



Taiwan Post-New Cinema: Collective Memory in the Aesthetics of the Common People

Xinyi Fan^{1,*}

¹College of Humanities and Arts, Macao University of Science and Technology, Macao, 999078, China

*Email: 1210024809@student.must.edu.mo

Abstract. In 2008, amid the global trend of Hollywood blockbusters, the film *Cape No.7* won an unprecedented box office record in Taiwan, marking the beginning of a new post-new era in Taiwan. As an important branch of mass aesthetics and mass culture, the new aesthetic form represented by the aesthetics of the common people has been implanted into the film by the new directors in the post-*Cape No. 7* era to facilitate cultural transformation and dissemination. This phenomenon can be explained by the concept of "collective memory" proposed by Maurice Halbwachs in sociology. In the process of tracing back to the local "cultural memory" and "communicative memory", the Post-New Taiwan cinemas provide a sense of identity for Taiwan aborigines. Under the influence of the impact of Hollywood blockbusters on the Taiwan film industry and related policies, the creators of the post-*Cape No.7* era completed the "social construction" of collective memory through the splicing of memories in the films.

Keywords: Post-New Cinema, collective memory, common people aesthetics, identity

1 Introduction

Post-New Taiwan cinema, as a new wave, can be traced back to the release of *Cape No.7* in 2008. Unlike the sentimental narratives of the Taiwan New Cinema period, it uses commercial elements such as comedy, music, and romance to enrich the story. Facing serious issues such as historical background, cultural loss, and identity anxiety, it remains optimistic and hopeful. In October 2009, during the international academic seminar "Aesthetics and Civilians: The 2008 'Post-New Cinema' Phenomenon in Taiwan", the concept of "Post-New Taiwan Cinema" was first proposed. The main representatives include *Cape No.7* (Wei Te-Shen, 2008), *Monga* (Doze Niu, 2010), *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (Giddens Ko, 2013). These films focus on the narrative around the blood youth and local culture, using the new film period's local historical narrative perspective to suit the social context[1] while

adopting the Hollywood commercial film lens language to develop a new business model.

This phenomenon aligns with the "collective memory" proposed by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). In Halbwachs's study, the physical, that is, the neurological and encephalological basis of memory was not explored and individual memory is constrained by the social frame of reference [2]. Therefore, all personal memories are retained based on a social framework. In Post-New Cinema, whether the cultural elements symbolizing history and tradition or the public emotions of a certain era are stitched together through the narrative to complete "the social construction of the past" [2], thus forming a new collective memory.

Furthermore, Jan Assmann (1938-2024) divides these collective memories into two forms, representing two essentially different memory frameworks: "communicative memory" and "cultural memory". Among them, communicative memory is also referred to as "intergenerational memory", which represents what the individuals share with their contemporaries[3]. Within this framework, group members possess disparate points of communicative memory, acquiring knowledge contained in memories informally. Therefore, there are no professional staff or experts responsible for the inheritance, and all members of the group possess the same qualifications. Cultural memory is the opposite. "Cultural memory always has its special carriers [3]."In addition, cultural memory focuses on certain focal points in the past, where the past is usually condensed into some symbols for recall. This aligns with the concept of the symbolic expression of traditional culture in Post-New Taiwan Cinema.

2 Collective Memory and Identity In Post-New Cinema

Memory is the ability that enables human beings to form their identity, which facilitates the integration of time and identity. Post-New Cinema chose to focus on the localization characteristics of Taiwanese people. For example, residents of Hengchun Township in *Cape No. 7*, night market vendors in *Night Market Hero*, and reactionary gangs in *Monga* convey the importance of defending their cultural heritage, freedom, equality, and morality, ultimately uniting to form a collective identity.

Taiwan attaches great importance to local culture, and the diversity of local culture and profound historical heritage need to rely on the expression of film art to make people known[4]. In the Post-New Taiwan Cinema, in the process of searching for and protecting cultural memory, different subjects find a sense of belonging to the group in the search for commonality, mutual help, spiritual support and other social communication methods. These subjects, originally entangled in cultural inheritance, have found a community that can accommodate them, thus creating a sense of identity.

Furthermore, communicative memory and cultural memory represent two different modes of memory and recollection, differing in content, form, intermediaries, time structure, participation structure, and other aspects [5]. This

multi-dimensional philosophical theoretical framework is particularly suitable for expressing the concept of collective memory in the Post-New Taiwan Cinema.

2.1 Communicative Memory Provides Daily Space for Identity

The difference between communicative memory and cultural memory is evident at the social level and within the participation structure. The participation of a group in communicative memory is diffuse. It is acknowledged that some individuals possess greater knowledge, while others have less, and the elderly can recall events from a more distant past than the younger generation. However, there are no informal communicative experts in memory. The knowledge conveyed in daily interactions is acquired by participants alongside language and social competence.

Communicative memory is alternatively termed "intergenerational memory". In the context of Post-New Cinema, directors often favor layered narratives, where emotions between two generations are exchanged through letters, traditional food representing personal emotions to create echoes or contrasts, ultimately aiming to evoke shared memories among people and their contemporaries.

Specifically, regarding the temporal dimension, communicative memory originates from a relatively recent past, extending across the interactions of 3-4 generations (approximately 80-100 years). Consider the film *Cape No.7* as an illustrative example, the narrative unfolds across two temporal periods and spatial settings, encompassing a span of over half a century. At one end of time and space are the two elderly individuals who love each other after the conclusion of the Japanese era, while at the other end are two young people of different nationalities entangled in emotional complexities in the new century. Within this context, the letter serves as a medium of human communication across various eras, symbolizing visualization, vitality, and cultural specificity. It represents an informal communication tradition or a form of daily communication, resulting in a divergent cultural participation structure. In other words, within this cross-era cultural exchange, the messenger issuing and receiving information does not follow a unified program. This aspect of folk memory from the Japanese occupation era enables the younger generation to remember and identify with this history through intergenerational communication.

2.2 Cultural Memory is also a Specific Form of Awakening Identity

According to Jan Assmann, "Participation in cultural memory is always highly differentiated. The original task of the poet was to preserve the group memory [3]." If communicative memory is regarded as a flowing "working memory", cultural memory will become a "reference memory"[6]. A fixed reference frame is first manifested in time, and the time corresponding to cultural memory represents the absolute past (the concrete number is expressed as the original time of myth — "3000 years"). Hengchun Township residents in Tainan, in the film *Cape No.7*, are always seeking a balance between "postman" and "national treasure", and are protecting their own part of the local culture. In the vast indigenous communities and the complex integrated local culture, many cultural carriers have been inherited for

many centuries, such as "Yu-kin", "rice wine", "Malasun" and so on. Because in the realm of cultural memory, it always has a Träger responsible for its inheritance. These bearers include shamans, minstrels, griots, priests, teachers, artists, scribes, scholars, and officials, who have mastered the knowledge related to cultural memory. These special cultural memories are protected and inherited by professional indigenous people in the face of the trendy culture, and they have a professional hierarchical structure and a specific carrier of memory.

The specific hierarchical structure and memory carrier are reflected in the medium of transmission for cultural memory. *Night Market Hero* is a collection of local grassroots culture and tourism characteristics with local characteristics through many local cultural symbols. From the night market as a larger carrier, many concrete elements are included: Taiwanese Glove Puppetry, traditional handicraft "Face Threading", traditional food "Four-Miracle Decoction", and local folk music "spring wind", etc. These cultural symbols are undoubtedly unearthed to arouse the cultural identity of the subject, and the emergence of specific cultural identity also helps to forge a unique identity among the indigenous people.

The strengthening of identity is also reflected in their attitude of opposition and integration towards trends and foreign cultures. *Cape No.7* has a prominent representation in this aspect, which includes the plot, the form, and the conflict and symbiosis between multiculturalism. In terms of plot, the dual narrative echoes the difference between reality and the docks of sixty years ago, emphasizing a common Japanese narrative among the people of Taiwan and the influence of half a century of Japanese colonial rule on Taiwan's economy, culture, and ideology. This juxtaposition of historical and contemporary elements reflects the identity memory and identity of the new generation of youth in Taiwan. In form, the most typical example is that musicians in Tainan town choose to integrate with trendy music forms when they encounter them. They sing yu-kin with bass, alongside Japanese and local singers on stage. The musicians' absolute confidence in folk music has contributed to their bold, inclusive, and open-mind approach, not afraid of the impact of foreign pop culture and daring to accommodate diversity, and thus using it to promote the internationalization of local folk music. *Cape No.7* thus warmly wraps a cultural renewal that thinks backwards on the gender and ethnic levels[7].

3 The Social Construction Of Taiwan Post-New Cinema

According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is not only a review and description of past events, but also a reconstruction of the past; that is, our memory of the past is not an objective existence, but a social construction[2]. As an important medium for constructing collective memory, film not only expresses the real thoughts, psychology and emotions of the local people[8], but also highlights the ethnic identity function of folk customs and plays an important role in the production and dissemination of collective memory. The collective memory of Taiwan is mainly carried by new films and post-new films.

3.1 Background of Social Construction: Literary Origin of Post-New Cinema

Taiwan Post-New Cinema is a film wave that originated from Taiwan New Cinema but is distinct from it. From *In Our Time*, the first representative work of Taiwan New Cinema in 1982, to the emergence of the Post-New Cinema wave in 2008, Taiwan's mainstream films gradually underwent a transformation from art to business. So, what makes Taiwanese films so different? The influence of local literature works and mass culture from a postmodern perspective on film cannot be overlooked.

The local culture in Taiwan films and the spiritual connotation of local literature are in the same line. Vernacular literature, with natural scenery as its main meaning, emerged in the mid-nineteenth century[9]. Local literature was first introduced to Taiwan in the 1930s, and the local literary creators began to use the word "local literature" to express local creative ideas. Later, in the 80s, after nearly two decades of accumulation, the local novels of the late 60s contributed a number of excellent spiritual and cultural products that focused on reality and paid attention to the bottom to Taiwan, and also provided valuable materials for the cultural transformation of Taiwan's new films[10]. In the period of Taiwan's new cinema, the film narrates the efforts to construct the subject's identity with images, and interprets the imagination and identity of Taiwan society with "homeland" from the 80s of the 20th century to the new century: homesickness, confusion and wandering, and "local" complex[11]. It was not until the Post-New Cinema era after 2008 that this tone was truly broken.

The transformation from the quest for artistic expression during the New Cinema period to the pursuit of commercial success in the Post-New Cinema era reflects the director's intent to popularize and commercialize the film. In the 21st century, facilitated by widespread consumerism and the pervasive influence of mass media, this genre of travel literature, emphasizing sightseeing, relaxation, pleasure, and personal spiritual cultivation, is favored by the public.

In addition, travel, as a process of time and space transfer, can help people to experience, examine, and reflect on their identities when encountering strangers. Therefore, there are many elements of foreigners and foreign culture in the post-new films. Each of them serves as a place, not only carrying personal feelings of loss and frustration, but more importantly, as an image to recognize society and narrate history and reality, conveying a certain collective memory.

3.2 Reasons for Social Construction: Implementation of Policies and the Impact of Hollywood blockbusters

The creators of Taiwan Post-New Cinema make the subjects in the film fully feel the atmosphere of the destination and further internalize the local cognition into the identity attributes of the actor ", to achieve the purpose of carrying the collective memory of the whole region. The social construction of the Post-New Cinema is also inseparable from the support of policies and the impact of Hollywood on the Taiwan film market.

Since the 1990s, as the economic strength of citizens has improved, the government has increased the promotion of destination travel. Under the cooperation

of policy opening and economic development, travel literature presents a scene of robust development, especially the holding of China Airlines and Evergreen Travel Literature Awards, which has deepened this upsurge. Zheng Henghui pointed out: "In response to the development of the social environment, the concept of leisure gradually matured. Under the promotional mechanism of the media and the reward mechanism of literature awards, travel writing quickly became popular in the literary world." The creation of films cannot be separated from the mainstream literature of the same period; thus, travel literature, as a product of the popular era, has also become the creative soil for many literary films in Taiwan Post-New Cinema. "Breaking away from the normal life track through spatial shifts behavior[8]" has become the established paradigm of many Post-New Cinema narratives.

In the film, individuals come to a foreign land through the form of "travel", feel the cultural memory of the destination, participate in the thoughts of different groups, and finally realize the social construction of the identity of the other person and the reconstruction of their own identity.

In the 1990s, Hollywood dominated the film market of other countries with "high-tech" and the two strategies of "super large investment". European countries and Japan lost significant ground, and the market share of American films was more than 60% to 70%. The Taiwan film industry has no capacity for counterattack. The market share of national films (including Hong Kong films) dropped from 50% in the early 1990s to less than 5% in the late 1990s. The situation was dire.

To revitalize Taiwan's film industry and open up international influence for Taiwan's films, the guidance fund policy was adjusted in 1997 to divide the subsidy projects into "artistic" and "commercial" groups. Since then, the pursuit of a balance between artistic and commercial interests has become a permanent issue in Taiwanese films.

Table 1. The Taipei Theater Box Office Statistics (unit: NT \$) [12]

	Chinese films (Including Hong Kong and Taiwan films)		Hollywood	
	Box Office	Income	Box Office	Income
1992	7,864,255	1,063,114,484	8,091,082	1,130,253,176
1993	5,441,693	875,002,815	10,378,201	1,1690,879,035
1994	3,365,029	511,613,093	9,653,240	1,762,452,492
1995	1,950,319	347,680,676	10,551,325	2,058,967,467
1996	1,299,733	224,702,294	11,909,500	2,506,303,618
1997		150,900,320		3,146,098,840
1998		158,243,266		2,987,472,720

In 2002, Taiwan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) under the name of "special tariff zone", allowing the number of copies of foreign films to be unlimited and lifting the restriction on the number of foreign language films in theaters to show, which completely immersed Taiwan films into the brutal competition in the

international market. In the same year, the Executive Yuan announced the implementation of the "Challenge 2008: National Development Key Plan" to promote the development of Taiwan's cultural industry.

With the combined support of the policy and the brutal competitive environment, the "new blood" such as *Cape No. 7* and *Monga* with both "commercial" and "artistic" features have been nurtured. Taiwan Post-New Cinema, characterized by telling local folk stories and repeatedly succeeding at the box office, seems to announce to the world the positive attitude of Taiwanese youth towards civilian culture in the new era.

Further, Taiwan Post-New Cinema also resembles travel "actors" in travel literature, actively integrating their cultural memory into the international market competition by imitating the "competing" Hollywood audiovisual mode of "packaging", thus completing its "international construction" and finally arriving in the Taiwan market.

4 Conclusion

Starting from the theory of collective memory, there are two forms of memory in the common people aesthetics of the Post-New Cinema, including informal communicative memory with personal emotions, and cultural memory with specific hierarchical structure and memory carrier. Through the forms, intermediaries, time structures, participation structures, and other dimensions of these two forms of memory, this group of new directors in the post-*Cape No.7* era has restored the process of Taiwanese indigenous people finding collective memory and building a sense of belonging and identity. Whether the individual guards or communicates the folk culture in the film or the audience who watches the film receives the culture, the collective memory also realizes the social construction in this process.

The emergence of social construction in Post-New Taiwan cinemas must be inseparable from the transformation of Taiwan's local literary works as internal forces, the impact of the international film market on Taiwan's film industry, and the government's policy adjustments as external forces. Finally, with the joint promotion of various forces, Taiwan Post-New Cinema has successfully completed the transformation from artistic to commercial.

But at the same time, Taiwan Post-New Cinema has been given excessive expectations to participate in the brutal market competition. In the process of the new directors' collective memory, is there a distortion of the original common culture to cater to the international market?

When collective memory enters into artistic creation as a carrier, do the creators truly speak out for the indigenous people who defend the local culture? Or is the collective memory merely being used as a means of consumption for the commodification of movies?

References

1. Ma Zhuoye. Homologous and Heterogeneous: On the Development of Hong Kong New Wave and Taiwan's New Cinema[J]. *Southeast Propagation*,2023(3):40-42.
2. Jan Assmann. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization Writing, Remembrance, and Political imagination*. Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 21.
3. Jan Assmann. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization Writing, Remembrance, and Political imagination*. Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 39.
4. Xia Chulei. Research on Urban Image Shaping and Brand Communication in Taiwan Youth Films[J]. *Southeast Communication*,2023(5):48-49.
5. Jan Assmann, Guan Xiaoqi (translation). *Communication memory and cultural memory* [J]. *Academic Exchange*, 2017 (1): 10-15. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.1000-8284.2017.01.003.
6. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning. *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008: 97-108
7. Zhao Ying. *Love Complex: The Spatial Narrative Turn of Taiwan Films in the New Century*[D]. Sichuan:Sichuan Normal University,2020(in Chinese).
8. Li Mengyang. Folklore meaning world construction.On the New Trend of Film Folklore Creation in Taiwan in Recent Years[J]. *Film Literature*, 2021(12):69-75. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.0495-5692.2021.12.016.
9. Lu Zheng. Research on the Relationship between New Films and Local Literature in Taiwan[J]. *Journal of Qiqihar University (Philosophy and Social Science)*, 2021(7):118-120,127. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.1008-2638.2021.07.028.
10. Chen Duo. When Literature Meets Cinematicity: An Attempt on the Adaptation of Taiwan's New Films to Local Literature[J]. *Journal of Nanjing Xiaozhuang University*,2023,39(2):84-90. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.1009-7902.2023.02.014.
11. Yu Na. The evolution of "local consciousness" in Taiwan films since the 80s of the 20th century[C]. *Proceedings of the Fifth Academic Symposium of the Taiwan Film Commission of the Taiwan and Hong Kong Film Research Association of China*. 2022:329-335.
12. Liang Liang. Policy in the 990s [J]. *Motion Picture Arts*, 2001 (4): 103-106. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.0257-0181.2001.04.031.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

