivity as established and pronounce the shackles on them to be finally removed. As time passes, we expect that Hakka femininity will encounter more transformations and keep co-evolving with Taiwan and the entire globe.

I would like to end this article with a poem in the Hakka language, "Chun-pan" (Ch. Zhenban 和版Cutting Board), written by a Hakka female poet, Chong Fong-chhu (Ch. Zhang Fangci張慈):

People say women are like vegetable seeds,
Blown away as the wind goes.
What makes a woman?
Throughout her life
Anything could be piled on her,
Cut and chopped atop her as others intend,
Like a cutting board they filled her with cracks and scars.

Dear sisters, Enduring whatever others want to do Is not the only route through your lives (2004: 82–83).

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