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THEORIZING AMBIVALENCE IN ANG LEE'S TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA: THE
DISCOURSE OF CHINESE IDENTITY BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Chih-Yun Chiang

August 2010

Advisor: Darrin Hicks

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Abstract

Using ambivalence as a theoretical framework, this study examines Ang Lee's cinematic discourse of Chinese identity, which is co-constructed with the audiences from different cultural communities. I focus on Ang Lee's transnational films *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution* as my two case studies. By analyzing the audience discourse from Taiwan, Mainland China, and overseas Chinese communities, I am able to conceptualize their reactions as communicative moments that co-construct the meaning of the film text. I suggest that ambivalence is a self-representational strategy for the ethnic "Other," who is historically denied access to representation, to contest and subvert the conventional stereotyping and simplification of one's subjectivity. Additionally, this research provides a good example of the familiar cycle of ambivalent emotion toward the West, in the aftermath of postcolonialism. China and Taiwan's long history of engaging in a subordinate relationship with the West enhances the resurgence of ambivalence. Representations become a significant and predominant way to mediate one's bodily experiences, to connect and collaborate with one another, and to form and inform one's cultural identity. My research furthers the theorization of the ways in which new media technologies impact and alter the human interactions between peoples from various cultural, social, and political contexts.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my dissertation committee members. First, I must thank the director of this dissertation, Dr. Darrin Hicks, who gave his generous ideas, time, and unwavering advice during the process of completing my studies. Dr. Hicks has always been a source of inspiration, a great mentor, and a long-term example of creative and critical scholarship for me. Drs. Bernadette M. Calafell and Kate G. Willink provided positive feedback, encouragement, ideas, and support for me. Dr. Bonnie Clark kindly agreed to be my outside chair during her tight summer schedule.

Special thanks to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange. Without the awarded dissertation fellowship for ROC students abroad, I would not be able to complete this study. I also appreciate that the Department of Human Communication Studies, University of Denver, gave me scholarships that supported my coursework, and provided a wonderful environment for a rich academic experience.

I am especially grateful to my mentor Dr. Lily Mendoza from Oakland University, who was the inspiration for this study. I am thankful for her long-term mentoring, friendship, and support, which opened up my interest and a new world of understanding in cultural studies and intercultural scholarship. Thank you all for your impact on my scholarship and life.

In addition to my academic support, I am most grateful to my parents and family who provided nothing but support. I thank my parents Jim Chiang and Wei-Chen Shih for their support while I completed the PhD journey. I am grateful to my aunt Dr. Yuan-Yuan Chiu and my uncle Dr. Hung-dah Chiu who helped me numerous times, offered

unconditional love and believed in me throughout these years while I completed my degree in the United States.

I want to especially thank my American friends and family—Donna Goben and Vern Irwin. I thank Donna for her seven years of unending support, help, and personal friendship. I thank Vern and Russia (the cat) for their kind companionship at the stage of dissertation writing. Finally, my gratitude goes to many friends from Taiwan, the Human Communication Studies Department, and Stella's coffee shop, who have ever given me your hands and words of encouragements. My sincerest appreciation to you all.

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Chapter One—The Disruption of the Global and the Local

Introduction

This study is a critique of the representation of Chinese identity, namely, “Chineseness” in diasporic film director Ang Lee’s internationally acclaimed films *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (*Crouching Tiger* hereafter) and *Lust, Caution*. I focus on audience reception and public discourse surrounding the two films, in the hope of contributing an alternative way of understanding national identity in relation to the politics of cultural representation and to rethink its impact in the age of transnationalism and uncertainty.

In the past two decades, the booming of transnational Asian cinema and Chinese national cinema permeated in global film market raised many critical issues. The problems of the global visibility of a minority subject in transnational films have become a much-debated topic in many academic fields. In particular, the success of transforming Chinese identity into a cross-cultural commodity in the global film market has brought up some important questions in global cultural politics to be considered by transnational film producers worldwide.

Ang Lee (Li An) is one of the most prominent directors to negotiate Hollywood film production successfully. He is the first Oscar winning non-American film director; his international acclaimed movies were described as “Confucianizing Hollywood” (Yeh & Davis, 2005, p. 177). Since *Sense and Sensibility*, Ang Lee has also almost achieved

the status of national hero from the perspective of audiences in Taiwan (Chen, 2000). Nowadays, what really matters “is not so much the ideological content of the film, but whether it will disseminate the name of Taiwan” (Chen, 2000, p. 176). The study of his films has become a “need-to” topic in the academy. For example, when studying cultural migrancy in Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Chan (2005) asks an important question: “What happens when a cultural text travels from one place to another?” (p. 56).

As a Chinese director in diaspora, Ang Lee has always taken on his *burden* to be a film director who contributes to the representation of Chinese culture on big screen. In an interview with the *New York Times* during the public period of the movie *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, Ang Lee notes the reason for the success of the movie was because of the Mandarin culture. He states,

We had escaped from the mainland in the civil war, and we missed that culture. For those of us too young to remember the mainland, we did not really know the old culture. So when we would see it in this movie, we would think, 'Oh, that is China.' When I went back to China to make 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,' I knew nothing about the real China. I had this image in my mind, from movies like this. So I projected these images as my China, the China in my head.

The movie was created by Ang Lee’s imagination of the “great Chinese theme.” After *Crouching Tiger*, his other American film *Brokeback Mountain* and the Chinese film *Lust Caution* continued to generate for him enormous attention in the academy and the public.

The divergent perceptions of Ang Lee’s movies underscore the point that interpretations and reactions to the cultural texts cannot be defined or understood in a single-dimensional vacuum. The change in sensemakings is indeed based on *who* the interpreter is and the specific group to which one is perceived as belonging.

Not only do Ang Lee's works serve as a site of contestation of the meaning of culture and identity, but they also function as a *symbolic bridge* to other Chinese diasporic communities with different nationalities, including myself, as an international scholar who is away from my home country, and emotionally attached to his nostalgic domestic family dramas and English-language films. I was profoundly touched by Ang Lee's speech when receiving the 2007 Best Director Academy Award for *Brokeback Mountain*. On the stage, with tears in his eyes and his voice quivering, Ang Lee humbly said that the award belongs to the people from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. He also wished them "Happy Chinese New Year" in front of millions of American and non-American audiences in both English and Mandarin. Through the acceptance speech, I witnessed that films have a profound social impact and function as a powerful and effective communication medium to stir up nationalism and strengthen/mobilize one's identity, or to put in another way, to hail one's transnational ethnic imagination, in this case my sense of "Chineseness." My overwhelming sentiment resurfaces to echo our own positionality, namely, a self-perceived Chinese person from Taiwan who lives in the U.S.

This point was made even clearer on a Winter evening in 2007, as I was waiting in line to purchase the ticket for Ang Lee's latest film *Lust, Caution*, I was surprised to see that a number of audience members with yellow skin and black hair were scattered throughout the small independent theatre located on Broadway in Denver, a city with a predominantly white population and a very small Chinese population. I have gone to a film several times each month over the past five years and this was the first time I saw so many "Asian-looking" people in the audience. Most of them spoke Mandarin Chinese which is the national language of both Mainland China (People's Republic of China) and

Taiwan. I easily recognized the different accents and could identify whether they were from the mainland or Taiwan.

I saw that movie several times in the same theatre. Each time, there were Asians in the audiences. On one occasion, I was even greeted by strangers with big smiles and, in Mandarin Chinese, “Eh! Ni ie lai kan *Se Jie*?” (Hey! You also came to see *Lust, Caution*?). To my surprise, I was immediately marked as a member of the group of “Chinese” viewers even though we did not know each other and had never met before. I was engaged in a putative “reunion” of the imagined community (Anderson, 1991) at that specific moment. At that moment I had a strange feeling of being marked as a Chinese/Taiwanese, and/or a Chinese/Taiwanese in diaspora; on the one hand, I felt welcome and included; I was identified as a member of the Chinese group by others, it validated my sense of belonging and strengthened my bonding to such a cultural group. It also appeared to me that it was a situation in which an ethnic minority, in this case “Chinese” in diaspora, is (re)*unified* to share a *collective* cultural pride in a successful *Chinese* film in the West.

On the other hand, I found myself uneasy since I was “mistakenly” identified as being from Mainland China rather than from Taiwan. It appeared to me that the possibilities of being “other Asian members” were automatically excluded in that “context of contingency” (Bhabha, 1996). Through exchanging smiling and enthusiastic discussions among Chinese fellow audiences inside and outside the theatre, we immediately identified and connected with each other as being from the *same* national group.

My feelings of uneasiness stemmed from my hesitation to respond to the passionate call for co-ethnic diasporic solidarity (Ang, 2001a). I had never (and will not) identified myself as a person from Mainland China in my everyday life in the U.S., yet simultaneously I was ambivalently pleased to be “mistaken” as a member of a Chinese group, sharing a moment of collective cultural pride. In Taiwan today, the unresolved severe political tensions with the mainland have influenced some people in Taiwan to deny their Chinese cultural root and refuse to identify themselves as “communist Chinese.” They foster a strong hostility toward the nation in order to solidify their indigenous Taiwanese consciousness. Therefore, such a *reunion* scene might never happen in Taiwan.

My experience in that movie theatre was one of a profound sense of ambivalence concerning my own subjectivity and identity. I also realized that imagining myself to be a member of the Chinese diaspora was a way of aligning myself with “a powerful deterritorialized community nationally bound together by an abstract sense of racial sameness and an equally abstract sense of civilizational pride” (Ang, 2001b, p. 57). Yet, I was not relieved from the uneasiness involved in the specific condition of being a Taiwanese/Chinese diaspora in that context. I have always subliminally engaged in the equivocal ambivalence of defining my own national identity.

Combined with the tremendous amount of public discourse surrounding Ang Lee and his works, I am driven to ask: What do Ang Lee’s transnational films mean to the audiences? Namely, how might his films be interpreted differently from various cultural groups of audiences within different national and historical conditions? Indeed, many attempts have been made to address the influences of his cultural background that shape

his works. In this study, instead of asking “Are Ang Lee and his films Taiwanese? Chinese? American? Taiwanese American? Chinese American?” (Lu, 1997, p. 18), I wonder: how does “Chinese” become an equivocal notion that no longer guarantees an ethnic solidarity under different social conditionings? To expand on this question, in what ways are the subjectivities of *Chinese* and *Taiwanese* problematic and ambivalent not only in his films but also in one’s everyday bodily experiences? How does one as an audience member negotiate one’s identity and subjectivity through the discourse of his films?

Rather than constructing his films under the framework of dualism, namely, either as a “cultural sellout,” or as a product of cosmopolitanism, I am proposing a more adequate and non-monolithic way to theorize the politics of national identity in transnational cinema. I want to provide a more provocative framework by employing the notion of ambivalence to expand the discussions on the politics of national identity represented in transnational cultural productions in an era of globalization.

The theoretical questions I propose in this project are: How does the notion of ambivalence serve as a more adequate framework to theorize the politics of national identity in transnational film productions in a global context? How does film function as a discursive site for negotiating and reproducing one’s *national identity* and *subjectivity*? How is national identity constructed to have meaning in different contexts, and who gets to actively quest and bring the certain knowledge into being, and for what purpose. More specifically, can the films of Ang Lee be *simultaneously* liberatory and limiting? If so, in what ways and under what conditioning does the cinematic discourse of Ang Lee serve a emancipatory function and in what ways is it limiting? The polarized reactions from

different groups of audiences present an interesting puzzle to me. By studying these questions, I will be able to engage in a systematic analysis of the essential conflict in interpreting Ang Lee's films among different cultural groups in relation to the construction of Chinese identity and further discuss how it contributes to the audience member's sense of being a *world citizen* in an age of transnationalism.

Film producers are noted to share not only the classical cinematic paradigm, but also more general paradigms of narrative and representation with their audiences (Saxton, 1986). The discourse of film not only has a narrative function but also a social function. We should understand films as a cultural collaboration because they involve not only "crew, cast, and studio, but also all of us who consume the film" (Saxton, 1986, p. 20). A cultural text cannot have a complete or closed meaning by itself, but rather is always open to interpretation. Given such, aside from film texts I will incorporate the public discourse about the films from three audience communities into my analysis. They include first, the Chinese community that includes China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and second, the community of Chinese diasporas. In doing so, I am able to unpack the politics of national identity such as *Chineseness* interrogated in the cinematic discourse and the effects of such representational practices with regard to a context of globalization.

I focus on Ang Lee's two--*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *Lust, Caution*. The justification for the focus of my research lies in the fact that both films represent a distinct yet controversial subject on the issues of Chinese identity and culture. Since the Internet has become an increasingly larger factor in new communication technologies that help build national identity and facilitate nationalism (Appadurai, 1996; Duara, 1993; Georgiou, 2006; Shome & Hedge, 2002; Ang, 2001, among others), my research

materials will include multiple sources from the Internet websites. They include Internet bulletin boards, interviews, and media coverage. I will examine the Chinese-language websites that are particularly popular among Taiwanese, Chinese, and Chinese diasporas. Using ambivalence as my theoretical framework, my examination focus on the discursive formation of “Chineseness” in these films, which brings the concept of ambivalence to the forefront to theorize the way in which the discourse of Ang Lee’s films succeeds in hailing Chinese coming from different countries of origin into a common transnational imaginary community.

After the foregoing introduction, the first chapter I map out a critical review of the debate of the margins struggling to come into representation within a context of globalization. I discuss the construction of culture and identity historically and politically, explore how the processes of globalization and transnationalism impact the theorization of them, and further examine complexities of the relationship between globalization and the visibility of minority subjects in cultural production in a postcolonial and transnational context. I employ postcolonial criticism to inform my discussion of the ambivalent discourse of transnational Chineseness. I then focus the theoretical debate of transnational cultural productions, specifically transnational Chinese films and New Chinese cinema in relation to various forms of global capitalism that shapes the politics of representing nationhood and national identity. In doing so, I extend the postcolonial framework that historically and predominantly emphasizes the European. The discussion maps out the theoretical context and understanding of the study.

To preview the subsequent chapters, chapter two discusses the social-political and historical context of Taiwan, China and the United States to unpack the specific

conditions in which cultural identity has operated. To establish my subsequent analysis, I offer a critical justification of my choices of the two films by analyzing their popularity in both Eastern and Western film markets.

I then focus on the conceptual framework of ambivalence in the third chapter by identifying, examining, and then applying four aspects of ambivalence as a concept from a postcolonial perspective for my analysis. In chapter four, I engage a textual analysis of *Crouching Tiger*, incorporate Ang Lee's autobiography and published interviews, and examine the discourse of audiences.

Chapter five offers a critique of *Lust, Caution* and its receptions, following the same layout of chapter four. Ang Lee's films function as a mediated engagement for the audiences to reaffirm, re-search, and re-engage their cultural roots. However, the films simultaneously reassign and problematize a static meaning of national identity and cosmopolitan identity.

The final chapter begins by connecting research questions to the theory of ambivalence to untangle the political and historical moments in shaping a specific version of Chinese identity that has been performed in the discourse of *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution*. I then discuss the implications of applications of the theory of ambivalence in studying culture and communication as a whole.

In the following sections, I offer a detailed critical examination of the theoretical debate of the margins struggling to come into representation in a post- and transnational context. I first discuss the nature of globalization as a neo-colonizing process, and the visibility of minority subjects in the transnational media. I then focus on the impact of transnational media, in this case, Ang Lee's films on national identity and communal

belonging. In doing so, I hope to expand and continue the scholarly dialogue on theorizing identity as a site of struggle in post-colonial and transnational globality in the study of culture and communication.

Representation and Cultural Identity in the Age of Uncertainty

The increased complexity between the local and the global, as well as its effect on the idea of nationhood and the “national identity” is one of the most distinctive features in contemporary postcolonial and transnational contexts. Through identity one sees the complex interplay between cultural and historical contexts and one’s subjectivity.

Cultural identities are never static; rather, they constantly change, without the limitations of special boundaries. Under the circumstances, one needs to understand the complexities of globalization that intersect with the constructions of national identity of the locals. The local communities simultaneously undergo transformation of themselves to respond to and engage in transnationalism—negotiating, constructing, and reinventing their own subjectivities. The ideas of “pluralism” and “cosmopolitanism,” as liberal as it might sound, indeed create the ethnic differences—the ethnic absolutism that could further lead to neo-racism and oppression.

Moving away from the traditional identity paradigm, critical interrogation such as postcolonial theory has opened up discussions on how the locals engage with the global under the complexity of globalization and transnationalism. The impact of transnational forces, such as the rapid circulation of images, goods, information, and movements of diasporic populations, demonstrates the limitation of the nation-state framework.

Scholars suggest that globalization is a form of neo-colonialism (Young, 2001; Aschroft, 2001, among others). Grounded in the discourse of modernity, the idea of Eurocentric

modernism operates within the issue of globalization. The most recent global power is indeed Americanism. The circulation of power is operated within the global mass culture, global cultural interchanges between the local and the global (Aschroft, 2001). To illustrate, theorists believe that “postcolonialism” only makes sense within specific historical contexts; that is, there are no essential “postcolonial cultures,” there are only postcolonial “moments,” where various discourses, representations, and tactics cohere to create a systematic argument (Clifford, 2005; Hall, 1996).

In the context of globalization as a continuation of Western neo-colonial economic domination, cultural productions such as literature, films, and music demonstrate the resistance to the imperial power since the subjects themselves exhibit agency by appropriating and mimicking the dominant cultural forms. New cultural politics have arisen following the phenomena of globalization. Under Western humanism, the production of racial or national identity should be viewed as a historical legacy that interplays with reductive cultural or national sameness and difference.

Clifford (2000) asserts, “Where ‘culture and place’ are reasserted politically in the new system, it is increasingly in nostalgic, commodified forms” (p. 101). It seems inevitable for voices that had been marginalized to adopt hegemonic traditions as a way to somehow free them from its power; to become individuals, and not just the collective ‘others’ the discourse has labeled them. Clifford (2000) argues:

Human beings become reflexive agents capable of effective action only when they are sustained ‘in place’ through social and historical connections and disconnections... this is the work of culture ...taking up discourses of the present and the past (p. 96).

For modern and postmodern cultural producers, the “cultural traditions” and “native identity” oftentimes could be a reproduction of sets of particularisms which acquire national mythology. Colonial domination resulted in European imperial imaginary unity, with the aim to distinguish the colonial power from the colonized “Other” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995; Fanon, 1963; Gilroy, 2000).

Subjected to European colonialism, nationalists invented the model “cultural belonging” which could only be artificial and problematic, only reflecting imperial constitution such as language, customs, and tradition. While discussing the national culture, Fanon (1969) argues when confronting colonial culture and facing their internal void, native subjects who have adopted the colonizer’s culture and become part of the body of European culture, could only look for “exoticism” in order to resist and recreate their own culture and subjectivity in the process of being liberated. In other words, through the medium of culture, “going native” in order to establish their own subjectivity and language meant to become the dirty nigger that white men essentialized before, and to become unrecognizable. It was colonialism that placed native subjects on the battlegrounds.

The native/local intellectuals, in the process of searching their culture, highly valued the traditions, customs, and looks of their own people. Culture was made to be the native intellectuals’ passive resistance to colonial rules. Culture never merely equates to simplification; on the contrary, it is opposed to the natives if it is considered as translucidity of custom (Fanon, 1963, p. 224). Take native artists for example; the danger of nationalism lies in that even though they tend to deny the influence of foreign culture on renaming their cultural traditions, they are not aware that emerging national thoughts

within the colonial culture have radically changed the native people. The process of searching culture and national consciousness is questionable and insufficient, because the revival of history and tradition doesn't take into account the present national reality.

Due to the constant tensions between the colonial rulers and the native subjects, the passive resistance is reflected on their cultural productions. That is, when natives become cultural producers, their works become differentiated and marked as particularism, confined to a "national imagination" while struggling for liberation. On the whole, the cultural expressions reassured the colonial power since they are locked in a rigid form of representation that is at the heart of colonial culture (Fanon, 1963, p. 242). Thus, Fanon (1963) asserts, one must free oneself not by reproducing European paradigms or denials, but by joining the native people "in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called in question." Namely, one has to recognize the zone of occult instability and indeterminacy. The defense of communal interests often mobilizes the fantasy of a static culture, as well as a frozen identity. Nationalism can therefore be both liberating and oppressive. Cultural nationalism of "roots," accordingly, operates within the false consciousness-the racial ideology. Simply put, Appiah points out that the very category of race and cultural nationalism is actually the product of European colonialism that subjects the racialized natives to an imaginary identity category, contrasting sharply with the white civilized "Other."

Westernization versus Nativism:

The Politics of Recognition Between the “Global” and the “Local”

In the Cold War, the U.S.-led modernization project provided an international framework for development, and the building of a capitalist nation-state system through various international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank (the World Bank). Globalization, according to Berger (2004), bears the commitment under U.S. leadership to support the market economy and national development internationally. The U.S.-sponsored liberal-capitalist versions of national development has recruited various allies with the efforts at anti-communist reconstruction, beginning in the Western Europe and Japan (Berger, 2004). Promoting a specific version of modernity that simultaneously excluded other forms of modernity, globalization is a highly selective and unequal process.

Following the Cold War, globalization changed global order and had profound impacts in Asia-Pacific and the rest of the world. East Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore, the context for my research, have especially been going through important changes economically, socially and culturally. What globalization has brought to the rest of the world is an effective spread of capitalist transformation and the nation-state system. “Asian Renaissance¹,” is a term coined by Berger (2004) as he provocatively examines the extremely complex political reformation of East Asia. “The battle for Asia,” described by Berger, is aimed at re-adjusting their

¹ Asian financial crisis was from 1997 to 1998, revealing the weakness of the Westernized, namely Americanized, international financial system due to some incompatibility of Eastern and Western social, cultural and political values. The new Confucian ethic and the spirit of Asian capitalism have risen during that time (Berger, 2004).

economic and political structure under the U.S.-led globalization project after the Cold War. Berger posits that the major change for Asia from decolonization to globalization is the adoption of the processes of capitalist transformation (socialist challenges to capitalism) after 1945.

Ibrahim's book *Asian Renaissance* (1996) contends that the development of "Pan-Asian consciousness" was a form of Asian regionalism which sought to provide an instrumental tool during the Asian crisis in 1998. The neo-Confucian philosophy was employed not only to distinguish the quintessential differences between the "East" and the "West," but also to serve as a tool from decolonialization of Asia to globalization, that is, to Westernize Asia, but to modernize Asia in the 'Asian Way' (Naisbitt, 1995). The emergence of the synthesized East and West has played a crucial role in identity consciousness since then. I would therefore argue that one of the profound impacts of globalization is to affirm and reaffirm a sense of Pan-Asian identity (and/or pan-Chinese identity), and that is, the construction of a "Greater Chinese identity" has formed. Before engaging a further discussion of the ways in which modernity and globalization inextricably and invariably influence media representation of minority ethnic identity, referred to in this project as the "Chineseness," it is important to understand the cultural study of globalization that emphasizes the relationship of mass consumptions, new modern communication technologies, and globalization.

The global configuration of mass culture as a characteristic of globalization is through electronic communication and information technology such as advertisements, the Internet, films, and television. Central to today's global interactions, especially "the cultural traffic," as Appadurai calls it, is the tension of a cultural homogenization and

cultural heterogenization. On the one hand, a homogenizing form of cultural representation, i.e., the attempt to recognize and absorb differences within the larger, overarching framework of what is fundamentally an American perception of the world has emerged. Global mass culture “is dominated by television and by film, and by the image, imaginary, and styles of mass advertising” (Hall, 1997, p. 27), the most ubiquitous form of which is characteristically Western, specifically American.

Appadurai, however, in his book *Modernity at Large* reminds us of the ambivalent nature of the process of globalization, arguing that it itself is not only based on deeply historically uneven development but also a *localizing* process. Namely, the process of globalization should not only be considered as an implication of the hegemonic Americanized process, but instead, the relationship between the local and the global is far more complex, and encompasses contradictions. It is necessary to have a deeper study of language, histories based on geopolitical boundaries, that is, to have a firm grasp on the ways in which different societies appropriate different forms of materials of modernities, various cultural practices of modernities (such as Confucianism, Islamic, among others). The modernization process could be varied, depending on the local political trajectories.

The paradox of globalization involves the politics of nostalgia (Appadurai, 1996). In the constantly changing postmodern world, searching for the past in the present became the central theme of late capitalism. The politics of memory, namely, selectively remembering what has been lost is the commodifying desire under the peculiar postmodern commodity sensibility. Through modern media, various image production and reception, a peculiar version of transnational cultural construction of imagination and

the imaginary has transformed into a new global order and permeated the world system. Westerners, i.e. Americans, as Appadurai (1996) notes, are not always living in the present since through media technology they can easily stumble into various nostalgic cultural productions such as fashion, arts, cinema, foods, etc.

In “advanced” cultural capitalist societies usually tied to global forces, their Others are regulated as temporary spaces, where the modernity becomes a normalized modality of their present (Appadurai, 1996). Imagination therefore is a crucial factor in postelectronic and postindustrial world. Through various sources of media technologies and mass mediated events, people transform their imagination into their everyday discourse of imagined selves, the Others, and worlds. In other words, the global and the modern become flip-side of the same coin; media becomes a space to transform the politics of imagination into postindustrial cultural productions that usually lend a sense of nostalgia for the people to act upon.

Diasporas and Its Challenge of the Nation-State Boundary

The issues of diaspora, dispersion, and displacement complicate how we study the concept of “culture” and “identity.” The mobility of bodies and changes challenge the boundaries of identities. The theoretical, political, and intellectual debates on the issues of transnationalism, global disjunctures (Behad, 2005), and diasporic differences in relation to new world (dis-) order have arisen in many field of studies. Clifford’s theory of “traveling cultures” takes a further step by studying postcolonial travelers, accounting for the complex traveling systems.

As discussed above, postcolonial theory has been primarily concerned with the development of national identity and cultural identity through various cultural

productions such as literature, films, aesthetics, cultural artifacts, etc (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002). Postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Hall, Gilroy, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin have sharply critiqued the traditional essentialized identity paradigm and destabilized the binary construction of colonized and colonizer. They suggest that the processes of globalization and neocolonialism complicate identity formations. The marginalized peoples who live “in-betweeness” not only passively received the imposed European colonial culture, but syncretized it as their unique culture.

Diaspora studies deconstruct the boundaries of nation-state, reconstructing a non-Western model of identity formation. The diasporic “in-betweeness” moves beyond the binary construction of colonized and colonizer, center and periphery, serving as a model of resisting the hegemony of Western modernization. Diasporas, as a product of transnationalism, are grounded in systems of inequalities. They evoke the specific trauma of forced displacement, usually resulting from specific and violent histories of economic, political and cultural interactions, such as the history of African slavery (Gilroy, 1993; Clifford, 1997). Thus, diasporic studies are generally concerned with the idea of cultural dislocation, examining the effect of the practices of displacement in relation to a new constitution of cultural meanings (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2002; Ashcroft et al, 1998). In other words, diaspora is one of the effects of imperial dominance, the displacements of people through slavery, indenture, and settlement. It not only involves geographical dispersal but also the question “identity, memory, and home which such displacement produces” (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 218).

To illustrate, central to the theoretical debates on transnational cultural productions is the “politics of recognition” (Taylor, 1992); minority subjects need to

assimilate into the dominant forms of representation. The “particularities” people choose to identify and connect collectively with functions as political solidarity. Sovereign-state and the distinctive model of national belonging are formed and accentuated. Marginalized, in order to survive, they mimic and appropriate the colonizer’s discourse, meanwhile developing a distinctive discursive practice, as Ashcroft calls “the post-colonial transformation” to resist the imperial power. In other words, through the brutal alienating process, marginalized place has transformed into a space of creative energy. In essence, marginalized colonized peoples have their own behaviors that vary from predominate Western modernism, which requires serious attention. And only through reconstructing the Third World’s own description without depending on the Western hegemonic structure can they truly liberate themselves from that always already subjected identity. The decentering of Eurocentrism needs to “resist the opposition of the Third World as logically and culturally posterior (or should that be anterior?) to the possibilities and positivities of the First World because that opposition consigns the Third World to an irretrievable anachronism” (Dayal, 1996, p. 119).

Such cultural politics in transnational cultural productions represent a new “tactic” of intervention of the global power drawn from the West. By appropriating the cultural capital and means from the Western dominant cultural discourse, the locals are able to speak and further redeploy their local situations and markets. In light of this, the line between the global culture and the local culture is blurred because of the relations of “interpenetration” through the transcultural process (Ashcroft, 2001). Through the consumption of Western commodities, goods, advertising, and cultural productions such as films, music and other forms of mass culture, local identities constantly construct and

reconstruct through the process of interaction and appropriation; the constant shifting identity construction, as Ashcroft would call it, is a local response to global effects. On the other hand, various differences from the locals also contribute to the global culture. Ashcroft (2001) notes “by appropriating strategies of representation, as well as strategies of organization, communication and social change, through access to global systems, local communities and marginal interest groups can both empower themselves and influence those global systems” (p. 221). In other words, rather than seeing that the “locals” only passively receive the global dominance, the fluid interactions of popular and mass culture themselves represent agency from the locals.

Essentially, new cultural politics have arisen following the phenomena of globalization. It is argued that within the context of globalization as an extension of neocolonial condition, cultural productions demonstrate the resistance to the imperial power since the subjects themselves exhibit agency by appropriating and mimicking the dominant cultural forms. And further, due to the latest wave of globalization characterized by the logic of finance capitals and international division of labor by critical scholars, transnationalism should be considered as part and parcel of the process (Shih, 2005). The moment of transnationalism is a more scattered space where cultures and meanings across multiple spatialities and temporalities move beyond the binary opposition of the local and the global. Within transnational space, cultural hybridities occur in national, local and global spaces.

Communication Research on Postcolonialism, Globalization and Diaspora

Within the area of culture and communication, the binary oppositions that both produce and inform these divisions, such as First/Third worlds, White North/Black South,

colonizer/colonized, and center/periphery, have been challenged by postcolonial theory, and by contemporary international and critical intercultural communication scholars such as Chitty (2005); Chuang (2000); Chang (2003); Mendoza (2002); Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka (2002; 2009); Shome & Hedge (2002; 2002), Shome (1999; 2003; 2006; 2006) just to name a few. They point out that globalization is a fully international system of cultural exchange through which the imperial power is strategically maintained and expanded. It operates within the network of power relations that is deeply embedded in the political, cultural and economic legacy of Western imperialism. Through the emergence of global economic forces, categorical identity and difference such as ethnicity and nationality are proliferate, (re) produced, and assembled by various communicative technological means, invoking national myth. Identity is constantly negotiated to serve political ends.

Critical intercultural communication scholar Shome (1999; 2003) has been stressing the importance of the politics of location and space that closely intersect with power inequality in the age of transnationalism. Various communicative practices and cultural phenomena are intertwined in each other, that is, scholars will benefit from recognizing other forms of modernity that impact our everyday life and cultural practices. The critical vein of postcolonial theory opens up the diverse theorization on nation and national identity that are once subjected to European colonialism. In the current article on interdisciplinary research and globalization, Shome (2006) sharply posits the urgent need for transnational inter-disciplinary practices to reconsider the long-term (U.S.-centered) research orientations in communication studies, especially within the context of an asymmetrical globalization. It is significant, she contends, for scholars who work on

critical global and postcolonial studies to employ transnational literacy, a term coined by Spivak, in order to truly acquire “cultural maps, relations, and politics of cultures outside of western modernities/geographies. In other words, to decenter the dominant “postcolonial” vocabulary grounded in American academy, one can begin to see the unseen collisions and collusions, diverse yet intertwined histories, cultures, and relations in conditions of globalization.

In a similar vein, Mendoza (2002; 2005; 2009) for a long time has been problematizing the “theoretical hegemony” (p. 233) on cultural identity and politics and their implications for cross-cultural communication. According to her, it is no longer sufficient to examine communication practices within a general abstract theorizing. But rather, she advocates a perspective that “demands the grounding of all theoretical analyses within the specificities of a given historical moment” (Mendoza, 2005, p, 23). She asserts that one needs to “learn to develop the ability to read and analyze dynamically across contexts (the context of power, in particular) in ways that pay attention to what might be very different meanings, functions, and significations served by very similar identity invocations” (p. 23). It is in light of this thought that I seek to gain a full understanding of ambivalent discourse on identity, in particular Chineseness, in Ang Lee’s transnational *Crouching Tiger*, and *Lust, Caution*, and its implications for the audiences by taking into serious consideration the historical, political and cultural contexts that help shape them.

To reiterate, the dialectic of the local and the global has influenced the idea of nationhood, cultural practices and the construction of cultural identity within local communities. The intersecting discourses of the global and the local reflect that the

boundaries of cultural identity and nationhood are temporal and spatial, constantly subject to ceaseless changes. In order to be “recognized” and visible, the locals constantly transform and reinvent themselves to engage in transnationality. The articulation of the global imaginary therefore is transformed into representations and cultural narratives, such as transnational film productions, as I will define below. In this sense, the local engagements in the transnationality can be liberating and empowering since they can provide tools to form different cultural formations and identities. Under transnationalism, as I will discuss in the following sections, one needs to re-examine the “routes” of displaced population, such as diasporas. It reforms the relations between the local and the global that undergo a reciprocal process, reshaping one another. Through systems of representation, fragmentations of history and different temporalities are sutured together.

Overall in the above section, I show the dialectic of globalization and localization that complicates the issue of identity construction. It is essential to consider the global in a local context. The resistance and acceptance of “global ideology” leads to a more unified world culture yet simultaneously it produces a fragmented cultural hybridity of a local culture. This international flow of products and capital has resulted in the proliferation of national or regional identity. Identity, in the global context, consolidates national identity that is oftentimes conceived as a means to resist or re-search the roots for the locals. The traditional identity paradigm constructed by the Western modern-state has become problematic. In this research, under a conditioning of diaspora specifically, the construction of Taiwanese and Chinese identity no longer become fixed categories, and constantly need to be contested and negotiated. Along with the end of the binary opposition of East and West asymmetries, intercultural relationships, diaspora, the third

cultural building, and the growing interconnectedness and interdependence among cultures and nations become important subjects to study in the field of culture and communication.

Global Visuality in Transnational Cultural Production: On Chineseness as a Representational Problem

In previous sections, I have tried to show above that the dialectic relationship between globalization and localization moves beyond a binary construction, and the ways in which it transforms a new logic of cultural productions. Postcolonial theory has provided a sharp thesis on representing minority subjects in different cultural productions such as literature, films, and music. Instead of subjects being absorbed into colonizers' language, they can demonstrate resistance to the imperial power since the subjects themselves exhibit agency by appropriating and mimicking the dominant cultural forms. In the following sections, I am primarily concerned with the political and cultural dimensions of "Chineseness" under a transnational flow of capitals. I attempt to look at the global position of Chinese modernity, Asian values within a specific historical context.

Scholars such as Rey Chow (*On Chineseness, Writing Diaspora*), Ing Ang (*On Not speaking Chineseness*), Allen Chun (*Fuck Chineseness*), Shu-Mei Shih (*Minor Transnationalism*), Aihwa Ong (*Flexible Citizenship*) and others raised the question of Chinese ethnic identity by problematizing and deconstructing the notion of Chinese identity and its representation, as it usually constructed as cultural essentialism- the "sinocentrism." Chineseness is no longer a notion that can only be considered under a

nation-state mechanism; but instead discourse situated within specific cultural and political context.

As discussed previously, postcolonial theory primarily emphasizes the process of decolonization of the countries and the peoples from previous European colonies. However, the theories that have been appropriated by some critics actually fell into a static binary construction of the hegemonic West verses an oppressed East, or the rhetoric of Orientalism versus Occidentalism (Lu, 2001; Shih, 2005; 2007; Lim, 2006). Such reactions present themselves as a critique of postcolonial theory established in the Western context, transformed into a form of Chinese nationalism. Such criticism against Western postcolonialism results in the creation of another academic discourse—Chinese national studies—that advocates establishing an inward reexamination of Chinese traditions and values that have been commodified within the academy (Lu, 2001).

In responding to the globalization and the domination of Western modernity, a pan-Asian value, specifically Confucianism, was revived. Academic work ranges from historians Prasenjit Duara's discussion on questioning narrative history of modern China, Arief Dirlik's studies on China's alternative modernity, and anthropologist Aihwa Ong's studies on Chinese diasporas. Studies on Asian modernity in the age of globalization extend to "overseas Chinese communities, the Chinese diaspora, and Asian countries with a history of Chinese influence" (Lu, 2001, p. 41). The rampant research and vibrant discussions bring the contested construction, historically, culturally, and politically, of "Asian identity" and the "Chinese-speaking world" (Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong) into the foreground of theoretical debates for global awareness.

Scholars provocatively contest the inadequacy of postcoloniality that is primarily based on modern world history of European colonialism. However, such a theoretical standpoint cannot be applied universally to various individuals and societies in diverse contexts. Ong (1999), for example, in a sharp critique, points out that the danger of postcolonial theory is in assuming all racial, ethnic, and cultural oppressions are the result of Western colonialisms. Such totalized “speaking” for the postcolonial situations has become academic discourse that is produced by scholars who are based in the West, without taking into account the scholarship of non-Western countries. Hall also warns us such a theoretical approach universalizes oppressions of race, ethnic and gender. Thus we need to move beyond an analysis that is based on colonial legacies and colonial nostalgia (Ong, 1999), and to understand these countries’ global political economy with the West and how they are to be transformed.

Technically speaking, China does not fit into the postcolonial condition as it has never been territorially occupied and colonized by European countries. However, most Asian countries, such as Mainland China and other East Asian tiger countries--Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea--influenced by traditional Confucianism values are undoubtedly subjected to Western forces economically and politically, given the pervasiveness of global capitalist structure. The close economic interdependence between Asia and the West within such capitalist world system, “modern” Asia is deeply embedded in a “multicultural” and “hybrid” space where a character of cosmopolitan is translated into cultural production, consumption and people’s everyday social praxis. Such changes in material, economic and cultural conditions, as many Chinese scholars contend, needs to be taken into a serious account when discussing Asian countries

undergoing a construction of *alternative modernity*. Ong writes her analysis of Asian modernity; when addressing Asian tiger countries, she argues, “they would not consider their own current engagements with global capitalism or metropolitan powers as postcolonial but seek rather to emphasize and claim emergent power, equality, and mutual respect on the global stage” (quoted from Lu, 2001, p. 63).

Thus, it is essential to reconsider the subjectivity of China, or the Chinese-speaking world by extension. One needs to ask “how and to what extent is China postmodern, and postcolonial”? In order to have a more holistic understanding of the politics of cultural production under the age of global capitalism, we need to examine the aesthetic features of Chinese cultural productions in relation to the mode of production within such a socioeconomic context. Questions that have been raised by critics are how does Chinese modernity and its condition fit into the theoretical framework of postcoloniality? (Li & Liu, 1995), and the question of *agency* in Chinese modernity, such as “Will Asia perpetually remain the passive object of representation in the West’s global lens? (Lu, 2001), and if China can say no, can China make movies (Berry, 2000)? Postcolonial theory could appear as another totalizing framework that generalizes the “Third Worlds” situation and theory. Thus, postcolonial criticism needs to account for geographical and historical specificity.

Besides Chinese living in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore and Indonesia, the overseas Chinese community plays a significant role in constructing political and social discourse of “Chineseness,” and a distinctive Chinese modernity. Chinese diasporic intellectuals have provocatively challenged “ethnic oneness,” sinicization of Chinese identity from a diasporic perspective.

Central to the theoretical claim is to problematize the realm of cultural authenticity utilized as a potentially oppressive political mechanism. Minority cultural workers, and specifically Chinese diasporas in this case, participate differently in post-national and/or the so-called nomadic context. In her research on Chinese transnationality, Ong (1999) proposes an alternative theorization of the Chinese diaspora as “flexible citizenship.” She sees that the changing ways of providing financial services, new markets, and labor under the globalization regimes have a few implications. For example, one is the development of a new kind of social organization that requires deterritorialized and highly mobilized intercultural communication. Due to the segmented international division of labor, the new transnational professionals “evolved new, distinctive lifestyles grounded in high mobility (both spatial and in terms of careers), new patterns of urban residence, and new kinds of social interaction defined by a consumerist ethic (Ong & Nonini, 1997, p. 11). “Third cultures” therefore have emerged out of the new social rearrangements.

The notion of “transnationality” informed by Ong mainly draws a distinction between the European postcolonialism and Chinese transnationalism. Thus, rather than concentrating on a relationship of colonizer and colonized, Chinese transnationality connotes a more flexible relationship between the Asian Pacific region and Western capitalism. It is specifically concerned with cultural logics of states and global capitalism. Chinese transnationality, as she (1999) remarks, more specifically involves “the practices and imagination of elite Chinese subjects, and the varied responses of Southeast Asian states to capital and mobility” (p. 4). For example, by the 1980s, 87 percent of Chinese immigrants who live in Southern California were from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia. They are predominantly well-educated professionals who live upper-

middle class lives, receive an elite Western education, work in high-tech companies, etc. Such transnational practices embody more scattered, flexible, less-structured border crossing activities and transnational practices shaped by business networks, economic migration, and state-capital relations within a global economic context. The relatively special-independent lifestyles transcend political boundaries of nation-states; new identities emerged out of the dispersion among Chinese diasporas.

In discussing “diasporic consciousness” raised by Chinese diasporic intellectuals, Chow (1993) argues that displacement constitutes an ever-shifting identity. She posits that “whenever the oppressed, the native, the subaltern, and so forth are used to represent the point of ‘authenticity’ for our critical discourse, they become at the same time the place of myth-making and an escape from the impure nature of political realities” (p. 44). Sharply critiquing Chinese nationalist intellectuals’ assertions that the authenticity of Chineseness actually becomes “the assured means to authority and power,” Chow points out that the native intellectuals are “robbing the terms of oppression of their critical and oppositional import, and thus depriving the oppressed of even the vocabulary of protest and rightful demand” (p. 13). In this perspective, she clearly points out the limited effect that the natives want to achieve. Chow instead suggests that diasporas are “tactics of intervention” (p. 15) because they embody the in-betweenness by speaking already “inauthentic” language which has already proven the interruption of hegemonic discourse. Through migration and traveling, for Chinese diasporas, transnationalization destabilizes the reductive inscription of Chineseness.

Likewise, while challenging the limits of the Chinese diasporic paradigm, Ing Ang (2001) observes that it is liberating to develop an imagined Chinese diaspora subject

in the environment where one feels symbolically excluded. The transnationalization of the imagination creates a sense of belonging. Chinese diasporas function as discursive community in which people establish commonality of those who belong or are excluded. Diasporic solidarity, in this sense, is developed through common ground, that is, it is the historical mistreatments such as anti-Chinese racism that drive Chinese diasporas to stick together.

To illustrate, authenticity becomes a political mechanism that regulates Chineseness into an essentialized entity. A preconceived notion of “true” and “false,” “right” or “wrong” image of a “native’s” identity that is operated under such mechanism reduces the multiplicity and complexity of “Chineseness” as a given object and being ethnicized within a cultural logic of multiculturalism. But at the same time, the construction of a distinctive racial paradigm such as “being authentic Chinese” reinforces ethnic absolutism and can be problematic. The resulting diasporic hybridity challenges the assumption of purity.

Since 1990s, an influx of Western popular culture into Chinese societies had greatly influenced Chinese media culture. Western (mainly the US) music, art, cinema, fashion, television, the Internet, visual and audio, and new telecommunication technologies not only created a realm of “global village” as McLuhan envisions, weakening the grip of the modern concept of nation-state, but also opens up a whole new space of third culture, hybridity, divergence, and fragmentation in a trans- and post-national milieu. Diaspora, traveling, and migration complicates and problematizes “China” itself through interrelated Chinese communities such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and large overseas diasporic communities. Given that the new market for world economy

is comprised of a significant number of Chinese-speaking people and societies, it is important to study popular culture and mass media and the ways in which they become a source of ethnic and national identification. Through media analysis, communication and cultural studies, we are able to understand the societies that are partly mediated by commodities, images, and new telecommunication. In this project, I argue that by situating the Chinese subject in a larger historical and global context, can one see the ways in which complexities of relationships of political, socioeconomic, and cultural dimensions are at play in constructing “Chinese subject” and humanism through cultural productions, cultural discourse, and mass media. Thus, instead of taking cultural productions as isolated subjects to interpret and analyze, I attempt to examine the *interaction* and dialectic relationship between globalization and “Chineseness,” and between the texts and the consumptions.

Transnational Cinema and the representation of national identity

The notion “transnational cinema” has been used to mean filmmakers across genres as a global system, including the global circulation of financial capital, commodities, distribution and consumption of cinematic productions. According to Ezra & Bowden (2006), transnational cinema comprises “both globalization-in cinematic terms, Hollywood’s domination of world film markets-and the counterhegemonic responses of filmmakers from former colonial and Third World countries” (p. 1). Transnational cinema problematizes the dichotomy of Western, mainly U.S. Hollywood films, and non-western “Third World” cinema. The majority of film industries in the world are influenced by U.S. cinema, especially commercial films, such as the most prominent India’s Bollywood and Nigeria’s Nollywood. The line between “western” and

non-western, national and global, although still implemented in popular imagination, begins to dissolve. Given the increasing transnational practices of collaboration, distribution, as well as site of international cinematic exhibition, the traditional r definition of “world cinema” and “Third cinema”² has been destabilized³.

The proliferation of national and international film festivals enhances the significance of international recognition and visibility of films across national and regional communities. The establishment of film festivals from Europe functions as a space for cross-cultural exchange and understanding of non-Western films (Ezra & Bowden, 2006). Thus the emphasis on cultural specificity, ethnic and national distinctiveness has been central to the site of international presentation. In other words, film festivals have become a site of cosmopolitanism, providing an outlet for international exhibition of cinematic productions of national and ethnic particularity. In the milieu of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, forms of cultural nationalism are inextricably linked with politics of self-representation. Indeed, it is true that transnational cinema arises “in the interstices between the local and the global” (p. 4).

Transnational visibility, a phrase used by Lu (1997; 2001) has been a significant area to study, examining diverse manifestations of image production, distribution, reception and consumption across national and regional borders. Historically,

² Third world cinema as a theoretical concept was used to describe films shaped by the impact of European imperialism and colonialism, and a discursive site of resistance to them. Scholars such as Roy Armes, Hamid Naifcy, Rey Chow, and Wimal Dissanayake, among others, contribute significantly to the discussion of politics of representation and political function such as resistance to imperial oppression in Third Cinema.

³ Lim & Dennison (2006) in their introduction of *Remapping world cinema* points out that “world cinema” historically refers to non-Western cultural films created in the Western world. The label “world” however enables various aspects of politics (such as the politics of self-exotization), ideologies, and a web of power to situate the term within an age of globalization. The questions about authorship/auteurship, readership, as well as “site of exhibition” complicate the meaning of “world cinema.”

transnational films in Chinese film studies cover films from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and Chinese diasporic communities, examining the nature of “Chinese national cinema in the age of global capitalism (Zhang, 2004; Lu, 1997; Berry, 2003, among others). Since the 1980s, increasing popularity of Chinese films brought a “Chinese film fever” into international film festivals that drew significant attention to the nature of Chinese national films. Lu (1997) refers to Chinese national films with foreign capitals and cross-national distribution as transnational Chinese cinemas.⁴

The world of film production embraces a bonanza of new talent from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. International audiences are not only beguiled by Mainland dramas by artists like Chen Kaige (director of *Yellow Earth*, *Farewell My Concubine*) and Zang Yimou (director of *Raise the Red Lantern*, *To Live*, *Hero*) but also impressed by the Taiwanese domestic comedies by Ang Lee (director of *Wedding Banquet*, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). Taiwanese New Cinema directors including Edward Yang (*Yi Yi*, *Mahjong*), Hou Hsiao-hsien (*A City of Sadness*, *Three Times*), Tsai Ming-Liang (*I Don't Want To Sleep Alone*, *What Time Is It Over There?*), to name only a few, resonate with a cinematic indigenous movement in Taiwan (Chen, 1998). Moreover, international audiences are thrilled by Hong Kong action films with Jackie Chan and Chow Yun Fat, two of the most famous action stars in the world, as well as Wong Kar-Wei's nostalgic melodrama *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*. Undoubtedly, Chinese films have shown wide appeal across audiences of every class.

⁴ Lu (1997) observes them at the following four levels: first is the split of China into separate yet connected terrains the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong after 1949; second, the globalization of the production, distribution, and consumption within the context of transnational capitalism in the 1990s; third, a cross-examination of the politics of self-representation of Chinese identity in the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese diaspora; finally, a reviewing of history of Chinese national cinemas (p. 4).

The international film market has seen this trend for about two decades now ever since Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth*, and Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* sensational debuts at the Berlin Film festival in 1988 (Lim, 2006; Corliss, Richard, Harbison & George, 1995). Compared to Hong Kong genre films (the third largest film mark after the U.S. and India), Taiwanese and Chinese directors need to submit their works to international film festivals to increase visibility due to the shrinking domestic market experienced in the late 1980s (Lim, 2006). Only through such avenues could Chinese and Taiwanese films increase the possibility of collaboration, gain screening rights, and secure future financial investment. Given such, different kinds of politics and power were involved in the cross-cultural public screening in film festivals. Participating in Western film festivals provides financial and cultural capital to obtain and "legitimate" the "values" of the native works. On the other hand, Chinese and Taiwanese governments also garner financial support for local film directors who have won awards at international film festivals (Lim, 2006; Wong, 1995).

Indeed, it seemed to foreshadow the emergence of what is deemed by some film critics as a pristine and passionate intelligence in cinema from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. At the heart of the controversy around the aesthetics of cinematic production in contemporary Chinese cinema is the question of nationhood and the contested notion of ethnicity. Most criticism toward transnational Chinese films, especially the Fifth Generation films, seems to be constructed under the framework of First/Third World dualism. The presupposition is that Chinese cinema is undoubtedly categorized as Third-World cinema by some Chinese native critics. For example, Lu (1997) provides a systematic examination of the discursive formation of Chinese

nationhood and ethnicity in Zhang Yimou's films (including *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Ju Dou*, *To Live*, *The Story of Qiu Ju*) in the context of postcolonialism. Zhang Yimou's cinematic art has been the focus of much critical discussion since the growing field of cultural studies in China in the 1990s. He notes the following in particular:

The international popularity of Zhang's films conveniently thematizes a set of interrelated main concerns of current cultural debates in China: the fate of Chinese national cinema in the condition of transnational capital, "cultural critique" and "cultural exhibitionism" in Fifth Generation cinema, Third World cinema and Third World criticism, Orientalism, and postcolonialism in Chinese style (p. 105).

Zhang Yijing (1997; 2004), for another example, critiques the "cultural exhibitionism" of Chinese national cinema that brings its greatest success for foreign capital and satisfies Western audiences' curiosity of the already exotic mystified Chinese national culture. For some Chinese native cultural critics, Chinese cinema is presumed to dominate the production and distribution of the global film market and has always been associated with distortion and misrepresentation of a Third World cultural nation. In discussing "globalization" and "transnational cinema," such criticism that turns on Edward Said's notion of Orientalism is not uncommon.

After achieving fame and success from the international film market and international film festivals, these films are charged with being cultural sellouts of the Chinese nation in the international film market (Lu, 1997; Zhang, 1997). New Chinese Cinema as Chow (1995) argues is "a cinema created around the very contradictions of culture and commodity, of "(self-) expression value and (self-) exhibition value, in a modern capitalist economy that depends on export to sustain internal growth..." (p. 171). Specifically, to be visible in the global film market is the main characteristic of global

mass culture. It is a strategy for these Chinese filmmakers to operate based on the logic of the global commodity in order to exist and find renewal in the international film market. This is due to the challenge of a smaller domestic film market, the Chinese film censorship system and the changes in China's film industry. How to make the national or local culture "able to be seen" in the transcultural market is the crucial and inevitable onus on any would-be successful Chinese filmmaker. This is no easy task. Indeed, the films directed by the Fifth Generation Chinese filmmakers such as Zhang Yimou and Chinese diasporic director Ang Lee have been criticized by many nativist critics as "distortions of the real China" (Xu, 1997). The sting of such critique is that in order to serve the Hollywood film industry and make their films successful as global commodities, such noted filmmakers are prone to sacrificing more "authentic" representation of Chinese culture and tend to interpret Chinese tradition in Western terms, thereby internalizing Western values and Western practices of symbolic manipulation (Lu, 1997; Lee, 2003).

It is in this light that Lu (1997) concludes that "New Chinese Cinema, especially Zhang's film art, is paradigmatic of the fate and predicament of Third World culture in our present time" (p. 105). The reinvention of Chinese national cinema in Zhang's aesthetics raised the important question for both Chinese critics and all cultural workers about the way "Third World" filmmakers strategically locate themselves in the new transnational market. The popularity of such transnational national cinema appears to lie in the fact that international audiences regard them as authentic depictions of the Chinese nation and history. Chow (1995) likewise argues that Zhang Yimou is indulging in a self-exhibition that is complicit with the voyeuristic tendency of orientalism, noting that "in

its self-subalternizing, self-exoticizing visual gestures, the Oriental's orientalism is first and foremost a demonstration—the display of a tactic” (p. 170). The “authentic Chinese history” itself has already been subjected to an essentialising notion of nation and correct meaning of tradition defined by the critics. It may be said then that in general, most of the cultural critics invoke Western postcolonial theory to examine the relations of culture and power between the First and Third World cinemas.

Critics of the Chinese cinemas tend to interpret the Fifth Generation of filmmakers' work as propagators of a certain version of Chinese culture. In effect, they see the directors' collective mission as the initiation of a complete attack on Chinese society and politics--a romanticized mission perceived to do disservice to the representing of the “real” China with its repression of Chinese people. According to Chow (1995), the ethnicity –or element of “Chineseness” – of Chen Kaige's films seem to signify cross-cultural commodity fetishism, a production of value between cultures, in other words cultural commodities hybridized and globalized primarily for Western consumption. In such critiques, there appears to be the assumption of an authentic cultural text, the possibility of an undistorted representation of real Chinese culture, if only these Chinese producers take heed.

It is in this vein that for another example, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger* was criticized by Taiwanese and Chinese intellectuals as having its success turn on its ability to satisfy the craving for the exotic from Western audiences. The improbable martial art skills, the romances between the two pairs of lovers, the actors' and actresses' accents all serve as exotic signifiers, which attract international audiences (Lu, 2005). Critics claim that the Mandarin spoken with an accent by most actors and actresses further exoticizes

the film in order to make it more appealing than English (Guo, 2001; Fong, 2001). They similarly point out that Ang Lee marks cultural differences and combines Eastern philosophy with a westernized plot masquerading as Chinese “original culture” in order to make it succeed in the box office with its “original culture” in the international film market. Critics argue that this film becomes a classic Oriental fantasy by producing a martial arts drama set in the Qing dynasty through Orientalist aesthetics. Shih (2007) argues that the trilogy is an example of how a Third World artist employs his flexible subject positions- national and minority subject-to successfully creates Sinophone articulations in his filmic representation.

On the other hand, there are those who offer different insights about this film. K-F Lee, for example, explores how the concept of “home and country” -“*jiang hu*”- in this film relates complexly to Ang Lee’s Chinese diaspora identity. She argues that, far from being a simple question of literal accuracy of representation, what Ang Lee adds are new layers of meaning of *wu xia* to Chinese culture that effectively provide an alternative meaning to “Chineseness” (Lee, 2003). Based on the *wuxia* film genre, the cultural imagining of China serves as a site to cultivate Chinese audiences’ nostalgia, as well as constitute and project their cultural identity on the global stage. Contemporary transnational Chinese filmmakers (such as Ang Lee) are criticized by many Chinese viewers for the way their works are said to distort the “authentically Chinese” (Zhang, 1997, p. 96). Predominantly, critics pick on Ang Lee’s imaginary China in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, as failing to ground its representation in the “concrete China” and both film critics and filmmakers viewed their role as social critics, presenting their films as political critiques of Chinese society and government (Lu, 1997).

Ang Lee and his films have been mainly categorized under Chinese National Cinema, Transnational Chinese cinema, and sometimes world cinema. His early Mandarin language films (father knows best trilogy) were however considered part of New Taiwan Cinema. The politics of naming itself presents political tensions between Taiwan and Mainland China. I argue that the politics (and difficulties) of “categorizing” Ang Lee, his position and subjectivity, and his works destabilize and problematize a normalized genre of “transitional Chinese cinemas,” and further demonstrate instability and indeterminacy of national and ethnic identity within the context of transnationalism. I attempt not to “assign” a totalizing definition to Ang Lee’s cinemas without a serious interrogation of the processes by which it has been conceptualized and discussed. In the academy, Mainland China has for a long time presented a “cultural matrix” (Nornes & Yeh, 1995) of all Chinese people; Chinese-language films from Taiwan and Hong Kong are relatively overlooked under “a specious definition of ‘Chinese’ identical with the Peoples Republic of China.” Thus, in this study I intent to account for the politics of “naming” and their embedded contradictions and tensions, and to understand “the situatedness of each discourse in its specific context, including that of our own” (Lim, 2006, p. 1). The politics of naming brings into play the power structures inherent within the discourse of “transnational Chinese cinema,” “Chinese national cinema,” as well as “Taiwanese new cinema.”

In this chapter, I reviewed the debate on globalization, transnationalism and the concept of diaspora to situate this study on examining the politics of national identity in Ang Lee’s filmic discourse and their receptions in a macro context. In order to discuss the global process and further understand the ways in which the locals engage in, and

interrupt the hegemonic Western construction of the worldview, in chapter two, I contextualize the research by historicizing the construction of Chinese and Taiwanese identity. I will trace the political and historical context of Taiwan and China that is closely connected to the U.S., to gain further insight into the ways in which one's national identity operates and is constructed and contested.

The struggle between Chinese and Taiwanese identity and consciousness, according to scholars, has been the fundamental cause of the conflict within Taiwan and the Taiwan-Strait conflict (Yu & Kwan, 2008). National identity is defined by a collective national consciousness. However, establishing collective national consciousness and further national identity and reality is “manifested in the processes of Sinicization and Taiwanization” (Yu & Kwan, 2008, p. 33). The political tension between China and Taiwan derived from the Chinese Civil War in 1927. The leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party Chiang Kai-Shek retreated to Taiwan after being defeated by Mao Zedong, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party. Two fundamentally different political structures and rulerships have divided Chinese people from the mainland China and Taiwan since then. By examining the ways in which the Taiwanese and Chinese identity and consciousness is being constructed within particular historic and socio-political moments, I hope to provide an alternative view to rethink the politics of representing national identity in the transnational films of Ang Lee.

Chapter Two—Speaking Beyond Postcoloniality: The Historical Construction of Chinese and Taiwanese Identity

In this chapter I attempt to understand the ways in which “Chineseness” and “Taiwaneseness” have been historically, culturally and socially conceptualized and how their ideological effects have been translated into people’s imagination, desire, and everyday practices. I aim to answer the questions and cultural aspects and national influences of Ang Lee’s nuanced filmic discourse on “Chinese identity”--the ways in which diasporic imagination and cultural memory have shaped the identity construction in film productions. I suggest his films should be considered beyond a categorical paradigm.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, *Crouching Tiger* broke the box office record and was rated the most popular foreign-language film in the North American film market. It earned over US \$200 million at the box office, and also set up the record for a foreign-language film in the Western European film market. It also occupied a leading position in East and Southeast Asia (Wu & Chan, 2007). Likewise, *Lust, Caution* was a big winner of numerous awards in Asian and Western film festivals, including the best film of the Golden Lion Awards (Venice), the best film of the Golden Horse Awards (Taiwan), and the Best Asian Film of the Hong Kong Film Awards, and received various nominations by the British Academy Awards and the Golden Globe Awards. It earned over US \$5 million in Mainland China within the first four days of

showing in theaters⁵, and attracted over a million audience members in the South Korean market within the first week of debuting⁶. The film also remained on the entertainment news headlines for a few weeks after its debut. However, unlike *Crouching Tiger's* global popularity, the representation of Chinese culture and history in *Lust, Caution* resulted in a more polarized and extreme reactions toward the film from Chinese and Western audiences. Throughout various Chinese-language film websites and online discussion boards, Ang Lee's movies, particularly his three most important internationally acclaimed movies *Crouching Tiger, Brokeback Mountain*, and *Lust, Caution* have become the most frequently discussed topics.

While there is enormous glorification of Ang Lee as a legend in the history of Chinese cinema, controversy also exists among Chinese audiences and the academics. Coupled with international warm recognition, political pressure in China put Ang Lee and his films in an ambivalent position. International viewers acknowledge Ang Lee as an image producer spreading the icon of Chinese culture to the international screen. Specifically targeting *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Lust Caution*, Chinese audiences by contrast regard it as a national betrayal in "distorting" Chinese history. A group of Mainland Chinese diasporic scholars made the serious charge that Ang Lee distorted the history of WWII in *Lust, Caution*. They refer to Ang Lee as an "immoral literatus" due to the explicit sex scenes and the glorification of a historical race traitor during the Chinese-Japanese War portrayed in this film. The polarized receptions reveal that these two films evoke intensively mixed emotions of excitement, anger, glory and

⁵ *China Times*, November 7, 2007.

⁶ *Broadcasting Corporation of China*, November 30, 2007.

shame among Chinese audiences, and how the Western audiences interpret them as Chinese culture that is shown on the big screen.

By far the most politically controversial debate in history centered around Ang Lee's latest epic film *Lust Caution*. After *Crouching Tiger* won the Best Foreign Language film of The Academy Awards in 2000, *Lust Caution* was submitted as Taiwan's official entry competing for the 2007 Best Foreign Language Film award. However, it was not eligible because "Taiwan did not prove that creative talent of that country exercised artistic control of the film" (Galloway, 2007). The Academy argues that there were not enough Taiwanese in the production team. *Lust Caution* also won the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival in 2007, yet its production country was changed from China-USA to USA-China-Taiwan, China on the Venice Film Festival official schedule after complaints from Ang Lee's office. Such controversies regarding the representation of Ang Lee and his transnational films are not uncommon. His films have been advertised and categorized discursively as Chinese films, Taiwanese diasporic films, New Taiwan Films, Chinese transnational films, and so forth. Yet, a lack of clear answers to such questions about the "naming," and "identifying labels" not only complicates the nature of national and ethnic identity, but also destabilizes a monolithic understanding of "Chineseness" and further raises a whole discussion of and the negotiation of identification and the politics of transnational cultural production in an age of globalization.

Before further discussion of the historical account of the construction of Chinese and Taiwanese identity, I want to explicate the politics of Taiwanese national cinema,

namely Taiwan New Cinema, as it will provide an understanding for the “categorization” of Ang Lee’s films. Ang Lee’s early Mandarin film productions were considered part of New Taiwan Cinema, as a new wave of native cinema movement in Taiwan in the post 1980s (Kellner, 1998). Since the late 1980s, Taiwanese directors have emerged in a new wave of representing Taiwanese history, culture, society and identity in a series of films by Ang Lee, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Yang De-chang (Edward Young), and Tsai Ming-liang. Employing a social realism approach, their new wave films developed distinctive themes and concerns about Taiwanese local problems and social issues, and were later called “Taiwanese national films” by critics. The cinematic techniques used by these directors also focus on presenting realistic social problems in contemporary Taiwanese society, probing a sense of social realism, and representing political and cultural interventions in the local society of Taiwan. Taiwan New Cinema has emerged and is well-recognized as an important development of world cinema. Yet while most directors emphasize the representation of “native” identity and culture, the films of Ang Lee deeply embody a sense of cosmopolitanism, producing films for global market and producing Chinese and Taiwanese culture and identity from a destabilized, uncertain, ambiguous, and ambivalent approach.

Naming and/or defining a cultural identity like “Taiwanese identity” requires consideration and discussion of historical disjuncture and discontinuity and the cultural syncretism resulting from colonialism and imposition of foreign cultures. A collective cultural identity for people in Taiwan is difficult to grasp and identify due to the fragmentation of identity inextricably formed by many cultural Others- principally

Chinese, American, and Japanese. A display of cultural syncretism, a term used by Paul Gilroy, emerges in everyday life, cultural imagination and practices for Taiwanese people. Gilroy (1994) proposes that “uncontaminated” cultural purities do not exist when it comes to the social functions of cultural identity in people’s everyday encounters. In a postcolonial and transnational society like Taiwan, what does it mean to “represent” Taiwan as a person, such as Ang Lee, who holds a passport from that nation? How does a person like Ang Lee negotiate the constructed Chinese and Taiwanese national and transnational subjectivities as an increasingly cosmopolitan sense of self arises in a global postmodern milieu? How does the negotiation of identity and subjectivity function as infinite intercultural processes for individuals who seek a sense of their positions as an individual and as a member of a “culture” (or multiple cultures) in which they live? In what ways do cultural memory, agency, nostalgia, self-reflexivity, and the employment of a diasporic imagination interplay in constructing a collective subject position for Chinese living in the United States? How are the “past” and “memory” deconstructed and reconstructed and translated into cultural productions and how do they continue to shape the “present” and “future” lives they live?

The notion of Taiwan New Cinema however raises a new question of the politics of representation of “native culture” and the construction of “national” films in a global context. Critical communication scholar Chen Kuan-hsing, for example, problematizes the notion of Taiwan New Cinema by suggesting it reveals a politics of global nativism⁷ that was integrated into the logic of consumption such as transnational corporations.

⁷ It refers to “a nativism predicated upon the commodification of the complicit dialect between nationalism and transnationalism” (Chen, 2006).

Constructing Taiwan's national cinema is the result of a response to an opening film industry where filmmakers had more freedom after the Japanese colonial occupation and the authoritarian policy under Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government (Kuomintang or KMT), and the political and cultural process of Americanization at the end of Cold War. Struggling to define a "self-identity" and present a narrative history of Taiwan, the native filmmakers convey a struggle over a collective and/or popular memory and imagination of the island in their works. Ang Lee's early mandarin language productions are usually categorized as Taiwan New Cinema because they participate in the new wave of producing films that aim to create a Taiwanese public sphere for political intervention and social transformation. Since Taiwan has a distinct sociopolitical path from PRC, the practices of articulation and identification of people in Taiwan, closely intersecting with its unique historical context, require a detailed unfolding. Here, it is important to note that historical narratives on Taiwanese and Chinese identity function as a way to naturalize, justify, immortalize, and at times manipulate the "past" and "memory" to the political constructions of nationality and ethnicity in the present day. Thus, the historical "facts" I refer to in this chapter should be considered as a process of unfolding narratives (Bhabha, 1990; Brown, 2004).

Identity Crisis and the Struggle Over Memory

Taiwan is located in Southeast Asia, comprising one major island and the three other smaller islets of Penghu, Matsu, and Kinmen. There were only a few Han immigrants living in Taiwan during the Ming Dynasty in the sixteen century. Taiwan was formally claimed as a Chinese territory in the Ming Dynasty. During that time period, the

main population was comprised of aboriginal ethnic groups (Chen, 2006). It was later colonized by the Dutch for 30 years in the seventeenth century, and then by Japan from 1895 to the end of World War Two in 1945, due to the cession as a result of the Sino-Japanese War. Lots of Han Chinese immigrants came from Fujian, the southern part of China, in response to “the economic and political disintegration of the Ming dynasty and the Dutch colonists’ demands for a larger labor force” (Chen, 2006, p. 326). Before Han Chinese immigrants arrived, the island was comprised of various aboriginal tribes. The emphasis on the predominant Han identity later became a contentious political issue and requires room for negotiating “Taiwanese identity” for the people of Taiwan.

Through the classification of ethnicity such as China’s historical narrative on Han identity, the majority ethnic group in China is referred to as the Han ethnicity. Han as a dominant ethnic group considered themselves as a single group embodying Confucian civilization (Brown, 2004). There was no unified ethnic group in Taiwan before Japanese colonial rule in 1895 (Chang, 2000). During Japanese colonial rule, a unified sense of a “Pan-Taiwanese identity” which was limited to Han was formed as a resistance to European colonialism and Japanese occupation and as political solidarity, yet this idea finally resulted in a failed formation of a nation-building.

During the period of Japanese colonialism, the Japanese government separated Taiwan from Chinese political and cultural policy. Under Japanese colonial practices, they developed a different education system and policy that forced the Taiwanese people to assimilate into Japanese culture (Chen, 2006; Peng, 2000; Ching, 2001). The Japanese government also utilized identity classification of peoples in Taiwan, mainly

distinguishing Aborigines who lived in the high central mountains as “barbarians” from those who adopted Han culture and lived in the western plain as “civilized Aborigines” (Brown, 2004). However, the most important distinction is the categorizing of peoples in Taiwan into differences, Japanese and non-Japanese, with the aim of transforming them into loyal subjects of the Japanese empire.

Not until 1945 did Taiwan officially return to her “motherland” – China, after half of a century of Japanese colonial control following a 1943 agreement among Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Chiang Kai-shek. The Chinese Civil War divided the government into two parties: Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party (formally Kuomintang, KMT) and Mao Zedong’s Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The Nationalist Party was defeated and then fled to Taiwan to continue the government of the Republic of China (ROC) with its capital in Taipei, while the Chinese Communist Party founded the People’s Republic of China in Beijing. Taiwan was returned to Chinese rule with KMT. However, tensions arose between “Mainlander” Chinese and “Taiwanese” (mainly earlier Han immigrants in Taiwan and Aborigines as I will discuss below). KMT declared martial law that suspended the democratization of Taiwan by enforcing rigorous censorship of language and all forms of cultural productions under the Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of Communist Rebellion. During this period, cultural productions such as cinema and literature remained only to serve the purpose of propaganda, to form a unified national Han identity, that is, KMT as part of greater China, the real Chinese culture, with the mission to “retaking the mainland” and defeating the Mao’s communist region. For example, the popular music during the time was considered

transformation of part of KMT's nation-building project in Taiwan (Shin & Ho, 2009). Chiang Kai-shek once claimed "the Japanese Empire will collapse as they keep singing popular songs while Chinese will be singing anti-Japanese songs" (Hwang, 1981, quoted in Shin & Ho, 2009). Such political representation of popular music embodies an ambitious idea of a renaissance of "a greater cultural China".

A unified Han identity, or to put it in another way, a politics of "authentic cultural China" was formed under KMT. The policy of KMT aimed to form an identity politics of "authentic Chinese" in order to fight against the Chinese Communist party. During the martial law period, people of Taiwan could only speak Mandarin Chinese as the national language of the Republic of China (ROC); the educational system also only employed a nationalist idea for promoting this idea of anti-Chinese communism and anti-Japanese imperialism. At the same time, Chiang Kai-shek aimed to develop ROC into an industrialized and democratic country. The martial law had a great impact on the economic development as the Nationalist government developed Taiwan into an export-oriented economy which was known as the "Taiwan miracle."

Further, after World War Two, during the Cold War period, the U.S.-led globalization and democratic project increased pressure and built alliances to fight against communism. Even though Taiwan was not under the US Army Military Government like some other East Asian countries such as South Korea, the US and ROC signed the Mutual Security Agreement. Taiwan was later subsumed to America's political agenda of forming a neo-colonial structure, that is, a global capitalist system. By receiving US financial and military support, Taiwan became part of the capitalist system

and developed a rather wealthy and stable economy through an exploitation of its laborers⁸. Now a neocolonial economic structure, Taiwan was able to become one of the more rapidly-developed industrial societies with economic transformation in East Asia from the 1960s through the early 1980s, along with Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea.

As discussed above, identity politics involves the process of decolonization after the Japanese occupation and was based on the project of nation-building, that is, to naturalize and promote a Chinese national identity. However, Chiang's authoritarian ruling policy increased tensions between "the mainlanders" and Taiwanese (Han immigrants before 1949). The tensions occurred between the 228 (February 28) incident in 1947 and subsequently a period of time known as "white terror"⁹ until mid-1950. Political dissidents were suppressed, often harshly. "Differences" among the early Han immigrant actually were not eliminated because of the pan-Chinese idea, but instead a form of suppression. That is, a binary construction of identity as "native Taiwanese" and "Mainlander Chinese" gradually formed. Official record shows that Han people were divided into Taiwanese regional identity, *ben-sheng-ren* (literally translated as people from within Taiwan province) in contrast with *wai-sheng-ren* (literally translated as people from outside the province, namely from mainland China). In other words, kinship was one of the main criteria for such categorization. "Mainlanders" were the closer

⁸ The manifestations of Taiwan as a "subempire" are through its capital expansion and employment of cheap laborers in mainland China and Southeast Asia in the 1980s. Taiwan also imported foreign labor (from Thailand, Indonesian, or Vietnam, for example) (Chen, 2000).

⁹ White terror was deeply rooted in an anti-communist ideology; political discussions were highly scrutinized, censored, and restricted.

connection to Chinese culture, language and ancestry and were the dominant political power but were excluded from small and medium-sized businesses that were mainly operated by Taiwanese (Brown, 2004; Chang, 2000; Chen, 2000).

Legacies of the Cold War: Americanization as Desire and Internationalization of Taiwan

Not until 1987 did president Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son, lift the martial law. Further political liberation has happened since then. During the martial law period, resistance and protest against the Nationalist government was suppressed yet there was an underground advocacy of Taiwan "independence." Political opposition to the Nationalist party formed by the Democratic Progressive Party still reproduced an ideological structure of Taiwan-centric "Taiwanese consciousness" and Han-*min-nan*-chauvisism that aimed to make a distinction from Chiang's Chinese nationalism (Chen, 2000).

Following the political linearization was the openness and freedom of the public sphere including cinemas, journalism, popular culture, academic publications, and museum exhibits, etc. Through cultural productions a new era was born that probed social criticism of the political and economic tensions of Taiwan including the issues of national and ethnic identity. Taiwanese popular music such as folk music had much more freedom to express social and political criticism, reflecting people's everyday life and social situations in Taiwan. Taiwan New Cinema also presented itself as part of the nativist movement that emerged in an aesthetic philosophy of "social realism" to seek to capture the uniqueness of the mundane life of people in Taiwan, the impact of the

urbanization and industrialization of the island, rural stories and ambiances usually based on native literature (Kellner, 1998).

Both Japanese colonialism and the Cold War had significant effects on the construction of a national and ethnic identity in Taiwan. In the post-Cold War period, the US military has been stationed in Taiwan to “protect” Taiwan and help fight against Mao’s communist (PRC) since 1950. Chiang Kai-shek’s political strategy of democratization of Taiwan therefore facilitated a basic national policy and a normalized common sense among the masses, that is, “Fighting against Communists” (Chen, 2000). An anti-Communist sentiment began to be entrenched as a Chinese nationalism; “Red Chinese” became a common enemy. On the other hand, Americanism became part of a structural feeling that has infiltrated with people’s everyday cultural practices, becoming part of a popular national consciousness. The politics of nationalist identity during and after Chiang’s government, Chen (2000; 2006) posits that Americanization became deeply infiltrated into the national-popular imaginary and consciousness due to the process of democratization. The massive import of American popular culture such as jazz and pop music, Hollywood films, satellite TV, popular sitcoms, MTV, food, restaurants, fashion, arts, American English education, etc. American cultural productions were dominant imports, penetrating public discussions from locals and functioning symbolically as internationalization and globalization. This open market to American mass culture productions brought such “Americanism” into consumption, a capitalist lifestyle. “Americanism” functioned discursively as a symbol of desire, democracy, freedom, wealth, and as a model for the people of Taiwan. Moreover, Americanization

and the dependency on the American democracy model and systems have been deeply rooted and pervasive due to the majority of social elites and intellectuals in Taiwan which had advanced degrees or work experience in the US. The record of Taiwan's Education Ministry shows that 80-90 percent of people pursued advanced degrees in the US before 1980, which created a dominant population of foreign students during that time (Chen, Chien & Hwang, 2009). This phenomenon illustrates the ideology of anti-communism and pro-Americanism that was incorporated into people's imagination through various institutions and practices politically and culturally. The aim of constructing Taiwan as a bourgeoisie state has brought Americanism as a desire and cultural imagination deeply rooted in Taiwan's national consciousness and cultural subjectivity since post-Cold War (Chen, 2000).

It was precisely because of such global strategies of building East Asian countries as "political alliances" against communism that the processes of decolonization manifested differently from other former European colonies. With an ambition of creating a global economic structure in the East and Southeast Asia, America has always been the closest "alliance" and "consultant" of Taiwan. Decolonialization happened in a very different way, compared to other postcolonial countries that are mostly English ex-colonies. As Chen (2001) puts it, the long-term impact of colonialism and imperialism depends on a complex process of "negotiation and articulation between its political and economic power and local histories" (p. 83). Even after the US ended its diplomatic relation with ROC in 1978, presented as the most severe crisis of the US-Taiwan relations at that historical moment, "Americanism" was still inscribed in the cultural

memory and public imaginary; namely, “America” was never outside of the island, not physically but abstractly (Chen, 2001). Another obvious example would be the Club 51 established in 1994. Club 51’s motto was “Rooted in Taiwan with America in the Heart,” seeking protection from the US after a series of Taiwan-Strait crises¹⁰, the severe political tension between PRC and ROC (Shih, 2007).

Taiwanese Nationalism and the Struggle for a National Identity

Paradox appeared in the process of state-building, and the desire for a cultural and national particularity of Taiwan. Ironically, while the reinvention of nation-building in Taiwan was imbued with the politics of pan-Chineseness and pro-Americanism as mentioned previously, local desire for constructing a unique Taiwanese identity has simultaneously arisen. I would argue that rebuilding national and cultural identity was a *project* and never static and the identity construction being articulated to the people of Taiwan has been a disordered process. This process and struggle over identity signifies the long-lasting political effects of imperialism, colonialism, and the neocolonial structure of global capitalism that impact this island.

The “traditional culture” of Taiwan was rooted in mainland China before Mao’s communist occupation. Thus, the “mainlanders” (*wai-sheng-ren*) and their generations embodied a “lost home” nostalgic sentiment, the “home” mainly referring to mainland China. “Being Chinese” became a complex symbolic system, involving an infiltrated sense of anti-communism and Confucianism, yet was simultaneously a process of

¹⁰ In 1996, 51 intellectuals and businessmen with American experience from Club 51 formed “An Open Letter to the Social Elite of Taiwan” to demand American intervention of the Taiwan Strait crisis resulted from a series threat of missile attack from PRC from 1995 to 1996. The letter advocated that Taiwan to join the 51st state of the USA.

Americanization. Each piece of the fragmentation of national identity for the people of Taiwan presents a fragmented local historical trajectory.

It is important to note that the attempt to create a renaissance of “Asian values” in the East Asian region involved a politics of pan-Asianism, namely, Confucianism, which also symbolizes nationalists’ struggle over decolonization after World War Two. “The Great Asianism” started with Sun Yat-sen to unite East Asian countries invaded by Japanese imperialism and Western cultural imperialism. This idea transformed itself into a way of national self-determination and empowerment, a social movement to interrupt the hegemonic European colonialism and imperialism. An idea of “cultural China” was raised especially during the 1997 Asian regional financial crisis (Chua, 2004). The (re)search of a “lost” cultural value and identity to position Taiwan in the world economically, politically, and culturally was a significant issue that functions as a cultural ground for the dispersed communities of Chinese descent that will unite and facilitate expanding the global capitalist market. Namely, with the expansion of overseas-dispersed Chinese communities and Chinese capital, the desire for the politics of a “cultural China” supposedly “unites and provides cultural continuities exemplified by other allegedly ‘ethnic-cultural’ characters” (Chua, 2004, p. 201). The emotional desire for a Confucian East Asia reveals that it constitutes the foundations of everyday life of East Asians, though in a rather flimsy way in contemporary days.

In Taiwan, for the last two decades of the twentieth century, the questions of identities and the negotiations between a Sinophone Chinese and a native Taiwanese are far more complex than a simplified binary construction, such as the mainlander colonizer

and the native colonized; social construction of “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” should not be read as a mutually exclusive identity label. Instead, the constitutive ethnic and national differences, namely the alleged ethnic cultural characteristics, were utilized as a way of mobilizing the public national consciousness and as a root of political solidarity. As I argued previously, such identity politics embodies historical, social, cultural and political significance that changes over time and social conditions; the processes of identification and articulation with a cultural or national identity formation and subjectivity involves politics of imagination, memory, and affective desire.

(Re) constructing a Cinematic Discourse of Chineseness

The emotional structure of the feeling of national identity, I argue, embodies an ambivalent nature which I will discuss in chapter three. In this project, I concentrate on Ang Lee’s transnational cinemas to bring out critical issues involving his discursive construction of Chinese identity to further an understanding of the ways in which the living personal and national historical experiences closely intersect with each other, and have continued to shape the macro level of national space, and the desire and bodily experiences of identities and subjectivities on a personal level. His diasporic subjectivity further complicates the process of such articulation and cultural representation.

The cultural subjectivities and articulation, as Shih (2007) posits, lie in negotiation of multiple languages, ethnicities, and cultures in Taiwan. It became impossible to create a collective “imagined community” especially after the lift of martial law. Taiwan’s foreign relations and international status underwent a dramatic change after the US switched their diplomatic relations from ROC to PRC in 1978. Moreover,

ROC withdrew its seat in the United Nations as one of the founding members in 1971. Such change of ROC foreign relations resulted in an ambivalent response to the US and its own identification. The rise of the opposition political party Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) that advocates a distinct Taiwanese identity and its later governance not only formed a different political atmosphere to resist KMT's authoritarian regime and the threat of communist China, but also attempted to construct a distinct "Taiwanese identity" to maintain or "clarify" a cultural particularity which should be considered as a constituted discourse. And, such discourse has been distributed, articulated, and circulated within the public discourse through public spheres such as mass media, institutions, and textbooks in educational institutions.

It is important to note that construction of a "Taiwanese national consciousness and the independent movement should be considered as a defensive response to the PRC's threat to Taiwan (Chen, 2001). After PRC's missile threat to Taiwan in 1995, President Lee Teng-hui advocated a discourse of "New Taiwanese," and declared that KMT governance is a "regime coming from the outside as a colonial state" when he came to power in 1988 (Chen, 2001, p. 182). This political discourse functioned as a trigger for the Taiwan Independent Movement. Lee's policy of "Theory of Two Countries" and later President Chen Sui-Bian's "Each Side a Separate Country" had profound impact on the public imagery of "Taiwanese identity."

The unfolding of historical narrative in previous sections provides a context where pop cultural productions such as Taiwan New Cinema have situated, so as to have a firm grasp of identity politics and cultural discourse being articulated, constructed and

co-constructed by cultural producers and the public. During that historical moment, Taiwan New Cinema represented liberation to an opening film market, as well as postcolonial ambivalence in seeking self-definition and political determination that was made visible within the global film markets through international film festivals, as discussed in the first chapter. Paradoxically, it was precisely because of such international recognition of the local films that they received more public attention in the domestic film market.

Postcolonial ambivalence for “naming” could be the result of the Taiwan New Cinema embodying *both* “Third World nativism” (seeking out cultural particularity) *and* coalescing into a global film market (becoming a significant part of the World Cinema). The desire for local filmmakers to draw a distinct nation-state political boundary can only be recognized within an “always-already” borderless global arena. Filmmakers from Taiwan ran into hurdles and could participate in the international festivals only if they submitted their works as a “sub-national” epithet such as “China/Taiwan” or “China Taipei” (Wu, 2007). It highlights the relationship between the local and the global, namely, the fundamental dialectic and ambivalent nature of ways in which native culture engages globalization. Inherent paradox and ambivalence lie in this process; it is, as Dirlik (2004) observes the relationship of nationalism to globalization, with a contradiction “to be understood in the dialectical sense of a unity of opposites, with the one set against the other but at the same time incomprehensible without reference to the other” (p. 491).

As I will further discuss in chapter three, the unfolding of this inherent contradiction, the ambivalence, and how present themselves brings the complexities of nationalism, identity politics, diaspora and their cultural productions to the forefront. Thus, in examining the cultural nationalism resulting from Ang Lee's (trans) nation films, I argue it is important to account for the politics of "naming" Ang Lee's transnational films. My aim is to make a case for a more complicated understanding of identity politics, cultural production, and global visibility.

National identity and cultural articulation in Taiwan is no longer, or more precisely speaking, has never been a single dimension of a political entity. Instead, it has become a project and cultural discourse that is constantly being constructed, deconstructed, formed, reformed, and transformed. I contend that identity formation for the people of Taiwan is not only a distant political framing; it has become a structural feeling, emotional attachment, affective desire, and nostalgic sentiment that are deeply rooted in people's everyday life. Through cultural production such as cinematic discourse, we can see the structural effects it has on the people, and how it works on the body and desire, and then become deep-seated for those living within such episteme. The recurrent sentiment and the tensions of such emotional encounters represented by the cinematic discourse and audience receptions of Ang Lee and his transnational films is the focus of this project. The complex entanglements of the colonialism and the Cold War in Taiwan have been translated into Ang Lee's cinematic representation and the responses of the viewers. The process of searching and/or desiring for a "certainty" of a *lost* cultural root is a way of grounding themselves within an uncertain postmodern, trans- and postcolonial

milieu. While constantly searching for a cultural belonging and certainty, the emotional engagement and the embodiment of the identity formation simultaneously involves a process of exclusion. The persistence of an ambivalent mode in the films and audience responses is therefore important to examine.

As presented in chapter one, scholars have argued the politics of strategic flexibility and universal appeal of Ang Lee and his works. As helpful as these critiques could be, however, I argue that there is actually a persistent nostalgic sentiment and longing for a cultural root constituted in Ang Lee's representation of Chinese identity and Chinese culture in the transnational cinematic discourse. Yet, the recurrent themes of Chineseness simultaneously embed themselves deeply in an ambivalent mode. I will extend and propose a different analytical framework to examine his films and explore how he as a public figure has been constructed as a national representative for audiences from different Chinese-speaking countries such as PRC, Taiwan, and dispersed overseas Chinese communities. To reiterate, in this project, I ask: how do audiences negotiate, affirm, and/or reaffirm their national and ethnic identity and imaginary of a particular culture through the films? How does Ang Lee's transnational cinematic discourse become a discursive site of negotiation of national and ethnic identity, and culture for audiences? In other words, what kind of cultural meanings are being circulated through his films and audience communities and what are those implications? In chapter three, I will theorize the various aspects that will guide my further analysis of the notion of ambivalence.

Chapter Three—Theorizing Ambivalence: Ambivalent Formations in Ang Lee’s Transnational Films and the Audiences

This chapter is a theorization of various aspects of the notion of ambivalence. With the aim to contextualize this research on the discourse of Chineseness in Ang Lee’s transnational cinemas, in previous chapters I unpacked the notion of Chinese transnational cinema and Taiwan New Cinema and their historical development, and reviewed important theoretical and critical debates on identity politics and cultural representation in relation to transnational and globalization forces. The cultural dimension of the notion “Chineseness” is far more nebulous than its political function defined within a static nation-state mechanism.

From the outset, it should be important to note that my attempt is not to analyze all forms of ambivalence, but to work through it conceptually to provide an alternative framework to rethink how it has been constructed in cultural productions such as cinematic discourse and audience perception relating to a specific culture at certain moments in time, particularly the twenty-first century. The focus on constructive sides of ambivalence as a space of possibility in Ang Lee’s cinematic discourse and the perceptions of it leads me to challenge the predominant characterization of ambivalence as a negative connotation. The theorization of ambivalence in contemporary transnational cinematic discourse relating to representation of national identity and communicative effects have been largely neglected or simply reduced into an adjective.

In this study, by a systematic conceptualizing of the notion of ambivalence, I hope to open up the discussion of the representation of Chinese identity deeply embedded in Ang Lee's transnational cinematic discourse. Such theorization will hopefully contribute to a deeper understanding of the communication effects of media, and specifically the ways in which cinematic discourse evokes widespread national and ethnic solidarity, or dispute over them. In so doing, we can further rethink the indeterminate nature of national and ethnic identity in relation to mediated texts, and audiences' perceptions and experiences with them on a broader level. Situating globalization within a context of a continuation of neocolonialism, in the following sections, I start the conceptual framework of ambivalence from a postcolonial theoretical perspective.

Ambivalence as Coexistence of Contradictory Tendencies

It would be helpful to begin with the conventional understanding of ambivalence. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ambivalence is "the coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing." From the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it is defined as "simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings toward a person, an object, or action," resulting in "continued fluctuation (as between one thing and its opposite), and uncertainty as to a certain approach." Namely, ambivalence is characterized as a common human phenomenon involving apparent emotional, sentimental, affective desire and contradictory feelings and attitudes with respect to a person or an object.

In psychoanalysis, ambivalence refers to a condition in which two contradictory feelings and tones simultaneously exist. Namely, it is a *coexistence* of opposites, oscillation, and/or fluctuation. In his remarkable study *The Rat Man*, Freud wrote about the interdependence of love and hate for an object or a person, and simultaneous contradictory tendencies. Freud's theory of ambivalence mainly stems from the Oedipus complex of children, arguing they could love and hate their parents simultaneously. Drawing on the thesis of children sharing bisexual desire for their parents, he considers that the Oedipus complex plays an initial role of structuring a subject's identification. In order to have mother's love, the child would develop a love and hatred relation toward his/her father and want to replace him in order to possess the mother. Thus, he puts,

Identification, in fact, is ambivalent from the very first, it can turn into an expression of tenderness as easily as into a wish for someone's removal. It behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such (quoted in Sarup, 1996, p. 32).

Ambivalence, in other words, is an original emotional tie with an object through identification especially in the context of sexual behavior. Yet the sexual desire, in Freud's own word, libido, was repressed and further transformed into a private, taboo, and somehow unconscious desire.

The development of "self" -the unconscious and primitive id- is therefore based on an ambivalent relationship with the "Others"- the super-ego that represents the social conditions relating the external forces on a child's understanding of the world and the self. The ambivalence pertaining to social prohibition, such as a child's desire for masturbation is understood as "primitive" and neurotic which is against the civilized

social order. Thus such repression and regulation of sexual behaviors, according to Freud, transformed into a private desire, which is opposite to public social expectations (Khanna, 2003). The conflict between the ego and the Id, that is, the primitive yet unacceptable desire and the social expectations, leads to the formation of ambivalence. Thus, ambivalent emotions including conflicting or contradictory impulses in Freudian psychoanalysis represents as repressed unconscious needs and desires (Woodward, 1997). Such fragmented and divided states of conflict and fluctuation are further developed as a modern problem. Reading *Totem and Taboo, Civilization and Its Discontent*, and *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud's theory on ambivalence suggests that ambivalent feelings are melancholia and repressed, causing disturbances, destabilization, and mourning in the modern context.

Developed from Freud's theory on ambivalence as coexistence of opposing instincts, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan observes that ambivalence is located in the relationship with "the Symbolic Other," being accompanied by the feeling of aggressivity directed at moments of identification (Khanna, 2003; Woodward, 1997; Sarup, 1996). Lacan developed the theory of the mirror stage to describe a child developing a psychic wholeness of self by viewing its own image in the mirror, prior to the entry into language as a system of signification and the symbolic order. A mirror stage, according to Lacan (1994), "is far from a mere phenomenon which occurs in the development of the child. It illustrates the conflictual nature of the dual relationship" (quoted in Khanna, 2003, p. 109). The dual relationships indicate that the child never feels as complete as others do

around it. Identification takes place, and the construction of self is sutured within that image.

Lacan's emphasis on language is significant. Entering into language and communication systems plays a crucial role for a child to develop a sense of *complete* subject. He posits that mainly through the language and symbolic order does a child become conscious of the distinction between his own body and the Others. It is through the hailing, the discourse from the others outside of the self that the self can be recognized. The "linguistic mode of reflexivity" (Sarup, 19996) developed by Lacan presents a significant stage where one begins to constitute oneself. In other words, identification is always relational by symbolic marking with the Others; one establishes a sense of "I" is based on the reflected I that is outside the self. The construction of the self and subjectivity is mainly through communicative interaction with the Others. The gap between the self-image of a child recognizing reflected self and the Symbolic- the outside world - leads to a fundamental "misrecognition;" namely, an illusive identification, to use Lacan's own word. The misrecognition results in the split of subject or many fragments of ruptured subjectivities, later to be concealed by ideology.

The aspect of coexistence of ambivalence reflects the contradictory effects of globalization and nationalism that I identified in chapter one and two. Hall (1992) in his remarkable essay *The Question of Culture Identity* has pointed out that globalization breaks down the boundaries of national identity, yet simultaneously deepens cultural nationalism and local identity as a resistance to it from native communities. Further, a culturally syncretic identity has emerged while the form of national identity is in decline.

Third World nationalism is a product of globalization and neocolonialism. It is a defense mechanism that represents social struggles for local communities, reconstructing and reinventing their “self-identity” and self-representation. The process of reclaiming oneself is not only political but also very ambivalent because it demands both the dominant historical paradigm and the deconstruction of it. More specifically, the process of ambivalence involves the coexistence of a sense of cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Cosmopolitanism is indeed built on cultural particularity and imaginary inscribed on the local communities.

The emergence of “new ethnicity” in a borderless world today, as Hall (1997) argues, signifies the changing of identity paradigm. However, these changes cannot be separated from their histories. If, as some post-modern scholars suggest, one makes a complete break with the past, the modernism actually overlooks the people who haven’t achieved the definition of modern, or have the “changes.” When the margins struggle to come to represent their own voices in the modern time, “ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak” (Hall, 1997, p. 34). The marginalized space can be a place of power, a place of resistance, because the margins take on the essential categories not only to *re*-search for their hidden histories, to *re*-claim the representations of themselves, but also to open up a new possibility to critique the restraints of identity politics. The new space allows them to speak their own languages, recover their own histories, as well as construct their new “roots.” For example, Hall (1997) tells us, “you could not describe the movements of colonial nationalism without that moment when the unspoken discovered that they had a history which they could speak; they had languages

other than the languages of the master, of the tribe” (p. 35). The reconstruction of history generates the “new ethnicity,” which dismantles the identities from the imperialists’ lens, as it were, in the post-modern diversity.

As I discussed in chapter two, a new Pan-Asianism in the East Asian region, especially “a greater cultural China” imagination has been permeated in various forms of cultural productions in the entertainment industry in Chinese language regions. On one hand, there is the sentiment of creating a regional identity that is based on cultural particularity and national language. On the other hand, a collective transnational subjectivity has been formed that aims to catch up with the global-postmodern trend. The coexistence of an increasingly cosmopolitan sense of self arising in a global postmodern milieu precisely draws upon a national cultural imaginary-- Asianism and Confucianism recurred with the ideas to compete with the West since the Cold War.

The coexistence of paradoxical emotions is the first aspect of ambivalent formations I will draw on in this study. The ambivalent feelings are produced within discourse, language and representation; for psychoanalysis, it is rendered by individuals who recognize the unattainable misrecognized self that is defined through the discourse of the Others. Ambivalence represents itself as a struggle for structuring a whole sense of self; it is a coexistence of contradictory feelings and emotions toward an object, a memory, a person, or one’s analyst self. Being oneself has no longer a clear distinction of the Others after the internationalization of the gaze from the Others. I expand this perspective to further the discussion of ambivalence in relation to globalization, the sentiment of cultural nationalism and the identification with the nation-state.

Ambivalence as Equivocation and Contradictions in Mimicry

The second aspect of the notion of ambivalence I draw upon is the *equivocal power relation* between the colonizer and the colonized, the self and the Other. Namely, I suggest examining both liberating and problematic functions of cultural nationalism relating to the representation of national identity in Ang Lee's transnational films. Moving from psychoanalysis, postcolonial theorists examine the ambivalent relationships of colonizer and colonized in colonial and postcolonial discourses. Ambivalence is a key term developed from Homi Bhabha's discussion of cultural hybridity, the unclassifiable nature of borderline, third space, and the ambiguous relationship between "center" and the "periphery." Postcolonial critics provide extensive works to challenge the binary construction of Self and Other, identity and subjectivity, the colonized and the colonizer, or the oppressor and the oppressed (Spivak, 1988; 1999; Fanon, 1969; Hall, 1996, among others).

For postcolonial theorists, the examination of literature is important because cultural text such as literature is the best complement to ideological transformation (Spivak, 2001). A cultural text is a discursive cultural production that embeds cultural ideology. In this study, I want to broaden this point and further it from a communication perspective by taking into consideration the practices of representation. Hall (1997) has argued that representation is a signifying practice. Representations can never be constructed out of the play of different discourses, and they are always partial and revisionary. They produce subject positions for audiences from which particular meanings and knowledge are formed. The practices of representations should move

beyond the restrictions of linguistic or literary practices. Since all social practices entail meanings, to study culture and the cultural productions I look at broader units of productions of meanings such as “narratives, statements, groups of images, whole discourses which operate across a variety of texts, areas of knowledge about a subject which have acquired widespread authority” (Hall, 1997, p. 42). In other words, a much wider field of “texts” in and through which meanings are produced and communicated including popular culture, advertising, performance, fashion, photography, films, and other media productions.

Moreover, the practices of representations are the reflections of our mental constructions, and meantime viewers take meaning from representations. Discourses and representations are the productions of social life, constituted by external relationships to other social practices. Therefore they are reflexive. These cultural practitioners produce discursive and reflexive practices that generate representations that reflect their values and beliefs, and therefore represent their positioning and simultaneously reproduce subjectivities and identities. I consider that cultural texts such as representations are reproductions connected to social context; namely, the meaning in the text is the “active product of the text’s social articulation, of the web of connotations and codes into which it is inserted” (Grossberg, 1996, p. 157).

From the audience position, readers and viewers learn to identify with the value system figured by a cultural text. They take meanings of the discourse by locating themselves within the rules and positions that the discourse constructs, hence becoming “the subjects of its power/knowledge” (Hall, 1997, p. 56). Literary theorist Holland

observes that readers would use cultural texts to reassure and reaffirmed their cultural beliefs, turning private desires into socially acceptable aspirations by the projection of the fantasy to the world (Sarup, 1996). Audiences identify themselves in discourses and representations, thus becoming subjected to the position the speakers and producers produce for them. Cultural productions are effective instruments to gradually transform the mind, and thereby are good resources for examining the negotiation of meanings and cultural identities.

Beginning with Said's groundbreaking work *Orientalism*, colonial discourse became an academic sub-discipline within literary and cultural theory (Young, 1995). Orientalism, according to Said (1978), is a tactic constructed by the dominant Western powers to domesticate and represent the "Orient." Orientalism is based on the distortion and misrepresentation of the subaltern subjects.

Bhabha (1983) questions Said's claim that Western colonial discourse *always* works successfully when put into practice by adding psychoanalysis to Said's analysis. He challenges Said's argument in *Orientalism* by pointing out that he "assumed too readily that an unequivocal intention on the part of West was always realized through its discursive productions" (quoted in Young 1995, p. 75). Orientalism works at two levels of psychoanalysis, according to Bhabha, "a 'manifest' Orientalism, the conscious body of 'scientific' knowledge about the Orient, and a 'latent' Orientalism, an unconscious positivity of fantastic desire" (Young, 1995, p. 75). By providing a systematic track to examine colonial discourse, he concludes that it in effect operated both as an

instrumentally constructed knowledge *and* as an ambivalent fantasy and desire of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer.

Drawing upon Lacan's linguistic psychoanalysis, Bhabha (1994) argues that ambivalence is produced within the double inscription of the colonial discourse. The presence of origin and displacement, discipline and desire, mimesis and repetition, fantasy, and psychic defense problematizes the "authority of recognition." In other words, the existence of double vision of articulation with the colonial authority is *always* ambivalent within the colonial text. He sharply critiques the dualism of the colonial authority and colonized subjectivity, the center and the periphery, and the power and the powerless. The incompatible cultural difference complicates the regulated binary opposition. The "third space" signifies a form of resistance and the shifting dynamics of power play. He remarks,

resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference" (p. 110).

Difference and the construction of Otherness is the crucial component to justify the colonial conquer and dominance. However, the difference and otherness could also disrupt the presence of colonial authority and make the recognition problematic. The ambivalent double-inscribed space actually produces a third place where the rule of recognition becomes dynamic. The dialectic power struggle is produced within the "in-betweeness"- the mother culture and the imposed alien cultures.

As I suggested previously, moving beyond postcolonialism, the liminal experiences of migrants due to the transnational flow of capitals have emerged into a more scattered and ambivalent space of cultural syncretism. The experiences should be more flexible; rather than merely emphasizing the monolithic distinction and the European colonialism, one should also account for the more contemporary forms of migrations and diasporic conditions. The syncretic culture created by transnational migrants in liminal spaces is more scattered than scripted by the binary constructions of the self and the Otherness. The “self” is always in relation to the “other,” namely, it should be considered a product of interaction with others. Thus, any clear delineation between self and other is disrupted and dissolved. I want to elaborate on Bhabha’s processes of identification under colonial subjectivity. He tells us, “...to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness, its look for locus... It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated” (Bhabha, 1986, p. xv). The moment one’s self-identity becomes actualized is when being recognized by the Others. That is, one’s existence and “being” is always in relation to Others, through the gaze of an Other.

In this respect, without the oppositional “Other,” there would be no essence of a “self-identity” since identity is apprehended only *in relation*, not as an essential or inherent characteristic possessed by any given subject without reference to a constitutive outside and without mediation by different representations, language practices, memory, fantasy, and so on. The construction of self lies in a nexus of intertwining projection, desire, affect, identification, self-denigration, yet simultaneously self-affirmation. The

desire and envy of becoming the Other marks the existence of the “self.” The ambivalent affect explains why one could be so hateful yet simultaneously so passionate about the colonizers or the Other.

Under such complex processes of affective identification, Bhabha proposes that the act of “mimicking” the colonizers from the colonized actually produces an ambivalent third space of enunciation, and the syncretic subject that neither becomes the colonizer nor remains the colonized. The act of mimicry therefore contributes the blurred relations between power and knowledge through which the master-discourse had already been questioned by the colonized in their native accents. The ongoing conditions of mimicry and hybridity suggest that it is impossible for the colonizer to make an absolute power exercise because the native’s inappropriate imitations of the colonial discourse actually has the result of threatening colonial authority through mimic, reform and distortion. Essentially, ambivalence is located within the fluctuating relationship between mimicry and mockery. He argues that a native’s colonial mimicry is as follows:

Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledge and disciplinary powers (p. 86).

The rigid binary distinction between power and powerlessness, the self and the other dissolve because of the paradoxical double articulation produced in the colonial encounter. The processes of “mimicking” the colonial culture, internalizing the Others as self by writing or speaking in other tongues inform an indeterminate ambivalence. In

light of this, even though a colonial subject is recognizably similar to the colonizer, there are *still* differences. The result of mimicking also signifies the colonized dis-identifying with the roles and the difference colonizers assigned to them. Mimicry, in this sense, displaces the colonial discourse where ambivalence shifts the gaze of “Otherness” to confront colonial surveillant eyes. For Bhabha sees mimicry as the colonizer’s disciplinary device, the inevitable failure presents itself as the doomed result. Colonial subjects become “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 91). The inherent failure of mimicry only reveals the disruption of the narcissistic authority.

Franz Fanon, another guru of postcolonialism whose inspiring works focus on the French colonialism toward Algeria, has groundbreaking works on the colonized paradoxical affective intertwining affective desire toward the colonizers. Even though he did not explicitly address the notion of ambivalence, his works *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967) are the provocative study of destabilizing the Self/Other and Identity/ Subjectivity binary. The problem of colonialism, according to Fanon (1967), “includes not only the interrelations of objective historical conditions but also human attitudes toward these conditions” (p. 84). Racial minority groups such as “Negro kids” in a predominantly white society grow up internalizing the white dominant attitudes and behaviors, assimilating into the white dominant culture in order to “pass.” Fanon proclaims “the Negro recognizes the unreality of many of the beliefs that he has adopted with reference to the subjective attitude of the white man” (p. 149). That is, they conduct themselves subjectively and intellectually like white men. They do not think of

themselves as black men. Yet they are Negro, as Bhabha puts it, the mimicry of the colonizer “almost the same, but not quite.” The Negro is thus a slave of the cultural imposition- “a victim of white civilization” (p. 192). This aspect reflects a strong ambivalence when a marginalized living in-between multiple cultures, the fragmented subjects indicate how they take on the imposed “*burden*” from the colonized of the “Negro culture.”

Through internalizing the colonial rules, the colonized eventually are *complicit* with the process of colonization. Namely, colonization was never simply external to the postcolonial subjects and the societies of imperialism. It was always “inscribed deeply within them- as it becomes inscribed in the cultures of colonized” (Hall, 1996, p. 246). The colonized people such as the native bourgeoisie are well adapted to European capitalism, establishing a complicit agreement- a kind of homogeneity- to rule their own people (Fanon, 1963). In doing so, the natives became “political animals in the most universal sense of the word” (Fanon, 1963, p, 81). The process of naturalization and essentialization of the self and the other, determining who gets to be included and who gets to be excluded, cause the internalization of *self-as-other*.

Spivak’s argument of “double colonization,” on the other hand, contends that the native’s voices themselves have already been subjected to a larger history of imperialism, that is, they are part of the subjected knowledge. For example, native subaltern women were subjected to the patriarchy of men, and the patriarchy of colonial power (Young, 1995). Considering the margins marked out by the imperial epistemic violence, Spivak states,

We must now confront the following question: On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside of the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?* (p. 267).

The subaltern subjects are not allowed to actively speak for themselves because they are subjected to a discursive formation created by the colonizers. I only agree partially with this perspective as it did imply the terrifying yet realistic effects of colonialism. However, such a proclamation ignores and eliminates the possibility of human beings as active agents of resistance and change.

Taken collectively, in this section I have been discussing the ambivalent relation and the shifting power dynamic of self-identity, subjectivity, and the Others developed from a postcolonial context. The second aspect I am developing for the ambivalent formation emphasizes the equivocation and contradictions in mimicry. I argue that the emotional attachment and affective desire toward the “oppositional others” is indeed crucial in constructing a sense of “self.” Such ambivalence toward self and others, presented in a sense of double articulation with the colonizers, generates a dynamic power relation between the oppressor and the oppressed, that is, there is no absolute authority or dominance because of the natives’ inherent failure of assimilating into the colonizer’s alien culture. More specifically, I argue the fundamental incommensurability of the “difference” manipulated for the justification of dominance could function as a double-edged sword. This leads to a further discussion of the representation of national and ethnic identity in a contemporary transnational context which I develop in the next section.

Representing the Self and the Others:

Representation as a Burden and a Becoming

Although Bhabha's argument of ambivalence focuses on the side of colonial authority, I attempt to extend this discussion to understand the ways in which ambivalence has been transformed, reproduced, and modified on the side of the racialized Others. Theorizing ambivalence in contemporary Chinese diasporic context requires some modifications and adjustments from the postcolonial framework. My own sense is that even the most ideologically compromised ways of desiring or longing convey a genuine human need (Su, 2005). I suggest that ambivalence is a double-edged sword; the construction of self-identity is a process of taking on a *burden* and a *commitment* in becoming a *complete subject*. The process of becoming the Others, as painful as it could be, is however both embodiment and disembodiment, both self-impoverishment and nurturing. I argue that the profound ambivalence produced by the minority subjects actually presents a strong sense of "ethnic tenacity," in Rey Chow's words. This strong affective desire to hold on to a cultural "past," the identification with a national and ethnic identity, is *self-sustaining* and *self-reaffirming* for marginalized subjects who struggle in a liminal space. Therefore, in this study I ask somewhat contrary questions: does the space of paradox always lead to the hatred or eradications of the "self" and the "other"? Could the space of ambivalence be empowering and open some possibilities? How does the diasporic condition in an era of translationalism complicate the "paradox of assimilation" (Cheng, 2001)? And to what kinds of cultural effects do Chinese diasporic subjects, Ang Lee in this case, seek recourse when they seek to ground themselves in a

subject position? In what ways and to what subjectivity do they devote themselves and project their own desires, and with whom do they connect?

Ambivalence is a process of naturalization and essentialization of the self and the other, determining what gets to be included and what gets to be excluded, leading to the internalization of *self-as-other*. Such self-internalization has become a form of *cultural burden* for split minority subjects to reform and transform their cultural identity in the age of multiculturalism. The profound and complex ambivalence is deeply inscribed in minority subjects. Marginalized cultural diasporas, who live between or among various cultures invariably develop an ambivalent sense of the designations of identity in relation to the nation-building in their new host countries. In the new nation, they develop a strong sense of alienation from an identity that was imposed on them, and rejection by the adopted country.

Combing through psychoanalysis theory, the psychic trauma and anxieties resulted of racial discrimination or other systems of discrimination including classism, sexism, or homophobia, is *soothed* by assimilating into the dominant culture and destroying their once-positive feelings about their native cultures and themselves. The native subjects embody a strong sense of ontological liminality and existence between discursive self-identity and alienated other. They embrace the transformational process of becoming the Other, or *self-as-other*, the correctness or worth of the self, even though they have strong contradictory feelings and inner-conflicts. Paradoxically, in order to achieve the idealized Other, the native people need to renegotiate their positioning; oftentimes, assimilation leads to abandoning and dissociating their native culture. Cheng

(2001) puts it as “the becoming body” (p. 78). The self-identity of marginalized groups is constituted by those of power, and they come to internalize the terms, in the process of becoming subordinated by the constructed subject.

Cultural Memory, Nostalgia, and Diasporic Imagination

The profound ambivalent relationship with the object and the subject that the marginalized identify with doesn't only embody resentment but also passion and empowerment. In this case, representing a distinctive Chinese national identity in transnational cinema could be considered as a burden, and the representation of the national subject becomes “mimic, performative, and constitutive” (Lim, 2006). The burden of self-representation denotes a condition that the somehow inauthentic, partial, and revisionary experiences of the past and the cultural memory continue to shape present values and beliefs. As stated before, ambivalence is rendered during the syncretic, hybrid style of mimicking the colonizers while retaining cultural authority in diasporic subjects' own political milieu. The new identities, hybrid selves that marginalized diasporas create, are actually a *liberation* for themselves from their cultural and historical burden – *the burden of becoming a complete Subject*. In other words, only through taking on such a burden does a diasporic subject achieve the “freedom” and liberation. The space of “complicity” and paradox not only functions as a reproduction or endorsement of essentialism; it also enables an equivocal aspect of examining national and ethnic identity.

In the following sections, I want to specifically connect ambivalence to a diasporic condition. Closely intersecting with the aspect of cultural and historical burden

of ethnic minority film directors, the struggle over representation for the “Third World” artists to be “recognized” in the world market is a result of the historical denial of their access to mechanisms of representation (Lim, 2006). To complicate matters, for minority subjects and specifically the diasporic subjects, they embody a collective history, experience, and cultural memory through the processes of dispersion and scattering.

For minority artists, the “burden” of *becoming* a complete subject indicates an ambivalent relationship with their historical and cultural existence in self-representation. The recurrent theme of their lost homeland, the national and ethnic culture, and the longing and the desire to return to a lost place indeed denotes how the “past” has continued to shape the present. As Hall (1990) asks in his remarkable piece *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* “who has not known, at this moment, a surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for ‘times past’?”(p. 236). Through cinematic representation, the idea of “returning to the origin”, searching for the past and the loss of identity actually conceal the feelings of fear, frustration, and anxiety of living in the new host land.

I contend that such a strong affective desire and emotional attachment to their ethnic cultural past from diasporic artists enable a constructive effect of facilitating understanding, and connecting audiences who have been divided by political ideologies in history that have driven them apart. In other words, the burden of representation embodies a utopian ideal that tends to transcend the “differences,” create a more connected understanding of human beings, and envision constructive resolutions to the dilemmas of fragmentation and displacement represented in their aesthetic cultural

productions. While ethnic minority groups and the diasporic subjects always carry a weighty burden for speaking the “authentic truth” of their own ethnicity, it is precisely these increasing opportunities for self-representations that can be utilized as a way of “redefining” and defending themselves, converting the “ethnic-hailed” self (Chow, 2002), and reclaiming their authority and legitimacy. Self-representation therefore could be both emancipatory and utopian.

For diasporic subjects, “the collective maintains its sense of people-hood through networks of travel, communication, economic exchange, and cultural interaction that crisscross national borders” (Klein, 2004, p. 26). Clifford calls them “lateral axes” of affiliation, implying that instead of grounding one’s sense of identity in the dispersal community that exists in the present, diasporic journeys are settling down “elsewhere” and creating their sense of identity in a homeland that exists mainly in memory (Klein, 2004). San Juan (2004) in his book *Working Through the Contradictions* proposes a similar argument: ambivalence characterizes subordinated Filipino women laborers as resisting oppression in the new land, yet at the same time participating in their own subordination. Diasporas who live in between do not necessarily fall into the trap of self-victimization, self-subaltern, or self-dramatization. Instead, the liminal space could be a form of empowerment, granting the marginalized a specific kind of power. This position echoes Rey Chow’s discussion on the double marginalized positions such as being Chinese in postcolonial Hong Kong, and being a Chinese diasporic intellectual in the West. Diasporic intellectuals who operate from the ambivalent position between Asia and the West actually enact a “specific kind of social power” (Chow, 1993, p.22).

The ambivalent positions bring out the inherent contradictions in the posited truths. It becomes a site of intervening and interrupting tactically dominant discourses of Chinese national identity. A diasporic status therefore could be an intervention to provide an alternative identity paradigm. Such diasporic “tactical intervention” does not necessarily completely destroy the nation-state affiliation or provide a formula for solutions, but instead, it complicates matters based on the ambivalent enunciation from a “third space.”

Diasporas are displaced populations who usually remain in subordinate positions by established social structures such as racial exclusion or subordinated ethnic status in the new land. Through the attachment to homeland, cultural traditions, and shared history of displacement, diasporas establish a collective symbolic community and identity, contributing to cultural solidarity. Namely, a collective diasporic identity is “necessary” because in a sense, it provides the community with a new possibility to appreciate and critique the past- their history and their positioning.

Transnational identity formation, emerging out of “a shared history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland” (Safran, 1991, quoted from Clifford, 2005, p, 527). The essence of a collective diasporic identity is defined by the relationship with the history and the past. The “history” and the “past” of the diasporic subjects are not buried in the past, but instead, provide an alternative avenue for a new constitution of subjects and continue to shape the present. The emotional attachment and the deeply seated embodiment of the nostalgic sentiment to the collective past emerge as a form of

cultural empowerment. As Peters (1999) suggests, the dispersed develop and sustain a sense of community through various forms of communication, such as language, media, or rituals. The collective memory of homeland therefore enables the scattered fellows to bind together, creating real or imagined relationships among each other. That is, “diaspora is always collective” (p. 20). The act of remembering and the sense of nostalgia are the ways to bind a diasporic community together.

Distance from one’s motherland generates a sense of loss, as Liao (2005) suggests. Asian diasporas, for example, have sustained critical networks of exchanging material and symbolism with their homelands (p. 504). The issues of home and migration are negotiated from art, popular culture, language and the Internet. Uprootings and regroundings, Liao (2005) argued, “emerge from this collective work as simultaneously affective, embodied, cultural and political processes whose effects are not simply given” (p. 2). Thus, one needs to rethink home and migration. For diasporic communities, the recreation of “home-binding” signifies the development of cultural belonging by exchanging symbolic or material meanings.

The work of collective memory in constructing the imagined homeland closely connects concrete materialities of objects, traditions or rituals. The rebuilding of “home” depends on the “reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted” (Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, and Sheller, 2003, p. 9). The methods of forgetting and remembering reflect an intimate relationship between the personal experiences of the history and a collective memory. And, oftentimes the personal history counters the dominant historical narrative. As Dai & Chen (1997) observe, the nostalgic

atmosphere is created in the cultural memory whereas self-reflexivity is reflected within a specific historical and cultural imagination. The nostalgic sentimentality- the longing for the “lost” homeland and the past-therefore is another layer of the notion of ambivalence.

The affective and physical creation of the imagined home is a continuing process; individual memory contributes to the rise of nostalgia. Imagined fragments piece together as a wholly imagined “home.” The sense of self is fragmented. Identity becomes a *bricoleur*. By piecing together fragmented bits of a distant collective historical past and the current self, the people who live in a liminal space invent and negotiate their hybrid identities and cultures, which do not present mixtures from other purer or more authentic identities, but rather, represent the tensions demonstrated in those periods. That is, the *equivocal* ethnic and national identity is rendered during the hybrid style of mimicking the alien cultures while retaining cultural authority in marginalized subjects’ own political milieu.

The ambivalence here is that the longing for lost or imagined homeland reflects diasporic desire of a “rootedness” that is paradoxically built on a rootless experience. Diasporas function as discursive communities in which people establish a paradigm of who will belong and who will be excluded. However, such diasporic solidarity is developed through some communal experiences; that is, it is the historical mistreatment of racism that has driven the dispersed to stick together to defend themselves. The geographical and cultural displacement creates new forms of cultural belonging, as well as increasingly informs us of the local-global cultural dialectics. Thus, even though the diasporic discourse of homeland and culture to some extent creates a myth of racial purity

or ethnic absolutism, it needs to be situated in a historical context in order to understand the whole complexity of the constitutive nostalgic sentimentality.

The result of the strong attachment and somehow “obsession” with a traditional culture within diasporic communities is due to their daily encounter with racial prejudice. Such a defensive mechanism paradoxically lies in an ambivalent sense toward a nation, the people, and the culture. Indeed, the aspect of nostalgia has been exploited for commercials and nationalist political interests. Politics of remembering, imaginary, and politicization of memory have been manipulated and inculcated by cultural producers and capitalists. However, the diasporic cultural representation opens up the possibility of refiguring the relationship to the culture and the past, through self-representation.

The prevalence of nostalgia in the cultural representation in transnational cinemas, especially under a diasporic condition, demands greater attention. Cultural memory, selfhood, nostalgia, self-reflexivity, and the employment of an ambivalent diasporic imagination of a “nation” and a “culture” all interplay in constructing a collective subject position. Besides the controversial representational strategy of constructing artifacts and cultural objects as commodities, I intend to add complexity by accounting for the constructive effects of such “entrance”, or more precisely, a creation of a global market and cinematic aesthetic, especially the transnational cinema of Ang Lee.

Naficy (2001) states that diasporic films emphasize the multiplicity and additional meaning of their homeland since the diasporic community tends to maintain a “long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness” (p. 14). In other words, “diasporic consciousness is horizontal and multisided, involving not only the homeland but also the

compatriot communities elsewhere” (p. 14). To reiterate, I believe we need to take into consideration identity politics and the problematic critique of authenticity in the cultural representation of a national culture. I suggest we view cultural representation of transnational cinema in a post-colonial and trans-national world as a kind of cultural translation (Bhabha, 1994), which as Bhabha notes is an important process (of cultural translation) for “Third World” nations to gain a foothold in the global cultural market. Specifically, he puts it, “In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other” (Bhabha, quoted in Du Gay et al, 2003, p. 95). In late modernity, there is no simple return to the “origin” or the ancestral past because even such presumed “origin” or “ancestral past” is itself constructed discursively from communal narratives, and, usually partly in the imaginary and therefore inevitably politicized in its process of construction.

“Nation as narration,” to elaborate more on Bhabha’s argument of cultural translation, clearly proposes that nation is inscribed in and dispersed through various narratives and discourses. The category of national people is constructed by means of double-writing. The double-writing or dissemi-*nation*, according to him, is “a space that is *internally* marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 299). The speculation on the national culture lies in contingent and fluid relationships. The national culture, therefore, should not be seen “simply as ‘other’ in relation to what is

outside or beyond it” (p. 4). The fluid relations in the construction of a “national culture” lie not only in the nation-in-itself, but rather, in the symbolic meaning given to the nation.

Ambivalence as a Site of Contestation

I argue that the intense sentimentalities and enthusiasms simultaneously affirm and reinforce a diasporic subject’s identity and sense of belonging. The nationalism is reactive to perceived historical and contemporary oppression. It is also important to note the complexity of the politics of recognition for the marginalized in the global world. To illustrate, the nostalgic sentimentality toward the homeland and the host-land challenge the traditional model of community, opening up new spaces of subjectivities. The ambivalent situation raises the questions of place, culture, memory, and identity of a displacement of cultural dialectics (Liao, 2005, p. 503).

The nostalgic identification with a place and a positioning requires an act of imagination not only for the cultural producers, but also for the viewers. The positionality of transnational audience communities is significant to analyze. Individuals identify with mediated representation to shape, affirm, and/or reinforce their sense of identity, feelings, and affective desires (or despair) toward a culture. Specifically for the diasporic communities, they engage in the mediated experiences actively or passively as audiences recollect cultural memories or revisions of them, as I will discuss further in chapter four.

Historically speaking, audience research is predominantly conducted in television studies, and primarily focuses on fandom studies since television dramas are considered to have greater impact on audiences (Chua, 2008). As such, in film studies, the predominant research focuses on the ideological analysis of the cinematic texts. The

study of audience perceptions of cinematic practices has been given little, if any, academic attention. In this study, therefore, I intend to incorporate audience discourse into my analysis of the forms of cultural nationalism, and the ways in which transnational cinematic practices function as a discursive site for negotiating cultural and political meanings under different conditions. In so doing, I am able to understand the ways in which transnational films become an ambivalent site that reflects cultural struggles over representation from a “Third World” artist who is based in the West.

In this study, I draw on an alternative framework of theorizing the notion of ambivalence, specifically in relation to the representation of the national culture and identity under a diasporic condition. I suggest that in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the politics of national identity and culture represented in the transnational cinema of Ang Lee, one needs to adopt a non-monometallic theoretical framework. I argue that individuals can position themselves as an agent, yet simultaneously participate in the ideological social construction. Individuals can simultaneously be both object and subject or victim and agent. Moreover, identity, which is always contested and fluid, cannot be independent from the larger social structure. Both identity and subjectivity are discursively constituted under various political, cultural and social conditions. Identity is not the given; instead, it is imaginary, only operating within ideological subject positions (Hall, 1996).

In this chapter, I propose four aspects of the notion of ambivalence. In the English language connotation, the most significant aspect of ambivalence refers to the coexistence of contradictory feelings, emotions, and attitudes toward an object or a

person from a psychoanalytical perspective. Moving to the postcolonial perspective, ambivalence is rendered during the hybrid style of mimicking the colonizers while retaining cultural authority in diaspora subjects' own political milieu. I posit that the cultural syncretism produced by transnational diasporas highlight a profoundly ambivalent nature of the identity politics, that is, to become a "complete" subject and gain liberation for marginalized diasporic subjects, is paradoxically based on taking on the historical and cultural burden that has been used to constrain them. Intensive nostalgic desire and affective attachment to a symbolic and a material ethnicity and nationality presents a complexity of the politics of self-representation for postcolonial- and- transnational subjects in a globalized era. The space of contradictions and paradox facilitates an equivocal aspect of examining the politics of national identity and ethnicity, which could be ideological yet constructive. Ambivalence therefore represents a condition that lies both inside and outside of the self; it presents a liminal space between the need for self-preservation and the need for others' recognition.

By using the theoretical framework, in the following chapters, I will examine the connections between different practices- the discourse of ambivalence in relation to Chineseness in *Lust, Caution* and *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, and the public discourse- and the conjunctures between ideology and social formations, and between various components within ideological structures, and between different cultural communities constituting social and ideological effects. In doing so, I hope to find larger implications for the production of identity politics in film discourse and in the global market as a whole.

Chapter Four—The Burden of *Becoming* a Chinese Diasporic Director: The Discourse of Bridging the East and the West in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*

Because of your love...I will never be a lonely spirit.

Li Mu Bai, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*

The world is getting smaller, and the line between the center and the periphery is blurred. I wish the world is like the [John Lennon] song goes: “Imagine there’s no country...” I would like to be in that gray area, where people see me as “all of the above.”

Ang Lee, 2007

In what ways have the notion of Chineseness become ambivalent? Why does one work so hard to hold on to a national and ethnic identity on one hand, yet simultaneously participate in a borderless global world? In what ways could films become a site of cross-cultural communication and collaboration?

Ang Lee’s prototype of transnational film is his martial arts (the *wuxia* genre) film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The revision and repackaging of transnational Chinese identity did not only cross boundaries of cultural and national boundaries, but also was utilized as an instrument to reclaim cultural representation of ethnic minority in the West, to use Ang Lee’s own words, and to “tell our story, and to explore the legacy of classical Chinese culture” (Sunshine, 2000, p. 7). Martial arts films have long remained the top commercial success of the Hong Kong film industry, yet they have not gained major

success in award ceremonies in the U.S. Academy Awards as well as other international films. Exceptionally, *Crouching Tiger* gained enormous attention and brought exhilarating entertainment into the global film market. Its emphasis of “the greater Chinese theme,” in Ang Lee’s own remarks, also makes it a good case for examining the ambivalent representation of Chinese identity, the changing dynamics of (trans) nationalism, and localization in relation to audience reception.

While much critical energy has been directed to deconstruct ethnicity and nationality, less attention has given to *why* and *how* an individual or a community remains invested in maintaining a racial or ethnic subject and a continuation of a distinct version of culture; even those categories have been argued to be problematic. In previous chapters, I have suggested that criticism toward Ang Lee and his construction of Chineseness in his transnational films primarily focuses on the charge of his self-exoticism. Such criticism that is based on a anti-Orientalism stance, however, ironically falls into a tautological implication; that is, it reinforces a tendency to theorize that any “third world” or non-Western minority subjects should perform an “incontrovertible ethnic truth and essence” (Chow, 2002, p. 116). It also generalizes that *all* non-Western subjects are habitually and invariably solicited in a manner of coercive mimicry of the white Western world. I argue that such line of theorization is rather limiting, and hence requires one to rethink the politics of national identity and recognition, and the political implications of them.

Consequently, instead of repetitively citing the obvious ideologically charged racial images and task of critiquing the pitfalls that we are already very painfully familiar

with, I further the discussion to explore the ways in which the passionate identification with a nation, racial and ethnic imagination, and desire have been structured through cinematic and audience discourse in the first place. Since less academic attention has been given to the viewers who co-construct and complete the meaning of films, I incorporate public discourses, interviews, and the discourses of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (*Crouching Tiger* hereafter) and *Lust, Caution*, as two cases where Chineseness is represented as a site of indeterminate ambivalence, and deconstructed as a site of contestation.

Central to my argument is an exploration of the (de)construction of the discourse on Chineseness which is fundamentally rooted in Confucian philosophy, and the *maintaining* and/or the embracing of it in Ang Lee's most prominent contemporary transnational films. I hope to contribute a further understanding of how a specific cultural meaning is circulated through the films and the audience discourse generated around viewing the films and its director. In this chapter, I aim to answer two questions: How is the notion of Chineseness being constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed? How do the audiences reflect a sense of Chinese identity from the transnational films of Ang Lee, and what are the implications? By focusing on the specific reception contexts, it becomes clear how Ang Lee becomes a Chinese media icon, and the discourse on Chinese identity in his films function as a site of negotiation.

Previous academic attention has been focused on the highly unequal global cultural flow, i.e., cultural imperialism from the Global North to the Global South, or from the West to the East. The empire of western media and the predominance of various

forms of cultural productions have been gradually disrupted by the reversed cultural flow from the “periphery” to the “center,” and among the periphery nations (Wu & Chan, 2007). *Crouching Tiger* has, nonetheless, solidified their international significant status, given their great box office success and the attention drawn from the global film market. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, *Crouching Tiger* was rated the most popular foreign-language film in the North American film market.

In the chapter, I examine the ways in which Chinese culture and the *wuxia* genre are (re)produced through transnational film discourse, and further unpack how the film becomes a site for cultural negotiation and empowerment. By comparing and contrasting public discourse of different cultural communities, I aim to understand the ways in which Confucian philosophy and traditional martial arts films have been destabilized and/or re-visioned through and successfully engage in cross-cultural audiences. By recounting the notion of Chineseness that is reconstituted through the film and its audience, I argue that Chinese identity is co-constructed as a disparate yet collaborative *project* by audiences from different Chinese communities. *Crouching Tiger* and its international success function as a site of cultural empowerment, and a bridge to communicate, maintain and/or strengthen a symbolic tie with the national identity and an imagined “home.”

Public Discourse as Construction of Film Reception

The Internet has become a major vehicle for individuals and communities to organize and exchange information and discussions about pop cultural productions. As researchers point out, instant communication technologies help facilitate borderless

virtual communities (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Chua, 2008; Ang, 2001, among others). In this chapter I am concerned with how national identity has been formed through online communities. Namely, I explore the receptions of Ang Lee and his transnational films, and further connect it to understand a broader implication of how specific cultural meanings in terms of Chineseness have been constructed, produced, and circulated in and through various online communities.

When viewers co-construct the meanings of a cultural text, they engage in public discourse about films after they see the films through face-to-face communication or online discussions. Hence, ongoing “talk” generated after film viewing is a key factor in understanding the political, cultural and ideological effects that a film text has on an individual and a community. As Sturken & Cartwright (2001) argue, meanings of a cultural text are produced through a complex social interaction among the text, viewers, and the context in which it is perceived. In other words, meanings are created at the moment audiences interpret and *experience* the cultural text.

Scholars have suggested that audiences have various ways of engaging with a cultural text, as they can reject or reconfigure a cultural text (e.g. Morley & Robins, 1995; Ang, 1996; Staiger, 2001; Chua, 2008; Iwabuchi, 2008; Kim, 2008). In this light, audiences could be active interpreters of a cultural production, such as films. Public discourses among viewers continue to process a text, and co-construct a sense of an individual or a communal identity through reflexivity and resonance with the text through different channels of exchange communications. Audience position also impacts one’s film viewing experience and responses. For example, watching a television program

concerning one's homeland country might facilitate a national identification and a nostalgic sentiment for a transnational diasporic subject. Another situation is that audiences might easily and "naturally" identify with characters and themes of locally produced programs, since they are embedded in a culture of their own. Media programs become a cultural space, as Chua (2008) argues, within which local audiences actively engage, appropriate and absorb cultural elements and fragments.

Methodological Note

The multiple resources I use include news articles, published interviews, and Internet bulletin boards. Predictably, there is a growing number of online websites that are catering to different celebrities, films, television shows, popular culture organized by cyber fan communities. The cyber communities travel across restrictive geographical and physical boundaries to connect passionately with each other for exchanging information on popular cultural figures and productions. I particularly focus on Chinese-language websites where I can access collections of discussion forums of Ang Lee and his films. The Chinese-language sites I examine are popular among audiences in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, the U.S. and overseas Chinese communities. Examples of these websites include www.blog.sina.com.cn, www.mtime.com, www.douban.com, pttbbs.org, and bbs.ntu.tw. They are the largest Chinese-language websites devoted to discussions of films by the public-professional film critics and their audiences. In particular, *Sina*, *Mtime*, and *Douban* are specific online discussion forums that include links to various updated news resources about newly released films and discussions from both fans and professional critics. As the most active sites, these digital platforms offer a

community section comprised of message boards, a database that covers information regarding Ang Lee and relevant film information such as news, interviews, actors, actresses, various collection of audiences' notes, film reviews, and open discussion forums, etc.

The sources of media coverage include the *China Daily*, the *Southern China Morning Post*, the *Epoch Times*, and the *China Times*. I used Google and LexisNexis Academic Universe to collect English news published around the world, and WiseNews for Chinese-language news articles and magazine reports regarding *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution* in Greater China. I narrowed down the news resources to the most authoritative newspapers as they present the most valid information, mainly focusing on the Chinese-language newspapers and online discussion boards including film reviews and relevant news.

The *China Daily* is one of the most influential English-language daily newspapers published in Mainland China. It has the widest print circulation of any English-language newspaper in China. The *Southern China Morning Post* is Hong Kong's premier English newspaper. The *Epoch Times* is an independent news media based in New York mainly targeting Chinese overseas readers and international readers. The news coverage predominately focuses on events in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In addition, Ang Lee's autobiography "*A Ten-Year Cinema Dream*" (literally translated from Chinese) is an important text for examining his diasporic subjectivity that has a strong impact on his filmmaking. Since the collection of a large amount of documents is an arduous task, I cross-check the data to examine the intertextual themes of the

documents. Finally, I conduct a textual analysis of *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution*, primarily emphasizing the cinematic narrative, themes, plot, and characters to compare the audience discourse. Such analysis enables me to relate the film texts to the analysis of the ambivalent discourse of Chinese identity. In this chapter, I particularly focus on *Lust, Caution* and its audience responses. In chapter five, I will examine the discourses and receptions of *Crouching Tiger*, particularly concentrating on the aspect of Confucian philosophy and *Wuxia* genre.

Several layers of audience communities are identified and explored in this project. I looked at audiences' responses from Mainland China, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities who primarily live in the United States. I defined audiences broadly, including professional film critics and online fan communities. Reception contexts therefore could be identified as news construction and audience perceptions. A total of about 400 online audience responses, 30 professional critiques, and 238 news regarding *Lust, Caution* and *Crouching Tiger* published the year the two films released--2001 and 2007--were collected and analyzed. Numerous discourses of the two films were (and continue to be) published. I have made extensive use of these published sources, even though it is impossible to exhaust the literature.

My analysis proceeds as following: first, I explicate how *Crouching Tiger* reconfigures an alternative version of Chinese *wuxia* tradition and subverts the dominant ideology of Confucianism; second, I analyze Ang Lee's published interviews and autobiography to understand his diasporic subjectivity that has a heavy impact on constructing an imagined cultural China; and finally, I compare and contrast various

audience perceptions of the represented Chineseness, specifically concerning the *wuxia* genre and Chinese philosophy. I identify the ambivalent themes expressed throughout the published discourses and categorize them into the following sections.

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon: A Dream of China

Crouching Tiger is a Mandarin language film and is adopted from a romantic tragedy novel by Wang Du Lu, a famous Chinese *wuxia* writer. The screenplay is co-written by Taiwanese screenplay writer Wang Hui Ling, Tsai Kuo Jung, and American writer James Schamus. Categorized as a multinational cultural production, it was financially sponsored by film companies from the U.S., Taiwan, and others. The story is set in the Qing Dynasty in ancient China, featuring a young woman, the daughter of a visiting Manchu aristocrat, Jen Yu (Yujiaolong), and her adventure of self-discovery. With a sense of rebelliousness and discontented with her arranged marriage and the contradictions of emotions and feelings, she embarks on an adventure to search for an alternative life. The film starts with the *wuxia* expert Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun Fat) who is a master *wudan* swordsman. He plans to return his legendary sword “Green Destiny” in order to retire from *jianghu* (the world of martial artists) to pursue a peaceful life. However, his plan is interrupted when Green Destiny is stolen by a thief. Mu Bai and his lifelong intimate, widowed female warrior Yu Shu Lien, track the theft to Jen. The film then unfolds a complex relationship between Jen, Mu Bai, Shu Lien, and Jen’s mentor Jade Fox, combining martial arts, romance and high-arts aesthetics. Instead of following a conventional trait of a romantic love story, Ang Lee subverts conventional social codes deeply rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy such as Confucianism, Taoism, and

Buddhism. In other words, by (re)presenting the social constrictions of relationships and conventions that dictate people's daily lives, the film problematizes three main themes of Chinese virtues—chastity, loyalty, and filial piety.

The title *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is a Chinese expression that refers to the underestimated potent characters that lie under the surface of a society or an individual; in Chinese, dragons and tigers signify powerful individuals who have extraordinary potentials or abilities. The title *hidden dragon* signifies Jen, whose name contains the Chinese character for “dragon” who is embedded in her dual lives--as a proper and innocent daughter of a wealthy aristocrat family who longs for freedom yet still grudgingly fulfills her social obligations, and as a passionate yet dark, anarchic rebellion who practices the *wudang* sect of martial arts to pursue her passion of jianghu life. On the surface, it is easy for viewers to underestimate Jen, given her seemingly well-trained life of a daughter of a loyal family who is accomplished in the arts of brush calligraphy and lives a cloistered life. In her secret life, she is a young rebel and is trained as a highly-skilled martial artist. *Hidden Dragon* hence denotes the complex character's double lives as nothing is what it seems for Jen.

Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh) and Jade Fox (Cheng Pei Pei) are two main female characters whose fates closely intertwine with Jen Yu. While having a mentor Jade Fox, who is a villain and urges Jen to break social convention to pursue a carefree life, Shu Lien is portrayed as the role of a moral version of advisor, who spends her entire life pursuing justice, abiding by traditions and represses her feelings for Mu Bai. Shu Lien

and Mu Bai try to convert Jen from a bandit who stole the legendary sword into a virtue of justice.

The story features two repressed love; one is the undercurrent emotions between Shu Lien and Mu Bai, the other is Jen and her secret lover Lo Shiao Hu (Chang Chen). Lo is a rough bandit who lives in the Gobi Desert who stole Jen's comb. His name "Hu" refers to the Chinese character tiger which also reflects to the first part of the film's title "Crouching Tiger." Jen and Lo developed passionate love for each other that puts her in a struggle between her inner desire of true love and docile acceptance of an arranged marriage. Repression characterized by the unspoken love between Shu Lien and Mu Bai plays significant role in the film. Their undercurrents of emotions, desires, and passion are never openly expressed because Shiu Lien was married to Mu Bai's brother who is killed. To express love for each other would violate the honor code of *jianghu* and dishonor the memory of their brother. They honor social codes above their true emotions, feelings and desire, yet the trade off is their true self and suppressed longings. Encountering Jen, the young, wild and rebellious soul, ignites Shiu Lien and My Bai's long-repressed passion. Jen steals Green Dynasty, cross-dresses like a young male *wuxia* fighter, and betrays her mentor Jade Fox puts everybody in jeopardy. Her wild behaviors break *jianghu* chivalric code, leading to the death of Mu Bai and Jade Fox. *Crouching Tiger* ends with Jen's leap from the Wudan Mountain.

Ambivalent Discourse on Transnational Chineseness:

Disrupting Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism

The ambivalent attitudes toward various social constraints are revealed in the representation of Mu Bai and the three-generation female protagonists (Jen Yu, Shu Lien, Jade Fox) throughout the film, which I suggest is a way to problematize the notion of justice, morality, and specifically in this case, Chinese philosophy.

The distinction of *Crouching Tiger* from other traditional *wuxia* films, I would argue, is its ambivalent representation of those alleged “truths” and principles of moral virtues that have been unquestionably pursued in the *wuxia* world. *Crouching Tiger* opens with Mu Bai’s weariness of *jianghu* after years of fighting and killing. He has a love-and-hate relationship with the Green Destiny Sword. Leaving Wudan Mountain and not being able to finish the meditation training, Mu Bai experiences his deep inner conflict of *jianghu* resulting from the finding of the coexistence of both virtue and vice in it. He says to Shu Lien,

Li: During my meditation training I came to a place of deep silence, I was surrounded by light, Time and space disappeared... I didn’t feel the bliss of enlightenment... I was surrounded by an endless sorrow.

When Mu bai unwraps the astonishing Green Destiny and passes it to Shu Lien,

Yu asks: *I don’t understand. How can you part with it? It has always been with you.*

Li: *Too many men have died at its edge. It only looks pure because blood washes so easily from its blade.*

Yu: *You use it justly, you’re worthy of it.*

Li: *It’s time for me to leave it behind.*

Here, we clearly see the ambivalence of *jianghu*. Instead of adopting the stereotypical plots of *wuxia* films, the film reconfigures it. The Wudang Mountains

represent a monastery for Taoist disciples to acquire diligent discipline of martial arts, practice meditation, and pursue the ultimate morality that leads to harmony with the natural world, and reduce conflicts with each other. And yet such pursuit of morality is ironically based on numerous fights and killing in *jianghu*. Being moral and being vicious both come to be fabricated and fraudulent.

Central to Confucianism are human relations and social harmony, which are based on social orders, training, and self-discipline. It suggests social orders needs to be followed in order to maintain a harmonious society. Filial piety, loyalty, and benevolence are three main virtues that should be applied to human relations such as family, friends, and others. The ambivalent attitude toward *jianghu*, and the struggle between the pursuit of personal freedom and the social obligations is not only expressed by Mu Bai, but also Shu Lien. While trying to quell Jen's yearning for the freedom as a fighter in *jianghu* and persuading her to obey the social norms, Shu Lien tells her that "fighters have rules too: friendship, trust, integrity... Without rules, we wouldn't survive for long... [getting married] It is the most important step in a woman's life, isn't it?" She encourages Jen to show filial piety to her parents by following the traditional path to get married. By spending her life pursuing justice and honor and being loyal to her finance who already passed away, Shu Lien represses her genuine feelings with Mu Bai to adhere to social obligations, namely, abiding by the traditional femininity even as a martial artist in *jianghu*. Shu Lien is depicted as a firm believer of Chinese tradition, yet at the same time she is ironically one of the strong female fighters in *jianghu*. Such depiction of the

character is translated into a profound ambivalence of traditionalism and modernism, resulting in a strong ironic contrast, a simultaneous contradiction.

While Shu Lien is portrayed as a character who embodies both traditionalism and modernism, Jen represents another example of the ambivalence of the praxis of morality that is inherent in the construction of the role. Her passion for giving up the privilege of a royal family and breaking free from socially imposed ideologies in order to be a free-floating warrior reflects her secret life as a bandit, who stole the Green Destiny, and more obviously her love affair with Lo (Chang Chen). As a desert bandit from Xing Jiang, the obvious class differences prevent them from being together. The character becomes a metaphor denoting an “ineligible” desire because it contradicts the social bondage- Jen’s arranged marriage. Lo struggles between his emotional attachment and personal longing for Jen. On one hand, he claims he has been an unrecognized wandering bandit who doesn’t follow rules, yet at the same time he also struggles with his desire for Jen and persuades her to return home. He tells her he will marry her when he earns her parents’ respect.

A rational choice and an impetuous emotion are no longer distinct from each other. Internalized social obligations have been translated into the characters’ personal desires. Hence the binary opposition of “social norms” and “personal freedom” is no longer adequate to explain the complexity of human relations. The external socially constructed subjectivity is deeply rooted in the inner self-identity. In order to fulfill their passion and desire, they need to first draw themselves into an *acceptance* of the family and the society. In other words, “desire” itself is not an independent variable separated

from a social structure, but rather a constructed longing and identification that *need* to be fulfilled by the social burden that is imposed on one. The inner desire and the external social forces become intrinsically fused and confused. Ambivalence is therefore a key concept to understanding the complex entanglement, dilemma, and dynamic relationship between rational choices and impetuous emotions, constitutional practices and individual liberty and freedom.

References to the traditional filial piety in Confucius philosophy are constructed throughout the film not as an endorsement, but more as subversion and destruction. It is particularly evident in the representation of Jen, Shu Lien, Jade Fox, and Mu Bai. The emphasis on strong and active female characters indeed challenges Chinese patriarchal authority, especially the macho *wuxia* world. In traditional Chinese society, Shu Lien and Mu Bai serve as the moral model; they sacrifice their personal desires and freedom for a society and a country. However, the film invites audiences to ponder some questions: what exactly is morality or justice in a human society, and is there an intrinsic worth of the ends that righteousness serves? Whose justice is it and for whom does it work? How does a society reconcile various interpretations of morality, or can they ever be reconciled? Throughout the film, Shu Lien and Mu Bai both present intense conflicting emotions toward the principles of morality that they have been following. Rather than gaining peace from *jianghu*, they *suffer* from the principles of morality and they both possess endless inner turmoil.

The relationship between Jade Fox and Jen is also complexly mediated by a strong love and hate relationship. They are long-term friends, embodying a Master-and-

disciple relationship, yet they simultaneously are the most intimate enemies of each other. The relationship between Jade Fox and Jen indicates the fragile yet deeply bonded human relations. They both cannot leave each other, yet toward the end of the story, they both betray each other. Jen once told Jade Fox her ambivalent feeling toward her--that she is frightened and disoriented when she realized her martial arts skills surpasses her own. Fox tells Jen toward the end of the story, "You deserve to die...ten years I devoted to you. But you deceived me...my only family...my only enemy..." This scene echoes Jen's mixed emotions toward Shu Lien who has been trying to direct her to a moral path. The fighting sequence at the Yuan Security Compound highlights the fragile friendship, and by extension, the notion of loyalty in an imagined world like *jianghu*.

By using an ambivalent approach to questions of friendship, loyalty, and trust, Ang Lee challenges the universal notion of humanity and virtues of human thought and conduct, rather than providing a doctrine of absolute truth. It is clear that an ultimate truth provided by the Grand Narratives can no longer satisfy many life situations. Hence, through the narrative of the intertwined entailments of the three-generation female fighters, the film actually invites audiences to ponder: what happens when rules become rule-less, an intimate friend become an enemy, trust becomes betrayal, the established social order is no longer a protection but only repressive, and the principles of justice are actually harmful for human relations?

Toward the end of the film, the unquestionable norms and social obligations emerge as a tragedy, as undetermined ironies. The simultaneous contradiction and conflicting emotions are manifested in the dialogue between Mu Bai and Shu Lien:

Li: *My life is departing. I've only one breath left.*

Yu: *Use it to meditate. Free yourself from this world as you have been taught. Let your soul rise to eternity with your last breath. Do not waste it...for me.*

Li: *I've already wasted my whole life. I want to tell you with my last breath...I have always loved you. I would rather be a ghost, drifting by your side...as a condemned soul...than enter heaven without you. Because of your love...I will never be a lonely spirit.*

The scene again amplifies the irony, ambivalence, and contradictions of the binary of pursuit of morality and a forbidden personal longing. For Mu Bai, the lifetime pursuit of justice and morality ends up a lifelong regret and a tragedy. Fighting under the rules of *jianghu*, romance is the last thing a loner martial artist warrior should worry about. Ironically, the pursuit of an ultimate justice and martial art skill does not bring him inner peace, but instead brings repression and conflict in his genuine feelings toward human relations, as well as constant self-denigration, and the disillusion of a corrupted *jianghu* world. He says multiple times, “Like most things, I am nothing. It’s the same for this sword. It’s just the state of mind.”

The freedom Jen has always longed for in *jianghu* soon becomes disillusionment. The illusion of a complete freedom doesn’t exist because human relations are still ultimately bonded with responsibility, honor, and loyalty that martial arts warriors need to follow. By focusing on the role conflicts, the film challenges audiences’ assumptions of socially accepted moral paradigms such as Shu Lien and Mu Bai with the contrast of social villains Jade Fox, Lo, and Jen. When an imagined moral paradigm actually performs as a burden and social constraint, it becomes disempowering and problematic. Mu Bai, Shu Lien, and Lo embody intense sadness and agony that clearly demonstrate a profound ambivalence – that is, men could suffocate, suffer, and even die from the rules

they create. The socially constructed principles of norms and standards that serve morality or justice could be a double-edged sword, which can both free humankind and constrain it. I therefore argue that this ambivalent approach brings an alternative paradigm, a critical and somehow anarchic viewpoint into the film.

Reconfiguring gender politics

All fighting scenes center around the female fighters who possess martial arts skills and who are far more capable of competing with, and, most of the time, defeating men. Instead of being portrayed as the traditional feminine role who is weak, dependent, or only being sex objects, female characters in this movie are strong and rebellious. Female power is best manifested through the fighting sequences between Jen and Lo in the Gobi Desert, she and a group of male bandits in a tea stall, and with Shu Lien in Yuan Security. To stress the artistic aspect of martial arts fighting sequences, Ang Lee uses a slow pace and poetic movement, together with Tam Dun's grand rhythms of drum performances "Night Fight" in the musical score to highlight Eastern aesthetics.

However, such gender politics in *Crouching Tiger* is actually not a coincidence. In Chinese *wuxia* genre, hero and heroine warriors are not two mutually exclusive subjects, but rather it is common for them to coexist, as Kim (2006) points out. The depiction of female warriors has a long history in Hong Kong *wuxia* genre, while such views might especially compound certain western feminist perspectives on a stereotype of passive Asian femininity. Kim (2006) suggests, feminism is not necessarily why such representations take place because "Orientalism inevitably serves as most U.S. viewers' framework for understanding" (p. 1). Logan (1995) also remarks,

Contrary to the Western perception of Chinese culture as chauvinistic in the extreme, Eastern cinema has featured an extraordinary number of women warriors compared to Hollywood. Tinseltown has long since relegated women to the stereotypes of victim, prize or queen bitch, whereas Hong Kong actioners have always featured fighting females doing battle with the menfolk on an equal footing (Logan, quoted in Kim, 2006).

Ang Lee posits that he is particularly interested in representing strong female characters in his films, as he specifies that “it is just to destabilize a stereotypical impression of Chinese females who have long been portrayed as the different gender tension in traditional Chinese culture, and Chinese societies” (Chang & Lee, 2002). I assert such deployment of female power does not necessarily intend to impose a post-feminist theory to attract global (especially western) audiences (Wu & Chan, 2007), but is more of a tactic to destabilize Western’s long-term Orientalistic imagination of exoticized, fetishized and racialized Chinese Other, particularly passive Asian femininity.

While some scholars argue that Chinese female action figures disrupt masculinity, I tend to believe that such arguments embody an imposed western gender politics on such genre. In the early period of classic Chinese films, the representation of ambiguous gender roles are omnipresent; not as an incredible innovation, it is more common and “natural” to see cross-dresser in traditional Chinese theater such as Huangmei Tone¹¹, for example in 1953 *Liang Sanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (*Butterfly Lovers*). While studying the kinesthetic movements in Chinese action films, Anderson (2001) remarks that Chinese martial arts movements are hard to divide into masculine or feminine. Additionally, the open acceptance and the great popularity of ambiguous gender roles and cross-sex

¹¹ Huangmei opera is also known as Huangmei tone. Originated as a rural folklore and dance, Huangmei tone has existed in Taiwan, Mainland China, and Hong Kong. In Chinese operas traditional, cross-sex performances are very common and typical. The all-male troupe didn’t exist in Huangmei performance prior to 1940 (Kam, 2007; Sui, 2006).

performance in Chinese opera traditions reflect the intrinsically different attitudes between Chinese and Western audiences. This point also explains the different perceptions of *Crouching Tiger*, which is predominantly favored by westerners but not necessarily Chinese audiences, which I will discuss in the following sections.

Ang Lee's Culture (Con)fusion and Mimicry

As a globalized cultural production, *Crouching Tiger* indeed embodies a strong sense of transnationalism, being financed by the U.S.-based Sony Pictures, based on a Chinese *wuxia* novel, produced by Taiwan and Hong Kong, shot in diverse and breathtaking landscapes in Mainland China, and distributed worldwide. Additionally, a “pan-Asian” characteristic is also comprised of actors from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Mainland China. The music is played by Chinese American musicians Yo-Yo Ma and Coco Lee. As Ang Lee points out, it has a global implication as a world citizen. In other words, if America is indeed a desire, what about the dream of a united, pure cultural China, or perhaps a “pan-Chinese identification”? And, what exactly is a *global implication* for a citizen living in a borderless world?

In many of his interviews, Ang Lee persistently says that his traditional Chinese upbringing and the rootless experiences as a *wai-sheng-ren* (people from outside of Taiwan province) in Taiwan, and a Chinese diaspora in the US enable him on the one hand to desire and grasp a cultural root, and yet simultaneously to question it. In other words, a “cultural root” becomes a constructed *survival tactic*, empowering and enabling connections of humanity and solidarity, rather than just as an unchangeable entity. It becomes a means for some, especially diasporic subjects, to achieve agency. Ang Lee

explains the desire in making a martial arts film such as *Crouching Tiger* not only comes from a nostalgia for *classic* China, but also his sense of being a *world citizen* by producing an international and/or transnational film. He views it as a good exercise to “make it reasonable for a worldwide audience—not just a western audience—a worldwide audience and to some degree a modern Chinese audience as well” (Lee, quoted in *Guardian*). To him, it is a test to examine his ability to tell a story with a global sensibility.

By employing a transnational marketing strategy, pan-Asian actors, and combining local and international resources and professionals, it is obvious that Ang Lee is ambitious to move the production beyond nation-states, and to globalize it. Embodying a (con) fusion of syncretic cultures, he always attempts to reconcile disparate and sometimes *incompatible* values and finding coexistence of them. His philosophy of *balancing* two seemingly mutually exclusive or opposite values is translated into the film production. Paradoxically, the balance of “differences” is simultaneously based on a belief of universal humanity. “I think people are universal.” He says in an interview, (*The Guardian*, 2000). To him, humanity, relationships, emotions, and progressions are shared universally by the humankind, so they are the primary elements that we, as viewers are drawn into.

Ang Lee’s conceptions of ancient China, a sense of connection to its history and culture, are reflected through the process of film making. In other words, a sense of connection is mediated through film making... constantly addresses that his culturally

mixed background- the traditional Chinese upbringing and diasporic status--a Chinese living in New York deeply reflexive in his film making.

Personally, coming from Taiwan, I hate to be categorized...all the ethnic, they all expect you to do one thing or another, and I desperately trying to jump out of it. And each time I make that leap, I am stretching myself. So I still want to be who I am, but not who I am at the same time (Ang Lee, *Museum of the moving Image*)

To illustrate, the sense of cosmopolitanism that transcendent polarized or is drawn on culturally particular experience.

Being a Chinese diaspora, the (re)creation of an imagine homeland and culture involves a hybrid, mimicry process. I contend through such mimicry process, instead merely being submitted to an ideologically compromised, autonomy and agency is painstakingly negotiated even it is practiced within a constrained global capitalist film market. He says in an interview, “Who I am, how I was brought up, I use that a lot in my work,” he says. “I feel that deep inside of me; there's a mistrust of depending on things. Everything changes; that's the essence of life. It's kind of Taoist. At a certain age, every Chinese person thinks that way. That's our belief; that's our faith.” As Ang Lee also explains, making *Crouching Tiger* fulfilled his boyhood dream, a dream of a cultural China that never existed (Lee, 2002). As presented in most of his films, a complete freedom or self-agency is always closely intertwined with a social structure. *Crouching Tiger* hence signifies a painstaking cultural negotiation and/or a breakthrough of a binary of ancient Chinese arts and philosophy and modern Western technology (cinema), an imagined homeland and an adopted host country, the local and the global.

Personal history interests with the present, reflected through an intense nostalgic longing for the *loss* of “culture”, or yearning for accomplishing a cultural burden as a

diasporic film director to present qualified, and authentic traditional Chinese films to global audiences in order to glorify Chinese films and the culture (Chang & Lee, 2002). Such nationalist sentimentality is not uncommon among diasporic subjects, especially they usually occupy a culturally and politically inferior status in their host land, as I discussed in previous chapters. And, the *dream* of (re) creating a Memory is partial, selective, and revisionary, to some extent fabricated and fraudulent. Ang Lee's diasporic subjectivity undoubtedly shapes a distinct version of transnational Chinese identity. I suggest that it is indeed the creative filmmaking process that subverts a static notion of "Chinese identity" and the nature of Chinese culture, re-visioning and re-shaping a specific culture within a global context. By examining Ang Lee's discourse on Chinese culture, I am able to gain further understanding of the ways in which his diasporic conditioning redefine and reshape the *wuxia* tradition.

Discourse of Audiences

Theme one: Pan-Chinese cultural pride

The discourse of collective national pride for people of Taiwan is evident in numerous newspaper reports after *Crouching Tiger* won the Oscar for the Best Foreign Language film. I examine 29 articles written about *Crouching Tiger* in the *Epoch Times* and the *World Journal*¹² in 2001 after it won the Best Foreign Language Film of the Academy Awards. Ang Lee has been framed as "the pride of Taiwan" in almost all news titles and content regarding this award. With the consistent emphasis on Ang Lee's ethnic

¹² Both newspapers are very popular among Chinese communities in North America. More data are found on *Epoch Times*. Articles regarding Ang Lee and his films on the *World Journal* are predominantly overlapping with news reports in Taiwan because it ties to *the United Daily News*.

and national origin, he has been discursively constructed as a national hero. It is significant that Lee was honored by both former and current Taiwanese presidents Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou. In 2001, former president Chen had a personal visit with Lee and his family in his hometown Tainan in Southern Taiwan to honor Lee as the first Taiwanese national winner of Academy Award (Chang & Lee, 2002).

Because of *Crouching Tiger*, Ang Lee has been referred *a credit to all Chinese people* in news discourse and audience reviews. The recurrent themes of Ang Lee's success as a Taiwanese national, the first Asian director who is receive Academy Awards, and numerous awards from international film festivals preoccupy all the media discourse. The negative discourses predominantly focus on the question of authentic portrayal of a *wuxia* story, or by extension, *Chinese history, tradition, and culture*. When most of the news discourse praised *Crouching Tiger's* groundbreaking achievement, and elevated Ang Lee as a "national hero," audiences from Taiwan raised questions about the cultural representation of actors' accent and acting. As Kenneth Chan (2004) points out, films like *Crouching Tiger* carry the burden and responsibility of representing an authentic culture. I want to elaborate on this discussion of the ambivalent discourse of the audience by arguing that such reactions reveal a complexity of mixed emotion, national sentimentality, and anxiety about being "Chinese" in a post- and trans- national world order.

The discourse of collective cultural and national pride is also situated in an invariable emphasis of Ang Lee's "Oscar triumph," that is his achievement of introducing Chinese culture into the dominant Hollywood film industry in the West. The particular

interest of his success overwhelmingly presents a mixed cultural chauvinism and deference towards Western culture.

Film industries from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and other East Asian countries such as South Korea are inspired, and eager to emulate the trajectory of *Crouching Tiger*'s success. For example, the most well-known and controversial Chinese Fifth Generation director Zhang Yimou commented that the *wuxia* film market created by Lee can "survive" for two or three years if there are more good [*wuxia*] films made in the market¹³. Later on, both his *wuxia* films *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) were blockbuster hits in international film market. His note on Ang Lee's "inevitable" and unprecedented success in the West, especially the world-influencing Academy Award brought a very high commercial value to the film market of Chinese cinema. Another example is that Chinese sixth generation film directors, such as Feng Xiaogang, aims to win Oscars in order to reach international audiences¹⁴. The strong *desire* to run for Oscar Best Foreign Language Film nomination has driven the production team to speed up their work, following the success of *Crouching Tiger* and *Hero*¹⁵.

Winning an Oscar is regarded as a grand achievement for Chinese film industry, and by extension for East Asian directors. The international success of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger* brought enormous hope to the domestic film industry. An analysis in *China Daily* points out that the use of top transnational film workers, i.e., Chinese

¹³ *Southern Daily*, 24 November, 2001.

¹⁴ Chinese Director Pins His Hope on an Oscar, *China Daily*, 8 February, 2006.

¹⁰ Richard James Havis, Asian American Start Thinking-and-Shooting- Outside the Box, *South China Morning Post*, 20 August, 2006

¹¹ Domestic Film Industries Awaits More Heroes, *China Daily*, 4 January, 2003.

composer Tan Dun, violinist virtuoso Itzhak Perlman, and cinematographer Christopher Doyle signifies Ang Lee's ambition of cross-cultural collaboration. Moreover, Hollywood Mainland kung fu movie stars are important factors contributing to the world's attention¹⁶. One news report states that it was precisely because of the international commercial success re-flourishing the domestic film industry. The argument implies that the Chinese film market has long neglected the public's taste since directors preferred high artistic value which resulted in a shrinking domestic film market. "The public has little interest in watching home produced films and instead opts for those mainly coming out of Hollywood" the report states. Here, we clearly see that the public's taste and has long been shaped by American Hollywood films. The critique of the domestic Chinese directors' films reflects a deep-seated cultural logic—the *intimate* relation of the western film market and the non-western audience. In other words, the cultural logic behind the commercial success signifies the fact that as long as a Chinese film being recognized by a Western award, it almost guarantees popularity in the domestic film market. In other words, it is mainly through the recognition of the world market—especially Hollywood-- can Chinese language films acquire some sort of authority, and to some extent, to be "legitimate" and worthwhile to cultivate.

The success of *Crouching Tiger* has made a role model not only for Chinese directors, but also for Asian Americans. Ang Lee was juxtaposed with other prominent Asian American directors such as Wayne Wang and M. Night Shyamalan who inspire the

community¹⁷. The recurrent theme of the news reports is the praise of Ang Lee's universal filmmaking skills for drawing international attention and shooting stories outside of his own community. For diasporic community, Ang Lee and his films are presented as the great *victory* and *glory* of the Chinese nation, and by extension Greater China which signifies as a *unification* of ethnic Chinese community. The article entitled "*Crouching Tiger* makes South Africans admire Chinese Communities" describes the popularity of the film among both Chinese diasporic community and South African audiences¹⁸. Similar to another news report that compares Ang Lee with other Chinese diasporic directors who are well-known for their Asian American subjected films, it juxtaposes *Crouching Tiger* with Chinese kung-fu movie star Bruce Lee's films shown on E-TV in South Africa. The report states:

There is an oral story/rumor being passed around in South Africa. During the racial segregation era, South African blacks have admiration and respect for the Chinese community because of the fact that Bruce Lee always defeats the whites in kung-fu movies. Hence, after winning the Academy Award, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger*, South Africans will have more respect for Chinese¹⁹.

"South Africans" referred in this report obviously indicates non-Chinese community. Films and cultural icons such as Bruce Lee and Ang Lee in this case become a medium in which viewers project or transform their unacceptable desire and private fantasy into culturally acceptable meanings. The introjection and projection of one's desire form a symbolic cultural nationalism, which represents a symbolic reaction on their physical rejections and exclusions in a society.

¹⁸ *Epoch Times*, 24 January, 2001.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

To illustrate, the news reports I examined include film critiques and analyses of Ang Lee's success. The major theme of the reports is critical exploration of the ways in which his success in the West can bring glorification to all Chinese communities. In one article, Ang Lee specifically points out that the winning of the Academy Award symbolizes that Eastern culture such as Chinese culture is not only recognized but also accepted by the West; it is a cultural phenomenon²⁰. Several reports point out how the major U.S. newspaper such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* exceptionally examine the international marketing strategy of *Crouching Tiger*. By emphasizing the rarity Asian directors reported and analyzed by the prestigious U.S. media, the articles underscored the great achievement of Ang Lee. What has been expressed in the public discourse reveals an ambivalent reaction in the West, essentially the U.S.

Permeating the news discourse is a sense of revival of Chinese cultural nationalism formed within a context of a long-term ambivalent relationship between China and the U.S. For the Chinese community, Hollywood has long been conceived as a competitor (or the most intimate enemy) to defeat, as expressed a title of a report, "China: Winning Global Audiences²¹." However, such "defeat" is simultaneously based on the mimicry of Western filmmaking and marketing strategy, and the recognition by Hollywood first. Moving beyond the film market and to echo the discussion in chapter one, such phenomenon indicates that the West has been subjectively constructed by Chinese communities, which desire to define their self-identity according to the standard

²⁰ Quoted in "Ang Lee: sharing the honor with all Chinese communities" *Epoch Times*, 13 February, 2001

²¹ "China: Winning Global Audience." *China Daily*, 2 July, 2001.

created by the West, and constantly compare themselves with it consciously and unconsciously. In other words, such comparison is inevitable, that is, it is the essential process of constructing a *national identity* as discussed in previous chapters.

The central structuring argument also reveals a long history of local culture, and domestic film industry being infiltrated by the American pop cultural empire. It is therefore not too surprising to see the rampant cultural nationalism following the international success of transnational films of Ang Lee. While *Crouching Tiger* was predominately favored by the Western audiences, it generated lengthy discussions on the cultural representation of Chinese *wuxia* films among audiences in Taiwan, Mainland China, and Hong Kong.

Theme two: Bridging the east and the west

The last theme that is expressed throughout the audience discourses is the cultural achievement of *Crouching Tiger*, which bridges Eastern and Western culture. From the discourse, Eastern aesthetics has been constructed as a pan-Chinese aesthetics whereas the West is generally perceived as the U.S. American culture. Taiwanese audience member okbom (2000) stresses that the film incorporates the character Jen as a symbol of the Western concept of “freedom,” whereas Mu Bai and Shu Lien symbolize the traditional Chinese literati who are emotionally reserved²². S/He continues,

Zhang Ziyi represents part of the American cowboy spirit—to be expressive, love freedom, and pursue dreams. On the other hand, Mu Bai and Shu Lien are constrained by social conventions, and therefore they both are very repressed and unhappy with their lives. Ang Lee questions both core cultural ideals, as the story ends in tragedy. Searching for a balance between the two cultures is the lesson he provides for the viewers. Throughout this film, Ang Lee wins Westerners’

²² bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw

attention, opening up a window for them to understand the sophistication and beauty of Eastern philosophy... Winning Academy Awards means the affirmation of our culture in the world²³.

Overseas Chinese audience members such as Davilee reinforce the idea that *Crouching Tiger* bridges the knowledge gap between the East and the West²⁴. “Ang Lee presents Chinese culture for the Western audiences,” s/he notes. In his critique, Chinese audience member Kai (2006) remarks,

Crouching Tiger becomes a model for many local Chinese directors such as Zhang Yi Mou. They are eager to produce more Chinese *wuxia* films to expand into overseas markets. Now the critical issue is we should consider the ways in which we present our Chinese on screen, and to let Westerners who haven't been exposed to our culture understand different layers of Chinese culture. It is difficult because to some extent we do need to *simplify* our language in order to be understood. “Cultural translation” becomes an issue...²⁵

Taiwanese audience member greenbug (2000) reiterates that *Crouching Tiger* should be a good resource to educate non-Chinese audiences about the specific culture²⁶. In his post, he encourages local (Taiwanese and Chinese) audiences to take their “foreign friends” to introduce them to Chinese culture, as it is also a good opportunity to conduct cross-cultural exchange. A film critique on *Epoch Times* explicitly points out that Ang Lee's diasporic background enables him to be familiar with both American and Chinese audiences' preferences and tastes of films. The flexibility of the script and English subtitles both facilitate international audiences' understanding of the film. Chinese audience member yunyeh (2008) asserts that the “The mysterious Eastern culture presented in the film evokes Westerners' curiosity. *Crouching Tiger* further shapes a

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ <http://culture.zwsky.com/n/200801/23/199716.shtml>

²⁵ http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ca9b1b50100anbc.html

²⁶ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw

future paradigm of martial arts films²⁷.”

Considered collectively, audiences consider the major achievement of *Crouching Tiger* is the aspect of “recognition.” That is, audiences share a collective emotional sentimentality and ambivalence of the success of the film. It is a profoundly mixed feeling. On one hand, Chinese audiences are proud that their culture is finally being appreciated in an international market; on the other hand, the discourse invariably embodies a sense of cultural chauvinism; namely, the constant defense of Chinese culture and repetitive statements of the presumable Westerners’ difficulty to understand the suplicated Chinese philosophy. Such ambivalent emotions are revealed throughout various audience discourses. The discourse of “bridging the East and the West” oftentimes could also reproduce a distinct binary opposition of both cultures.

Theme three: (Re) Constructing Wuxia world and a cultural China

While many fans are fascinated by the cultural representation of *Crouching Tiger*, “authenticity” of the represented *wuxia* world is a much-debated topic in the audience discourse. The discourse also surrounds the Ang Lee’s portrayal of “repression,” which was discussed previously, since *wuxia* is a popular cultural genre that stimulates Chinese people’s imaginations and is derived from a shared history and collective memory. Such collective cultural imagination holds significance. Before engaging in a detailed discussion of the audience’s debate of the *wuxia* genre, we should have a firm grasp on the genre.

²⁷ <http://www.mtime.com/group/live/discussion/144411/>

Wuxia pian is commonly known as Chinese martial arts films, a cinematic genre developed in Hong Kong film market in the 1960s. Ang Lee drew on the *wuxia* tradition yet developed it into a modern format by combining martial arts, traditional and modern language, classic Chinese dancing, opera, and music. We would want to have a brief understanding of *wuxia* before we further discuss the film. *Wuxia* is a cultural world that has more than a thousand year tradition and exists in the popular imagination of Chinese-speaking communities. It is a traditional Chinese literature genre that has been transformed into various cultural forms such as television dramas, films, comics, operas, etc.

Wuxia originally referred to a literary genre that has a history of fictional writing and a long tradition in Chinese popular TV series and films, combining “historical facts, folklore and legends about the heroes who fought against unjust rulers and the corrupt legal system” (Lee, 2003). The *Wuxia* world predominantly features male and sometimes female adventures where a *xia* (a swordsman) is searching for knightly chivalry. It has been considered a macho genre. In Chinese, *wu* literally means martial arts; it usually signifies a powerful warrior who possesses martial arts and searches for ultimate justice and righteousness to help eliminate oppression. *Xia* is also a swordsman. In the *wuxia* world, swordsmen with strong and supreme martial arts usually have extraordinary powers to defend the rights of the helpless and the oppressed, conducting righteous acts. In essence, the spirit of *xia* is heavily influenced by various ancient Chinese philosophies—Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Moism (Lo, 1990; Lee, 2003).

Based on such premise, *wuxia* heroes and heroines in the fantasy world become one of the most popular Chinese genres.

Wuxia fiction, according to Lee (2003), provides “an imaginary world away from the harsh reality caused by political turmoil and economic as well as social upheaval” (p. 283). *Wuxia* fiction reached its climax from the 1920s to 1940s (Lo, 1990). During that period, writers experimented with new ideas such as adding romance, fantasy, and a detailed description of landscape and urban settings to enrich narratives and construct a fantasy world for ordinary readers (Lo, 1990). For viewers, *wuxia* is a popular genre at which they project their feelings, emotions, imagination, and sometimes frustrations with the government while seeking comfort in *wuxia* fantasy culture. *Wuxia* stories usually feature a specific historical period; characters wear period costume (Lee, 2003).

Wuxia films originated from the *wuxia* literary genre. Most *wuxia* films are adopted by popular *wuxia* novels from *wuxia* maestros such as Jing Yong or King Hu. Swordplay characterizes martial arts films developed from the Cantonese-based Hong Kong film industry. Swordplay martial arts films, as Bordwell (2000) points out, comprised the early Hong Kong cinema, and they became a mass-produced commercial genre of film export with broad audiences including East and South East Asians, overseas Chinese communities, and Westerners. Hong Kong *wuxia* films predominately feature fast-paced actions, stylized fighting, magical effects, and fantasy swordplay. Story plots usually are based on distinct characters of villains and superheroes, embracing values of loyalty and faithfulness. Plots of vengeance, competitions for the highest rank of martial arts skills, sensationalism, and vigorous fighting sequences play an essential role in the

Cantonese *wuxia* films (Bordell, 2000; Lee, 2003). Viewers watch *wuxia* dramas mainly for visual pleasure and sensationalism. While Hong Kong *wuxia* film draw much criticism because of its strong emphasis on violence, fighting, and low aesthetic due to its predominant low-budget product, I argue Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger* provides an alternative layer of meaning for martial arts film, disrupting a traditionally preconceived notion of "Chineseness" by his transnational re-interpretation of the genre.

Wang Du Lu's novel *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is a five-part series. Wang's style emphasizes humanistic concerns and the characters' inner worlds; his work elaborates on the characters' dramatic emotions, feelings, and romantic plots in a greater detail (Lee, 2003). As *Crouching Tiger* is condensed and adopted from Wang Du Lu's work, Ang Lee intends to bring in a more sophisticated portrayal of a pair of lovers' romantic tragedy, challenging the dominant ideology of Chinese philosophy, developing nuances from traditional martial arts films, and balancing Eastern and Western aesthetics.

Mixing Eastern and Western filmic philosophy (the translation and simplification of the original story from Wang Du Lu's novel) and employing the production team and actors from various Chinese-speaking regions, Ang Lee destabilizes a static conception of the *Wuxia* genre. Such creativity unsurprisingly challenges Chinese audiences' responses, resulting in a series of critiques and passionate debates over the "authenticity" of the cultural representation of the *Wuxia* world. While the film receives an overwhelmingly warm reception from Western audiences in North America and Europe, the actors' and actresses' non-standard Mandarin accents become an important criteria for Chinese audiences to evaluate whether or not the film is an "authentic Chinese *wuxia* film."

However, it is precisely the non-purity of the spoken Mandarin accent that marks the transnational nature of the cultural product. Chang Chen is from Taiwan with a Taiwanese accent; Zhang Ziyi, who plays Jen, speaks Mandarin with a Beijing accent, and both Michelle Yeh and Chow Yun Fat labor through their lines with a Cantonese accent. Although Zhang Ziyi and the soundtrack composer Tan Dun have actually lived in Mainland China, other principle workers constructed and articulated an imagined cultural China from their shared, collective memory of the land and their previous experiences with the *wuxia* popular culture. As Berry & Farquhar (2006) assert, the mixed accents and origins signify the ethnically diverse China, and the Chinese in diaspora. Through the accented spoken Mandarin and non-traditional (or inauthentic) way to repackage a *wuxia* story, *Crouching Tiger* could be considered a product of transnational Chinese diaspora.

Suona (2009) from Taiwan reflects her viewing experience. S/he says,

I have seen the film five times and not until the third time, did I really appreciate it. We are so used to fast-paced Hollywood movies that we no longer are easily able to appreciate alternative films. Ang Lee presents a very real, down-to-earth style of Chinese culture, featuring ordinary people. There are no fancy clothes, luxury, or magnificent buildings, but only a realistic reflection of people's frugal lifestyle at that time²⁸.

Madgic (2006) comments on the detailed shooting of the fighting scenes,

Ang Lee brings a refreshing perspective of martial arts by concentrating sophisticated fighting sequences and styles. For example, I love the bamboo forest fight where Mu Bai and Jen stand on bamboo stalks, and the nighttime chase when Jen cross dresses in a black outfit as a male thief, leaping up to the roof, running across walls and trees, being chased by Shu Lien...these fighting

²⁸ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

sequences make this film remarkable compared to other coarse *wuxia* films...the scenes are astonishingly beautiful...²⁹

Gnrx (2006) also remarks that “I was completely astonished by the fighting scenes and the ‘gravity leaps’; they are the most beautiful fights I have ever seen in *wuxia* films!”³⁰,

While some audiences appreciate Ang Lee’s reconstruction of *wuxia* fighting scenes, there are viewers who critique that the fighting scenes and the dialogues are exaggerated and inauthentic. Audiences debate whether or not the representation is made to pander to the Westerners’ craving of exoticism. To echo my previous analysis, the heated debate on cultural authenticity is always in a comparative mode; that is, audiences are mainly concerned about Western audiences’ (mostly from North America and Western Europe) perception of the nation as the discussion predominantly focuses on the winning of the Academy Award. Taiwanese audience member conbar (2006) critiques that Taiwanese audiences exaggerate the impact and the performance of *crouching Tiger* simply based on its popularity among Westerners, especially in the U.S.³¹. S/he says, “It seems that our confidence is based on Americans’ approval³².” Such argument is not uncommon. Taiwanese audience member zeox (2006) points out the inauthenticity of the dialogues. He says,

Much of the dialogue is created to appeal to Westerners. I don’t believe that the ancients spoke in this way...I guess the screenplay is written in English and translated back in Chinese. The translation of the subtitle is very funny!!! M Bai’s last line to Shu Lien ‘I have always loved you’ is very modern and fake...plus we can see the wires behind the actors’ back in those fighting scenes, they jump too slow and are not realistic...the scenes last too long...Jen’s cross-dressing thief

²⁹ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

³⁰ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

³¹ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

³² *Ibid.*

role reminds me of Tsui Hark's *wuxia* classic film *the Butterfly Murders*...Lo's clueless dialogues in the film also make audiences laugh out loud, his look just doesn't match his role in the film...³³

Audiences compare Ang Lee to conventional Hong Kong *wuxia* films, such as the most well-known director Tsui Hark's classic works *New Dragon Gate Inn*, the *Shanghai Blue*, or the most well-known Kung Fu series *Hwang Fei-Hung*. In other words, for some fans, Hong Kong *wuxia* film is the prototype of the genre that plays a standard of authenticity to evaluate Ang Lee's interpretation of *wuxia*.

Taiwanese audiences appleapple and gly (2000) note that the dialogue in the film sounds very unnatural³⁴. Gly says,

Ang Lee uses Western notions to tell an Eastern story. The culturally hybrid representation of the story makes the film neither purely Western nor Eastern. The gravity leaps are not authentic, and seems like the American film 'Casper,' or vampires something like that. Plus, the architecture is not Chinese; for example the palace looks like a European castle with a semi-Eastern appearance...all in all, this film may be novel for Westerners, but not authentic for Chinese³⁵.

Audiences from Hong Kong critiqued the slow-paced fight without much action, and consider the films boring and unnatural. Antiach (2000) notes that "the dialogues do not sound like what people would say at that time; they are very contemporary conversations, and they sound very bookish and genteel. Michelle Yeh and Chang Chen speak Mandarin very robotically³⁶." Besides the perceived "unauthentic" gravity leaps and certain martial arts scenes, actors' pronunciation is critiqued by audiences.

³³ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

³⁴ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw

Taiwanese audience member sylvax (2000) expresses his/her dissatisfaction of *Crouching Tiger* as following:

Mu Bai and other actors' martial arts techniques are weak. Life-force and energy are not expressed thoroughly. Hong Kong *wuxia* film master Tsui Hark probably knows traditional Chinese theatrical opera and acting better as we can see from *Peking Opera Blues*, etc. Perhaps incorporating more Beijing Opera would make this film more "Chinese"³⁷.

Again, Ang Lee and his diasporic background are constantly compared to Hong Kong *wuxia* Master Tsui Hark and his works, with the aim to evaluate whether or not *Crouching Tiger* is "Chinese" enough. In other words, the main criticism of the film from Chinese audiences focuses on the charge of Ang Lee's interpretation of *wuxia* in Western terms, and its "self-exoticising" strategy to attract Western audiences.

However, Chinese audience member wenchingyu (2006) on the other hand asserts the contribution of *Crouching Tiger*³⁸. He suggests that this film brings more Chinese audiences to value and (re) search their cultural roots and consolidate their cultural identity that that was once removed and destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. The film is perceived as a form of *cultural education* not only for international audiences, but also for Chinese themselves. The global popularity of *Crouching Tiger* indeed functions as wenchingyu comments,

For a long time, Chinese as well as other countries lack respect for the Chinese culture; Chinese themselves do not have a strong emotional attachment to the cultural tradition. Following the increasingly "modernization" and "westernization" of the nation, we gradually lose our attachment and understanding of moral, historical, and cultural values of ancients. It is as if Chinese civilization only has existed for the last thirty years, and doesn't include the previous five thousand years of history. I re-read many *wuxia* novels after my

³⁷ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw

³⁸ <http://www.mtime.com/my/yuhailinlin/blog/17559/>

first time seeing *Crouching Tiger*. Then I went back to watch it again and was able to connect it to other cultural references from classic *wuxia* works such as Jin Yong's classics *the Book and the Sword*, *the Legend of the Condor Heroes*, *the Smiling Proud Wanderers*, etc³⁹.

Audiences view *Crouching Tiger* as a chance to re-connect to the essence of *wuxia* and Chinese culture. Additionally, the success of the film brings pride to the community, as audiences "recognize how difficult it is to re-construct a Chinese tale and translate it into a global visual image that could be appreciated worldwide" (wenchingyun, 2006). To illustrate, *Crouching Tiger* functions as an infinite intercultural process and discursive communication site, through which audiences (re)affirm and co-construct the meaning of Chineseness, as well as being reflexive as a Chinese under current social circumstances. *Wuxia* values and traditional Chinese culture once again becomes a heated discussion topic for the moral challenge of contemporary Chinese life. What constitutes an "authentic" Chinese culture is therefore an issue of cultural negotiation.

Theme four: Nostalgia and reflexivity

For most audiences from Mainland China, the representation of Chineseness in *Crouching Tiger* intensively evokes an emotional and *nostalgic* resonance. Audiences spend much time discussing the landscapes, various classical Chinese cultural elements and the *wuxia* genre in the film. Audience member Jason (2008) from Shanghai comments that *Crouching Tiger* evokes a deep resonance for classic Chinese culture⁴⁰. He says, "We as Chinese need to ask ourselves questions such as 'who are we? Where do

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ <http://www.mtime.com/my/984824/blog/1326541/>

we come from?’ in order to engage a deep, thorough self-reflexivity of our cultural identity.” He continues:

There are no exaggerated or phony Chinese cultural elements presented in the film. We see a very authentic historical setting presenting our ancestors’ lives and further leading the viewers to a nostalgic dream. Ang Lee aims to bring those lost classic Chinese culture back to our memory... We are so westernized that we seem to be no longer familiar with our cultural root, which is why some people think this film is ‘unrealistic’... *Crouching Tiger* interprets a classic Chinese *wuxia* tale in a modern, Western cinematic way. This film also incorporates Ang Lee’s personal dream of China. We see a traditional Chinese literatus’ inner world—reserved, merciful, and persistent—reflected in the struggles among the characters. Mu Bai and Shu Lien’s consistent guidance and caring for Jen and Lo reveal their lifelong commitment of mentoring and ...this portrayal reflects a larger context of Ang Lee’s merciful and sensitive attitude towards other people’s misfortune.

Crouching Tiger is considered a cultural product that passes down the essence of a five thousand year Chinese tradition and philosophy. A strong nostalgic sense of the past and cultural memory and reflexivity are expressed throughout audience discourse.

Since *wuxia* is one of the most popular literary and film genres, audiences can easily relate to the characters and the story line. Most audiences watch *Crouching Tiger* multiple times and express their deep emotional resonance of their viewing experiences. It can be argued that one of the main reasons for the success of *Crouching Tiger* is the portrayal of the fictional characters, romance, fantasy, and Chinese philosophy in *jianghu*. All the intertwined elements and perceptions subtly intersect to arouse a sense of cultural identification and nostalgic reflection. The film reflects a *lost* aspect of classic Chinese culture that used to be in numerous audiences from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas communities’ cultural memory and their longing for lost social vigor. Such nostalgic feelings should be contextualized as a general response to encountering the

western modernity. China, especially, has been going through dramatic socio-economic reformation since the 1990s.

Chinese audience member sololau (2008) comments that the representation of the fighting scenes in the bamboo forest translates the poetic of Eastern aesthetics well into a visual language, since bamboo represents righteousness, which is a central spirit in the *wuxia* world. He says,

We gain great visual pleasure and experience the real, concrete, authentic Eastern poetic feeling while watching the film. Jen and Shu Lien's fighting styles well incorporate the *ying* and *yang* of Taoism. I can't help but wonder about my own life after watching the film. What is the meaning of life⁴¹?

Taiwanese audience member Quiff (2000) expressed his intense nostalgic feeling toward *Crouching Tiger*. He notes,

There must be many, many *wuxia* fans who are so moved to see the dream and fantasy of the *wuxia* world being presented on the big screen worldwide. The film reminds me of the good old times when I skipped class, secretly hiding under the bed (in order not to be caught by my Mom) every night in junior high school, reading Jing Yong novels again and again until I can almost remember every single line of the story. In fact, most of my knowledge about Chinese philosophy is from reading *wuxia* literature, not the textbook... Through the notion of *wuxia*, Ang Lee presents the essence of Chinese culture thoroughly and seriously. Compared to the Hong Kong *wuxia* commercial films, *Crouching Tiger* digs deeper into the conventions of the genre of the *wuxia* tradition. It contains all the essential elements such as inter-ethnic romance, cross-dressing fighter, Purple Yin poison, vengeance, sword fights, etc. I was so touched to see how vibrant the film authentically represented *wuxia*; I had tears in my eyes during the fighting scene of Jen and Shiu Lien...⁴²

Respectively, some Taiwanese audiences state their astonishment at how the “Chinese ink and wash painting” like *wuxia* scenes were shown on the big screen. *Wuxia* fans also distinguish themselves from audiences who watch the film just to support

⁴¹ http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4b9f54530100an64.html

⁴² <bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw>

transnational Chinese films. In their minds, this film presents more than a popular Chinese film, but fulfills their nostalgic dream of the *wuxia* world.

Elliot (2000) also remarks that audiences who are familiar with *wuxia* would understand the “aura” of the film, that is, Ang Lee expresses the fantasy world thoroughly. “I was so very moved to see the eloquent portrayal of sword fighting that I was in tears while watching it,” Elliot says.

Western audiences must have a hard time comprehending the essence of the film, given that this is an entirely new and unexpected representation of Chinese martial arts...perhaps Chinese audiences could understand better, and Western audiences might merely see the exotic side of the other culture. I always expected Ang Lee would enhance the level of *wuxia* films by using astonishing special visual effects and he didn't disappoint me⁴³.

Audience member sulfadiazine (2000) interprets the film as an alternative representation of *wuxia*, compared to traditional Cantonese martial arts films. He comments that viewers may not be used to the visual style of *Crouching Tiger*, given that most Chinese audiences grow up watching the “stereotypical *wuxia* films” that do not focus that much on drama and the inner world of characters, but more on fast-paced fighting styles. Ang Lee's inclusion of geographic and ethnic diversity preserves Wong Du Lu's expansive and inclusionist view in his novels. Yet since such inclusion of ethnic and regional diversity has rarely been presented in previous *wuxia* films, hence the debate on “cultural authenticity” has been raised across audiences from different Chinese communities. I will further elaborate this point in the next section. Fan Jazzy (2000) also notes:

⁴³ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw.

Even though there are places that could be “problematic” such as free running, the slow-motion fighting scenes that do not match the typical *wuxia* warriors’ fast-paced actions, the film yet accurately presents a delicate, vigorous portrayal of fanciful images on screen, bringing the beauty of Chinese martial arts into the international film market. This film brings back one part of our long lost and treasured classical Chinese culture, which was once popular in our parents’ and grandparents’ generations! I was so absorbed in the film that I was in tears while watching the film...*Crouching Tiger* re-granted the dignity and respect that *wuxia* films deserve...We should be so proud to see a film on screen which can really awaken and remind us of the beauty and significance of traditional Chinese culture, and hence to be more confident to be Chinese...⁴⁴

Chinese audience member *raison_detre* (2005) argues that the film aims to present a wonderful balance of drama and action, and a combination of folklore, legends, and historical facts. He continues.

An ideal world of the ancients and Chinese literati is a world in which one is well versed in both martial arts and literature. The fusion of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism represented in the film speaks to Ang Lee’s dream of a united cultural China...it is also a dream of a huge fan of *wuxia* like myself, being extremely moved by the cultural representation...it is also a collective dream of the majority of Chinese who share a nostalgic longing for a disappearing ancient Chinese culture and value...*a China that is fading away in our heads*...⁴⁵

The above statements reveal an ambivalent emotion of the film—a combination of melancholy and delight. The cultural discourse of *wuxia* in *Crouching Tiger* on one hand plays a crucial role in strengthening a sense of self-identity. Yet, on the other hand it provides a source of self-reflexivity, that is, the questioning of an essential discourse of Chinese identity.

The discourse of Chinese audiences demonstrates the dream of the *wuxia* world that is deeply embedded in many people’s lives, as a “root” of Chineseness. Audience

⁴⁴ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw.

⁴⁵ http://www.mov8.com/dvd/freetalk_show.asp?id=28041

member *raison_detre* (2005) states, “I believe that Chinese who really love traditional *wuxia* would be deeply moved by the film, and understand the collective dream of China that is surging in our blood as Chinese.” Further, he argues that the spirit of *wuxia* has long been part of Chinese culture, representing an old China.

It represents the traditional moralist value of China, and yet it is disappearing...we love the film because we long for our past, the lost Chinese cultural spirit. The old moral values and martial arts spirit are just like bones and blood to our human bodies. They are symbols of Chinese culture...⁴⁶

Another Chinese audience member says, “Toward the end of the film, I can’t help myself but cry...It is the sense and the aura of solitude and repression, and the intense emotions presented in the film that touch me. It forces me to reflect back to my own life...⁴⁷” Davidgood (2006) responds that “I fell in love with the film the first time I saw it. The struggles between social obligation and personal freedom reflect my own gay identity⁴⁸.”

The discourse above is filled with a strong sense of longing for, and passionate emotions experienced in the past. Essentially, the audience discourse is imbued with nostalgic melancholy over a lost “past.” Such nostalgia should not simply be condemned as a tainted version of history or cultural memory, discontent, or merely as complacent and reassuring in this context. On the contrary, it reflects a complex, ambivalent emotion toward not only the “past” but also the present and the future. Boym (2001) examines the effects of post-communism in postsocialist Europe and Russia in her work *The Future of Nostalgia*. Nostalgia, as she explicates, “shared some symptoms with melancholia and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ <http://www.mtime.com/group/live/discussion/144411/>

⁴⁸ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

hypochondria” (p. 5). According to her, there is a distinction between “reflective” and “restorative” types of nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia evokes a collective national imagination and past that is recoverable and returnable, whereas reflective nostalgia concerns the personal, collective, and affective cultural memories that are ambivalent, ironic, inconclusive, fragmentary, ambiguous, and compassionate (Boym, 2001).

To borrow the distinction, in this case I contend that the audience’s nostalgic reflection is more reflective than restorative, yet at the same time it seems a combination of both. That is, even though *wuxia* is an imaginary cultural world, it represents a quintessential ancient Chinese value that contributes to a collective national imagination. Ambivalence arises from a sense of longing for a lost pre-existing society before the modern reformation. Audience discourse of such reflective nostalgia, in this sense, also implies critical reflection. It signifies an intersection of personal and collective cultural memories, and enduring past that is reminded, invoked, and remembered through the images of *Crouching Tiger*.

For audiences from Mainland China, nostalgic sentimentalism in relation to traditional values vanishing in a “post-socialist” China is particularly intensive. Given the political turmoil in China and Taiwan and the increasing Westernization of both nations, such yearning for the past embodies a critical reflection for “the good old days.” In the age of “post Material China”, as Huang (2000) coined, Chinese people experience tremendous economic and social transformation from the old system of “planned economy” to market economy (Lu, 2007). Following such urbanization and industrialization is the emotional uncertainty and insecurity. Materialistic desire

characterizes almost every action in the nation. As Huang (2000) points out, now Chinese are struggling “to build their own consumer culture while dealing with their loaded historical past such as thousands [of] years of cultural residue and the more recent political turmoil such as the Cultural Revolution” (Huang, quoted in Lu, 2007, p. 150). Under the drastic socioeconomic transition, what substitutes for the quickly-vanishing old cultural values such as Confucianism, traditional familial structure and the old, collective and caring community life is yet social alienation, the breakdown of interpersonal relationships, and endless materialistic desire that causes the psychological confusions and moral dilemmas. The “urban generation” (Zhang, 2007), such as the film’s audiences, therefore uses the cinematic discourse as a way to re-engage in a moral ideal. The “past,” whether it is existing in collective memory or imagination, has been (re)kindled through Ang Lee’s cinematic discourse. Such reliving of the past in memory revitalizes personal passions and contributes to a different understanding of Chineseness.

Crouching Tiger plays an essential role in reinforcing one’s sense of “being Chinese” in a global world. It further contributes to a “cross-cultural” emotional solidarity, reconfiguring a collective cultural identity. In a broader sense, political ideologies divide Taiwan and Mainland China due to the Civil War, yet through the audience discourse, a rare untied and collective imagined Chinese identity has been reinforced and reformed. Nostalgia, as Palmer (2007) posits, “weaves together fantasy, consumption, and an emotionally colored interpretation of the past to create a ‘new’ yet seemingly continuous notion of identity” (p. 183). To put it another way, one can argue that *Crouching Tiger* becomes a site of intercultural connection for both nations, and

Chinese of different origins to negotiate a collective sense of self. *Wuxia* in this case is conceptualized as an essential element that evokes emotional resonance about Chineseness in the past, becoming a source of inspiration and cultural connection. The nostalgic discourse articulates reflexivity, connecting the present to the past, and juxtaposes past values with those of the present, while vindicating the past. To illustrate, *wuxia* is a site of pan-Chinese collectivism.

Additionally, the fantasy world of *Wuxia* has successfully been transformed into a cross-cultural mediated experience. The realms of fantasy and consumption are inextricably linked in this cultural text, which references a commonly shared pop cultural experience of the viewers. Appadurai (1996) once stated that collective imagination has a projective sense that “creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood.” The intersection of restorative and reflective nostalgia represents a complex ambivalence. Indeed, Ang Lee follows the logic of global economy in marketing consumable images of the traditional Chinese cultural icon for international audiences. However, I suggest that one should not overlook the impact that cultural commodity actually has on the “local” audiences themselves.

Finally, cultural authenticity also becomes an ambivalent site; that is, what constitutes an “authentic” cultural China is fundamentally based on a constructed, imagined *wuxia* world that should be subject to interpretation. Hence, the question becomes: if as some professional critics’ claim *Crouching Tiger* is a cultural product of self-Orientalism that essentializes and/or fetishizes Chinese culture, what exactly should a non-essentialized and authentic cinematic discourse of Chinese culture be? The

discourse of Chineseness in *Crouching Tiger* raises the debate of cultural authenticity and discussion on bridging the East and the West.

Conclusion

Crouching Tiger indeed plays a crucial role in the history of cinema, shaping and reshaping a paradigm of “transnational Chinese cinema.” Its ambivalent and ambiguous status speaks to the nature of a diasporic cultural production, that is, uncategorizable and indeterminate. Not only does the cinematic discourse of Chineseness in *Crouching Tiger* challenge a static notion of national identity, but it also repackages, revisions, and reshapes the paradigm of transnational Chinese films, and specifically the *wuxia* film genre. Audience members co-construct the meaning of Chinese identity and transnational cultural China, and utilize the film as a discursive site to negotiate and renegotiate their cultural identity.

In this chapter, I argue that *Crouching Tiger* should be considered a site of infinite cross-cultural communication that generates enormous discussions across audiences, from professional film critics to online fan communities. The discourse of audience members reveals four themes: pan-Chinese collective cultural pride, narrative reflexivity and nostalgia, cultural authenticity, and finally the discourse of bridging the East and the West. Moving beyond the simplified criticism that primarily focuses on the self-Orientalism debate among professional critics, I suggest that *Crouching Tiger* indeed provides both Chinese and non-Chinese audiences a site of imagining the nation demonstrated by the audience discourse. Online audience communities tour the *wuxia* culture and cultural China represented in *Crouching Tiger*, through which they take

various journeys of self-reflection and emotional resonance when they watch it multiple times.

The different audience communities, I argue, contribute various interpretations and meanings to Chineseness. It is indeed the various processes of interpretation that invite a productive cultural dialogue that furthers one's understanding between disparate subjectivities and positionalities. *Crouching Tiger*, as a product of cultural syncretism, also signifies a constant negotiation of an ethnic minority artist's participation within a global context. Ang Lee's strong emotional attachment with the ethnic identity is transformed into a new *opportunity* to appreciate and critique the past- the history and the positioning. Essentially, the *commitment* of his ethnic and national identity functions as a strategy to relocate his positioning in the ethnic group while participating in a transnational world.

Chapter Five—The Discourse of Cultural and National Pride: The Ambivalent

Discourse on Chinese Identity in *Lust, Caution*

Personally, coming from Taiwan, I hate to be categorized...all the ethnic, they all expect you to do one thing or another, and I desperately trying to jump out of it. And each time I make that leap, I am stretching myself. So I still want to be who I am, but not who I am at the same time.

Ang Lee, *Museum of the Moving Image*

In this chapter I seek to explore the rich thematics of *Lust, Caution* and situate my analysis within a broader historical context. Interestingly, this film has received lukewarm reviews in the U.S., yet it has generated enormous passionate and divergent debates in pan-Chinese regions including Taiwan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore and East Asia in general. The plethora of reviews ranged from the debate on the “naming” of the film, such as whether or not this film should be considered “Taiwanese cinema,” to the nostalgic reconstruction of an old Shanghai city, and the representation of the history of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Given the current political climate in China and Taiwan, the controversial portrayal of the national history triggered deep-seated patriotic resentment and outbursts of chauvinistic nationalism in Mainland China. Yet, it received uniform praise among Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities. The intense divergence of receptions from the Pan-Chinese regions indicates the collective political consciousness

of the national identity is at stake. The discourse of pan-Chinese identity is therefore deconstructed, reconstructed, and punctuated by heated controversies.

I attempt to examine audience discourse, not only to problematize the notion of Chineseness and antagonize, anger, or dispute it, but to *understand* why and how perceptions are formed. Through prevalent passionate public discourse circulating around Ang Lee and his films, the Internet becomes a site for the fans to connect (and sometimes to disassociate) with each other.

The chapter proceeds as following: I begin with a textual analysis of *Lust, Caution*; second, I incorporate Ang Lee's published interviews to understand his filmmaking processes and cinematic construction of Chinese identity which is closely influenced by his diasporic conditioning; and finally, I compare and contrast various audience perceptions of the represented Chineseness in *Lust, Caution*, and the ways in which the audiences co-construct, and (re)produce the notion of Chinese identity as a site of indeterminate ambivalence. I identify the recurring themes expressed throughout the published discourses and categorize them into the following sections.

Only Through Performing Can One Reach the Ultimate Truth of Self

Lust, Caution unfolds in Japanese-occupied Shanghai in 1942 during the Second Sino-Japanese War, which is also known as War of Resistance Against Japan and invention of Manchuria, under the collaborationist "puppet" regime of Wang Jingwei (1940-1945). It was a sensitive period that has rarely been explored by historians or portrayed in contemporary cultural productions. The story explores the ambivalent nature

of love and betrayal, the blurred area of reality and fiction, nationalism and patriotism, self and the Other.

The film begins with a somber establishment shot of Yee's residence, the headquarters of Wang Jingwei's government. Then the camera moves to the mahjong game in progress at Yee's, which is located at an elegant residence with numerous guards. Wong Chia Chi (Tang Wai), a sophisticated, well-dressed wife of a wealthy Hong Kong importer, also known as "Mrs. Mak," played Mahjong with Mr. Yee's (Tony Leung Chiu Wai) wife Yee Tai-tai (Joan Chen)⁴⁹ and their socially elite friends' wives. Ang Lee begins the film by building suspense and an eerie atmosphere. Yee is the security chief of Wang Jingwei's puppet regime, the puppet state set up by the Empire of Japan. Wong plays a secret nationalist agent with a patriotic mission to assassinate Yee, who has viewed as a national traitor working under Wang Jingwei.

Playing mahjong involves a high level of skill, strategy, and calculation; the game functions as a metaphor that signifies undercurrent events are in progress. At the table, four women- "Mrs. Mak", the hostess Yee Tai-tai, avaricious and grasping Leung Tai-tai, and young, attractive Ma Tai-tai gossip about the politics, families, and business by switching dialects between Mandarin and Shanghai dialect. They all dress in traditional Chinese cheongsam, wearing delicate makeup and nail polish, which effectively conveys their elite social status. The close-up shots of the mahjong game clearly set the tone of the film, that is, suspenseful, gloomy, and repressed. The ladies are busy playing mahjong and they gossip incessantly about each other's lives. Coupled with the highly contextual

⁴⁹ "A Tai-tai is a married woman with a certain social status – "Ma Tai-tai means something like "Madame Ma." (Lovell, 2007, Lust, Caution)

mahjong game jargons, their gossip is also highly coded with metaphorical and nonverbal language such as the expressions in their eyes, the lifting of one's eyebrows, and the smiles during conversations. Conversations range from collecting information, gossip, to comparing each other's wealth and husbands' businesses, signifying a subtle competition amongst the four women. Traditional Chinese snacks such as wonton soup, dried dates, and sticky rice are served. As the most common social activity, competitions between the players could be observed from the size of diamond rings flashed under its glare, the quality of fabric that are made of their cheongsam, make-up, manners, from the game itself to their real lives.

By playing endless mahjong with wives of Shanghai elites, Wong Chia Chi successfully earns Mr. and Mrs. Yee's trust. However, the repetitive losing of the game also signifies her seemingly doomed status as a failure in her patriotic assassination mission. The film progresses to the scene in which Wong Chia Chi walks into a coffeehouse in Shanghai. She makes a phone call with coded language, and then sits and waits for her secret resistance comrades to execute the assassination mission. As mentioned previously, Ang Lee devotes extreme efforts to re-create an authentic historical setting of 1940 Shanghai street scenes. The décor New Commander K'ai's Café is located at the corner of Nanjing West Road and Seymour Street in the French Concession. The series of shops include Ping-an Theatre, the Siberian Fur Store, and the Green House ladies' clothing store which historically existed in the 1940 Shanghai. In interviews, Ang Lee says, "Everything is authentic, including the plate number on the rickshaws, or Buttonwood trees on Nanjing Road. We planted every single tree."

Putting tremendous efforts and meticulous attention into achieving historical authenticity, Ang Lee and the crew traveled to Penang, Malaysia to reconstruct old Hong Kong streets from the 1940s. As Taiwanese cultural critic Lung Yin-tai points out, Ang Lee transformed himself into a cultural ethnographer and anthropologist⁵⁰. While discussing the meticulous attention to details of the décor, settings and materials, Ang Lee talks about his memory of his family and father. Many of the materials of the Republic of China era are lost, and hardly be found. Actors and actresses went through a series of training in order to become familiar with that era. For three months, they read Eileen Chang's works, her story with her most well-known lover Hu Lan-cheng,⁵¹ took language courses, listened to the popular music and watched popular movies of that era.

The nostalgia is not only invoked in the film, but also Ang Lee's interviews. By linking his personal memories of his father, family, and the nation to larger political and historical discourses of China, the fragmented parts of history are pieced together, mediated, and manifested not only in the film production but also the film making process. *Lust, Caution* becomes a site of mediation for his projected emotional attachment, fantasy, and affective desire of the history of China. He consistently speaks about his memory of his father, imagined classic Chinese culture, and the most turbulent era of China during the Japanese occupation. The nostalgia that is invoked moves beyond a simple intention to please the Western (or by extension international audience), or to simply mimic Hollywood styles of Chineseness. But rather, he intends to "twist," and

⁵⁰ Lung Yin-tai, "Lust, Caution," *China Times* (25 September, 2007).

⁵¹ Chang's well-known first marriage. It is said that the story *Lust, Caution* is her autobiographical story with Hu Lan-cheng, who is also a prominent literary figure and official, serving briefly in Wang Jingwei's government. The couple was considered as traitors by some Chinese. Both of them are controversial figures in Chinese history.

bring into question of the long perceived static notion of Chineseness and its historical authenticity.

The film moves forward with a long flashback sequence in 1938 to express Wong Chia Chi's journey from being a young, naïve college student to a secret agent of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), the government of the Republic of China. At Lingnan University where she starts her college life, she encounters Kuang Yu-ming (Wong Lee-hong) who hosts a patriotic drama club that aims to perform various patriotic fund-raising plays to enhance anti-Japanese occupation resistance. Chia Chi was recruited and a group of college students forms their first serious patriotic play at Hong Kong University. Kuang Yu-ming once tells the fellow students that through performance, oneself is no longer a real self since it is acting. The play was a successful hit that ends with a climatic scene when Wong Chia Chi shouts: *"Let me bow to you on behalf of our country, my dead brother, and our nation for generations and generations to come! China will not fall! China will not fall!"*

Choked with emotion and tears, Wong's trembling voice resonates around the hall. Audience members stand, clap, and shout "China will not fall" with tears in their eyes. Here, nationalism and patriotism are deeply invoked by the climatic scene of the play. The group of college students, due to their patriotic spirit and led by Kuang, later decided to structure an assassination plan to contribute to the war against Japanese occupation. Mr. Yee, working as special agent of the Wang Jingwei regime, is their target.

For the government of the Republic of China, individuals who appear to collaborate with the Empire of Japan are undoubtedly traitors and need to be killed.

Wong Chia Chi is chosen to be the undercover agent and to perform as “Mrs. Mak,” a successful Hong Kong businessman’s wife, and is required to approach Yee Tai Tai, and insinuate herself into their social circle. In one scene, she was “assigned” to sleep with her fellow student from the patriotic drama club, with whom she does not have any physical or emotional attachment, in order to be familiar with sexual behavior that she will face with Yee and to perform the wealthy, well-experienced, mature “Mrs. Mak.”

However, her first assassination mission fails, as one of Yee’s subordinates, Tsao, finds out their real status and Mr. and Mrs. Yee move back to Shanghai. At this point, Yee is already deeply attracted to “Mrs. Mak.” During that period of time in Chinese society, a woman’s virginity and sexuality to some extent is considered as essential as one’s life. Wong’s forced sacrifice of it indicates the severity of Chinese nationalism. This is the very beginning of Ang Lee’s challenge of nationalism, instead of endorsing it. Ironically, the explicit sex scenes, and the representation of a Chinese woman’s sexuality in relation to the seductiveness trigger criticism from some audiences, especially from Mainland China. By presenting the patriotic students’ reckless mission that inevitably results in a failure and the killing of the innocent, the film unpacks the always unquestionable patriotism and unfolds the complexity of humanity, the binary diction between moral and immoral, right and wrong.

Kuang and Wong reconnected after three years and resumed the assassination mission. Yee and “Mrs. Mak” thus reconnected. Mr. Yee becomes the head of the secret police department for Wang Jingwei’s government, and is responsible for capturing and executing the resistance who are working for the government of the Republic of China

(Kuonmintang). “Mrs. Mak” and Mr. Yee developed their “love” into a deep ambivalent and emotional relationship through violent yet extreme passionate love relations. The line between love and hate is blurred. Their relationship further challenges audience’s perceived “normalcy” of love, echoing the title of the film “Lust, Caution.” Wong has become greatly immersed in her performing as “Mrs. Mak,” constantly oscillating and struggling between her performed role and her “true self.”

In the name of nationalism, “loyalty” and “betrayal” need to be redefined, as it is usually presented as opposed to each other. Loyalty to the Chinese nation is challenged after the head of PRC secret agents, Wong and Kuang’s supervisor, gradually revealed his true, selfish, and menacing face that is under the mask of national loyalty. In other words, the notion needs to be contextualized. Betrayal on the other hand, is not a big deal as long as it is under the name of nationalism. For example, in a scene where Wong is meeting with Kuang and another skilled secret spy of ROC government Old Wu, Old Wu says affirmatively and emotionally to Wong, “*As an agent there is only one thing, loyalty. Loyalty to the party, to our leader, and to our country.*” Yet, Old Wu did not keep his promise to deliver the letter Wong wished to send to her father in England. All the broken promises, unnecessary killings, and authoritarian political orthodox have gradually shaken her belief in the nationalist party and the nation.

Performing, for Wong, is no longer simply a performance. Wong immerses herself into the fictive role, yet she finds that she is not performing herself, but instead *being and becoming a true self*. As she has slowly developed her passion toward Yee, she tells both Kuang and Wu about Yee:

He knows better than you how to act his part. He not only gets inside me, but he worms his way into my heart. I take him in like a slave. I play my part loyally, so I too can get inside him. And every time he hurts me until I bleed and scream before he comes, before he feels alive. In the dark only he knows it's all true.

Through their passionate and sometime animalistic, violent sexual behaviors, they both release their oppressed "self." Under the lines exist an extreme ambivalence of identity; that is, through performing and imitating as "something by nature cruel and brutal: animals, like her characters, use camouflage to evade their enemies and lure their prey" (Lee, quoted in Lovell, 2007).

The three controversial sex scenes present the progress of Wong and Yee's relationship. The first scene is simply violent, sadistic, and animalistic, dominating and being dominated. Then their relationship progresses to be deeply emotional and passionate, yet simultaneously conflicted for both of them. For Yee, he must remain cautious, emotionless because of the nature of his job, yet he develops a strong emotional attachment to Wong Chia Chi. For Wong, she performs "loving" Yee in order to set him up for an assassination.

The *love* presented in the film is not beautiful, but rather, cruel and destructive. In a struggle with her inner self, Wong is anxious to experience love, but must remain obligated self, a professional patriotic secret agent who is forbidden to be emotionally attached to her enemy. However, she can only reach her pleasure--being with Yee, by reimagining the pain, that she needs to have him killed eventually. Paradoxically, she can be true to herself by *performing* someone else, or just *being* herself. Her ambivalent feeling toward the government, as a member of the collective self and political

consciousness is in fact deeply contradictory to her desire. It is no longer clear whether the desire is constructed or natural. Self and Other become intersected and intertwined.

Yee, on the other hand, has ambivalent feelings about being perceived a “traitor” who served for the official in puppet government developed by Japanese, as he believes that through cooperating with the enemies he can help re-develop Republic of China. In one scene when Wong and Mr. Yee meet in a Japanese tavern, their conversation proceeds as following:

Yee: You hear that? (Japanese singing) They sing like they’re crying, like dogs howling for their lost masters! These Japanese devils kill people like flies, yet deep down they’re scared as hell. They know their days are numbered since they got the Americans on their case. Yet, they still hang around with their painted puppets, and keep singing their off-tune songs-just listen to them! I know better than you how to be a whore.

The choked emotions increase to their fullest as he listens to Wong’s singing a classic song to him. Yee is unaccountably moved, tears flowing. The dialogue and the scene reflect a deep sensitivity and humanity of the perceived cruel, emotionless traitor. Ironically, deep inside his heart, he struggles with his own role as a secret agent collaborating with the Japanese. Both of them, in a sense, need to be themselves by performing others. Truth, in this respect, is only achievable when that truth is performed. The line between patriotic and traitorous, good and bad, love and hate is indeterminate and ambivalent.

The significant transition of the film is when Wong finally lures Yee to the jewelry store to get the diamond ring Yee bought for Wong. The set-up trap to assassinate Yee fails again since Wong urges him to escape unharmed due to her sudden emotion and sentimentality toward Yee, when he expresses his deep love for her. The successful

escape of Yee eventually leads him to sign the death warrants of Kuang's resistance group members, including Wong Chia Chi.

Finally, exploring the murky aspect of the war, the Nationalist Party, government of Republic of China funded by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and examining morality under such turmoil period, Ang Lee indeed evoke a collective sense of cultural collaboration among communities of different Chinese origins. In the film, both regimes are antagonize with each other, yet they both embrace the same orthodox lineage to Dr. Sun. The emblems of political symbols are omnipresent throughout the film, both from Old Wu and Yee's and their official uniforms, Dr. Sun's portrait and flags in Yee's office. The signifiers indicate the ambivalent nature of "hero" and "villain," especially while both sides bear the same orthodox and patriotic behavior. Who is the real victim, and who is the real hero? Who is the amorous prey and who is the dominator? And, to borrow Ang Lee's long-term collaborator James Schamuz's words, the *truth* is attainable through being performed. Or to reiterate Eileen Chang's own questions: "for at the crucial moment when we choose, when we decide, when we exercise our free will, are we not also performing?" (quoted in Schamuz, 2007).

Ang Lee: Making Authentic Shanghai in the 1920:

The Ambivalent Discourse of Chinese identity in *Lust, Caution*

In his numerous interviews, Ang Lee discusses his diasporic experiences and emotional attachment to Taiwan and China, the imagined homeland. Ang Lee always talks in his autobiography and interviews about his ambivalent affective desire to make an "authentic" Chinese film, and his deep commitment to be a *Chinese* director

presenting Chinese culture and recreating the taboo, repressed period of Chinese history. Making this film conveys his complex sensibility of Chinese national history, the peoples, the culture, and his ambivalent attitude toward Chinese identity. Paying meticulous attention to the details of setting and décor of the film, Ang Lee was successful in recreating the scenes of 1940 Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese War. He has done exhaustive research on the part of history to instruct the actors and recreate the scenes and historical background.

In addition, Ang Lee expresses his intense interest and personal attachment to Eileen Chang's *Lust, Caution*. More than once, he talks about the autobiographical nature of the story from this most controversial Chinese woman novelist who inspired and haunted him. As a Chinese director who is from Taiwan and currently lives in New York City, re-enacting the story of the Chinese legendary novelist also fulfills Lee's desire to explore the dark aspect of people's lives during that time period. The ambivalent and the politically sensitive nature of the story, according to Lee, is what attracted him the most. He says, "no story of Eileen is as beautiful or as cruel as *Lust, Caution*...as a trauma, reaching for pleasure only by varying and re-imagining the pain."⁵² In discussing making the film, Ang Lee further says, "That's my destiny....my real cultural roots in classic China and what I was taught now feel like a dream. I feel more of an insider in movies than real life. Very much like the girl in this movie. By pretending, actually you connect with the true self."⁵³ From here, we see the burden of being a Chinese diasporic director

⁵² Sheila Roberts, 'Ang Lee Interview *Lust, Caution*' < http://www.moviesonline.ca/movienews_13127.html>.

⁵³ Erica Abeel, '*Lust, Caution* Director Ang Lee', (26 September, 2007), <http://www.indiewire.com/people/2007/09/indiewire_inter_110.html>.

like Ang Lee's self-identification. As I mentioned in chapter three, the demand of ethnic particularity in order to be recognized in a borderless world, finding and reaffirming one's cultural roots becomes the most significant activity. Through mediated communication technologies such as film-making, national and cultural belonging is reinforced. Film-making as a process of cultural translation, reconstructing one's cultural roots, (re)searching one's diasporic's subjectivity, and maintaining a sense of national and distinctiveness.

The strong sentimentalities and enthusiasms simultaneously affirm and reinforce a diasporic subject's self-identity and sense of belonging. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Ang Lee stresses the historical background and his vision of projection of the history *Lust, Caution*, "I try to revive what was, and nobody can do it alone."⁵⁴ As he takes the burden of representation of the history, I would argue, to some extent, the process also makes claim to one's agency, autonomy, and selfhood as a reaction to a perceived historical and contemporary oppression. He adds: "If I don't do it now, in five years it's probably gone...because the people who remember it will die."⁵⁵ The self-absorption with the cultural burden and the weight of tradition are heavily translated into his films. As he described Chinese tradition, he constantly emphasizes the *root* and the *origin* of classic Chinese culture that are inherited in a member of that society. Lee says that for his children, who were born and raised in the U.S., a popular cultural production is one of the most prominent mediums for them to acquire the culture. Yet, cheap and

⁵⁴ Emily Parker, "Man Without a Country," *Wall Street Journal* (1 December, 2007), Opinion page.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

twisted images about Chinese culture and the people permeate media representation. He continues,

You have to come from somewhere...That's your culture, your backbone, who you are. You cannot give that away. Whether it's in the elite culture or pop culture, you just need to come from somewhere. And the best way to introduce [this] to young people is to make profitable films that relate to the past⁵⁶.

For him, his motivation to present an alternative, sophisticated version to the global audience has been manifested in his other Chinese films, including his early *Father Knows Best* trilogy, and *Crouching Tiger*. To continue historical representation reflects that “history” is not a buried past, but continues to exist in the present and extends into the future. For ethnic minorities, such *burden* and strong ethnic commitment present as an ethnic tenacity. It becomes the most important way to possess their own sovereignty, reclaim their legitimacy and authority, to (re)present themselves, and (re)define their own cultural identity. As Lim (2006) remarks, self-representations are oftentimes the only stories to providing insights into their subaltern Other. I will have further detailed discussions on them in Chapters five and six.

(Re) searching for a cultural root is thus a way for Ang Lee to redefine himself. However, the “self-representations” in both *Lust, Caution* are deeply embedded as a sense of subversive (mis)representation that invariably raises a lot of controversies among the audience. To put it another way, in the transnational era and borderless world, it is no longer easy or feasible to position oneself in a rigidly defined nation-state position. The anxiety of self-representations, namely, redefining one’s self-identity is manifested and fueled by the affective desire to simultaneously rectify the historical past that is

⁵⁶ Ibid.

subjected to interpretation and constant negotiation. Ang Lee discusses his cultural background that inspires his filmmaking:

I grew up in Taiwan, we always lose...Nobody wins any thing...We're always on the losing side. My parents get beat by the communists, they escape to Taiwan...In Taiwan we carry the torch of the classic Chinese culture, of feudal society, so to speak. We didn't go through Cultural Revolution and communism...⁵⁷

The classic Chinese culture that Ang Lee strongly holds onto has long been translated in his cinematic discourse that focuses on the notion of “repression.” Confucian ethics indeed prevails in his films, yet through a subversive and deeply self-reflexive way to revise its future and its relationship with the rest of the world. In other words, I contend that *Lust, Caution* could be seen as Ang Lee’s personal confrontation of the grand narrative of Chinese history; traditional Confucian ethics is not only being reproduced but also challenged in his films.

Discourse of Audiences

In the following sections, I identify recurrent themes expressed by audiences from different Chinese origins. I address these themes in relation to cultural ambivalence by connecting to historical and current conditions of the perception of Chineseness. Cultural positionalities play significant roles in film viewing experiences. The polarized perception and reception between Chinese communities of different origins result from different reading strategies and framework they take on. Even though the public discourse of Ang Lee commonly emphasizes his success across ethnic and cultural lines, both *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution* raised sharp questions on issues of politics of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

recognition in relation to multiculturalism. In Taiwan, Ang Lee is considered “the pride of Taiwan” by the public. While there is enormous cultural glorification among Chinese-speaking area, by extension East Asian countries, severe criticism toward Ang Lee regarding his “inauthentic” representation of “the Great Chinese theme” arises.

The ambivalent audience reactions toward *Lust, Caution*, I would argue, reveals a deeply mixed emotion, strong nationalist sentimentalism reflected upon a long history of ambivalent relationship between the Eastern and Western cultures. The success of Ang Lee’s transnational films and himself becomes, in my own phrasing, an Eastern cultural icon, which symbolically signifies and is perceived as *resistance* from the East to the West, and as reverse cultural flow that has long been emulated an inevitable, unequal forces long dictated by the West. Such cultural phenomenon also indicates that the films become a site for viewers to negotiate their cultural identity, identify with, affirm or reaffirm their subjectivity. It is also a site of political and cultural *empowerment* and simultaneous *resistance*.

Finally, I suggest that the enormous discussions and popularity of the films signify the shift- “the new national in transnational” (Berry & Farquhar, 2006). The films themselves should be considered as a symbolic image of *rejection* of Western imperial cultural force; but this image is constructed a global commodity itself. Namely, the glamorous cultural connotation that was brought to the Chinese-language speaking communities simultaneously becomes a form political solidarity, participate more actively and equally in a world market.

**Theme one: The question of Chinese history and the blurred line between
The “eastern self” and the “western other”**

Despite the fact that *Lust, Caution* was cut thirty minutes because of the censorship system in China, it still broke box office records and generated numerous online discussions⁵⁸. The divergence of opinions demonstrates the popularity of the film, which also contests the lukewarm reception in the U.S. The plethora of reviews indicates different positions of the audience. Among Chinese community from different origins, ambivalence frames the responses they have toward Ang Lee and *Lust, Caution*. In her speech at Beijing University, Chinese film scholar Dai Jinhua (2007) comments the “Ang Lee phenomena.” She stresses that Chinese audiences stood up to applaud for a long time after the *Lust, Caution* premiere in Shanghai theatre. The audiences even yell “Bravo, Ang Lee! Marvelous!” “Ang Lee” has become a cultural and social phenomenon, and a brand name.

A group of Mainland Chinese diasporic scholars seriously charge that Ang Lee distorted the history of WWII in *Lust, Caution*. Criticism mainly focuses on the ways in which Ang Lee *distorted* Chinese history, especially the Second Sino-Japanese War, and charges him to shame the country. Forty eight Chinese scholars from Mainland China, Hong Kong and the U.S. in various disciplines ranging from Chinese Studies to Engineering drafted the letter together. The statement says:

Since the first Sino-Japanese War in 1840, one of the worst civil wars in Chinese history, Chinese were mobilized and united for a strong national consciousness. Countless men and women sacrificed their lives and dignity for the nation. However, unscrupulous writer Eileen Chang’s novel *Lust, Caution* to tarnish

⁵⁸ *Lust, Caution* earned more than 4000, 000 RMB (Chinese yuan) within the first four day.

Chinese national hero Zheng Pingru's reputation through her own personal desires. Then Ang Lee's movie goes even further to present naked, explicit sexual scenes to denigrate the dignity of our war martyrs and the innocent victims of the Sino-Japanese war. It is intolerable for such a public flagrant violation and insult of our martyrs of the war. We seriously condemn the film *Lust, Caution* for its inappropriate representation of Chinese nation, his despicable behaviors of the martyrs. We at the same time express our deep admiration for the martyrs, and pray for the world peace and reunification of Chinese nation⁵⁹.

The statement reveals an intense emotional conflicts and disputes over the interpretation of the film. Pushing the sort of comment made in the letter further, the logical outcome of this preoccupation with female sexuality and one's chastity is the perception. The representation of Wong's sexuality is equated with the violation of the dignity of a nation since chastity has been one of the most important and common in traditional Chinese culture. Wong's relationship with Yee is undoubtedly perceived as an alleged violation of conventional moral code—chastity being supplanted by sexual transgression. By the same token, “losing chastity” is perceived as a *shame* that metaphorically denigrates a heroine's value, and further disrupts a reunited national consciousness or hurts a nation's spirit. Sexuality, in this case the sexual relationship between Wong and Yee, is considered as a filthy concept.

Additionally, as posited in this letter, Chinese nationalism and the possibility of *reunification* are disrupted by the negative representations of the war and the martyrs. In other words, history was perceived as a fixed and static notion. Such perception is clearly expressed through strong ambivalence. The complex emotion of China during World War II is characterized by excessive Chinese cultural nationalism, evoking widespread national solidarity. As discussed in chapter two, cultural nationalism results from a long-

⁵⁹ bbs://bbs.ntu.edu.tw

term resistance to multiple forces of Japanese and Western imperialism. Tang Wei the leading actress, as a result, was banned by China's State Administration of Radio Film and Television.⁶⁰

The emotional response to Ang Lee's representation of Chinese history is also translated into discourse of non-professional audience. The public discourse of *Lust, Caution* predominately surrounds the issue of authenticity, the representation of sexuality, and Ang Lee's "responsibility" of being a Chinese diasporic director. Again, this criticism clearly reflects the fact that Ang Lee is widely considered to be a representative Chinese director. Some Chinese audiences are ashamed of the ways in which Ang Lee presents the history of the war, charging that he is insensitive toward Chinese audience's feelings about the period of history. Han (2008) articulates his point of view as following:

Ang Lee, as a collective cultural pride of all Chinese people, he needs to remember his fundamental *mission* of representing the nation while constructing cultural representation of Chinese history. Western audiences will definitely laugh at the "revolutionarists" and "patriotic students" presented in the film, resulting in misinterpretation of *correct history* of China. It will also bring negative impact to the young domestic audiences!⁶¹

Lust, Caution is constructed as a film that distorts the history by "glorifying" the national traitor Wang Jingwei's puppet state of the Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese War. For some Chinese audience, *Lust, Caution* is a *Hanjian* film, adapted from Eileen Chang's same name story⁶². The well-known Chinese actor Sun Haiyin once said

⁶⁰ 'Lust, Caution actress banned in China.' *Reuters*. (9 March, 2008), <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN0935238620080309>>.

⁶¹ Han, 'Why is Ang Lee being criticized?' (2 February, 2008), <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4e737717010087ax.html>.

⁶² *Hanjian* literally means traitor who betrays Han Chinese ethnicity, dated back to the beginning of the use in Qing Dynasty. Eileen Chang is one of the most famous yet controversial women writers in the history of modern Chinese literature; she is criticized as a national traitor because of the critical viewpoint of Chinese communist government.

in an interview, “I do not regard Ang Lee as an artist because of the films he makes. I will never watch his films, no matter how many more Academy Awards he wins.”⁶³

Chinese writer and literary critic Yan Yanwen posted a series of articles to critique the representation of Chinese history, especially portrayal of Wang Chia Chi who is thought to be a real secret agent named Zheng Pingru during WWII, resulting in maligning the whole Chinese nation and people. Even though Ang Lee has pronounced that the film is not based on a true historical event. The perception of this film reflects the subjectivity of the audience. In her invited lecture of the film *Lust, Caution* in Beijing University, Yan (2007) remarks,

Ang Lee should apologize for the film that “rapes” the history of the (Chinese) nation and its culture through the problematic representational strategy. It ruins the positive image of China and defames our war martyrs...The twisted adaptation from Eileen Chang’s story indicates the completely illogical interpretation of the history. That is, it romanticizes *hanjian* puppet government, especially the traitor Mr. Yee who was turned into a symbol of materialism. Instead of focusing on the dehumanization and cruel reality of the war, the film is focused on the love story between Wang Chia Chi and Mr. Yee...⁶⁴

In her other critiques, Yan charged that Ang Lee, despite being a Taiwanese director, has very twisted historical point of view toward China which immensely disappoints those who are loyal and deeply patriotic toward their own nation. Such twisted cultural representation, she remarks, “presents as a *ritual* that *seduces* the audience to participate in an subversive image of the evilness of *hanjian*, and to have them have false interpretation of the national traitor”⁶⁵ She then asks, “why didn’t he [Ang Lee] choose to represent how the Chinese martyrs sacrifice themselves to fight

⁶³ Sun Haiyin, ‘Ang Lee is Not an Artist’, (10 October, 2009), <<http://tv.people.com.cn/BIG5/79889/10171451.html>>.

⁶⁴ Yan Yanwen, *Lust, Caution* as Pornography Pollution: Ang Lee Should Apologize to all Chinese peoples. (11 November, 2007), <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_49433c4a01000b6v.html>

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

against Japanese militaries' bloody killing, our national history and showcase the twisted humanity to the world audience?" The discourse suggests that in order to *protect* the Chinese core cultural values, just as to protect our environment, the film should be banned.

Hundreds of reports echo the criticism. The main theme expressed through the audience text consists of a constant comparison of the native history and the cinematic discourse. In other words, unfortunately the burden of representation was imposed upon Ang Lee. *Lust, Caution* was stigmatized by a lack of infidelity to its native obligation. A number of audience reviews critique his filmmaking as aberration from Chinese history and Chinese culture. The discourse also consisted of a series of discussions on the ethical boundaries of arts. For example, audience (*sina* blogger) Duan, in his article "What *Lust, Caution* maligned was Chinese national spirit," suggests that this film is not an artistic product, but instead a commodity that conveys a specific political message to disrupt the positive image of China⁶⁶.

In his panel discussion in Shanghai University, well-known writer and scholar Liu Xiaofeng said that it is a warning sign that there are so many Chinese audience who are favorable of the movie. He argues that Ang Lee's ambiguous attitude toward 'lust' and 'caution' leads to his been criticized as national traitor⁶⁷. Liu concludes that in order to unleash his personal desire and to pander to vulgar taste of some audiences, Ang Lee gives up the pursuit of virtue, dignity, and morality. Thus, it is argued that *Lust, Caution* represents as a deterioration of Chinese film industry.

⁶⁶ http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4b6e09dc01007r3y.html

⁶⁷ <http://www.mtime.com/my/t193244/blog/1543153/>

Considered collectively, the underlying message of such audience discourse reflects a strong sense of Chinese cultural nationalism. Based on the critique of the representation of Chinese history in *Lust, Caution*, on one hand, Chinese audiences *re-affirm* and/or *re-assert* their Chineseness. By constantly disassociating with the cultural identity represented in the film, the audience simultaneously re-creates and advocates a Great Chinese Nation. Critics who evoke history as a guideline for evaluating the worthiness of the film indicates a close, ambivalent relation between the construction of the Chinese *self* and the Western *other*. Namely, the Western other always plays a significant role of defining the Chinese self, national identity is always in an ambivalent relation to its imagined other.

In comparison with audiences of Mainland China, for Taiwanese community, the debate over the authenticity of Chinese history is not as severe as Chinese audience. There were several hundred audience responses and opinions devoted to *Lust, Caution* in 2007 when it was showing in theaters. Instead of arguing whether or not Ang Lee presents the most authentic Chinese history, the audience predominately focuses on the comparison of Eileen Chang's original story with the film. Taiwanese audiences generally are in awe of the sophisticated portrayal of the ambivalent relationship between the two main actors, Mr. Yee and Wang Chia Chi. What appears to most interests the audience is Ang Lee's subversive representation of national loyalty, love, and deeply human desires which I will discuss in more detail in the later section.

One common theme that appears in the responses of Taiwanese audiences and Chinese audiences is the focus on Ang Lee's international success. On one hand, the

audience is proud of *Lust, Caution* and its international reputation. There is constant concern about whether or not “Western” audience would understand the “Eastern philosophy” deeply embedded in the film. In various interviews, Ang Lee has mentioned repeatedly that the responses of Chinese audience community are essential to him. The *mission* ascribed to him as a Chinese diasporic film director in the U.S. is to let the global audience see a non-cultural monolithic aspect of Chinese people, but also a plethora of aesthetic voices. The connotation of such *concern* for the Western audience reflects not only an anxiety of self-representation from the local community in a global era, but also a *self-defensive* position, a position in need of constant self-explanation in relation to the West.

The discourse ranges from “Western audiences should be glad if they could understand half of the story *Lust, Caution*” and “*Lust, Caution* is so *Chinese*, embodying a traditional sense of Chinese philosophy and aesthetics that Western audience can barely understand” to “it is too difficult for Western audience to understand Chinese style of repression, and because of this, the film wasn't perceived well in the US.”⁶⁸ It is through such constant comparison of *self* and the *other* that the audience reinforces a sense of local identity, that is, their Chineseness and/or Taiwanese. As Georgiou (2006) asserts, the availability and immediacy of the Internet functions as a tool to maintain and reinforce a sense of cultural belonging.

⁶⁸ Comments from *ptt.twbbs.org*, the largest Bulletin Board System (BBS) in Taiwan.

Theme Two: The reunion of Chinese community

Perceptions of Huaren--Chinese and Taiwanese diaspora

For overseas community, watching *Lust, Caution* is a way to enhance a communal experience. In New York City, a Chinese community organization in Flushing organized an “Ang Lee night”, reserving a whole theatre for Chinese and Taiwanese overseas audiences. It is a cultural event, Fred Fu, the president Flushing Development Center in New York City, said to the press,

This is a very unique experience. This is the first time we gather 200 *Huaren* (overseas Chinese language speaking community) to watch such a meaningful Chinese movie. As we all know, Ang Lee is a representative of the community whose Chinese and non-Chinese movies always embody a deep sense cross-cultural sharing. He and his works represent the Eastern aesthetics⁶⁹.

An audience explained, “We (Chinese audience) can easily understand the inherent Chinese philosophy and the Asian aesthetics than the foreigners (American audience)...Lee really did a good job of re-creating an authentic setting of old Shanghai.”⁷⁰ Other statements from both news discourse and the overseas communities reflect ambivalence toward Ang Lee’s success in Hollywood and international film market-- that is, the strong feeling of cultural pride and the simultaneous self-explanation and defensive position in relation to the West.

Unlike the criticism from the viewers in the People’s of Republic of China, the diasporic communities re-affirm their *Chineseness* and/or *Asianess* when viewing this film. The emotional sentimentality of being overseas Chinese enhances a communal

⁶⁹ ‘New York Chinese Community got together for *Lust, Caution*’, Nownews, ETTV, (9 October, 2007), <http://info.51.ca/news/world/2007/10/09/138303.shtml>

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

experience. In other words, cultural symbols and cinematic narratives of Chineseness in *Lust, Caution* contribute to cheering for the success of the film among overseas Chinese communities; most importantly, the reconstruction of Shanghai during WWII, and people's lives during that time period enables a strong nostalgic desire and simultaneously (re)affirms and deepen a sense of particular cultural root shared by a collective imagination of the homeland among the overseas communities. One audience expressed:

After seeing *Lust, Caution*, the images that struck home with me to home are historical scenes represented in the movie. I was still thinking about China in the period of WWII, and how Chinese people live in that period. It is difficult for us to imagine the lives people have and difficulties they need to face during the most turmoil historical Sino-Japanese War, and the ways in which people struggle over their lives in Shanghai and Hong Kong. We all have once read and memorized that part of history in our textbooks, but we have never experienced that. Ang Lee authenticate the desire to recreate that history through his meticulous filmmaking to revitalize that passed history, and to let the audience to experience that history by presenting the profound struggle between Mr. Yee and Wang Chia Chi, the street scenes back then in those cities, various dialects used among people, and the profound humanity. He did his best to let us believe it really happened, the story between Mr. Yee and Wang has really happened...⁷¹

News about *Lust, Caution* remained on the front page of most overseas Chinese language newspapers such as *World Journal*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *Qiaobao* (China Press), *San Francisco Chronicle* and others for months. It was a pervasive discussion topic, and popular not only in news but also among various Chinese diasporic communities in the U.S. and other countries. For the diasporic community, the film contributes to a specific act of “remembering” a cultural root based on collective memory of [imagined]

⁷¹ Yang Xinyi, ‘Do you see “Lust” or “Caution”?’ (4 November, 2007), <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4ad54af901000b4r.html>.

homeland. Such cultural belonging is produced and reproduced through Ang Lee's cinematic discourse, crossing large distances and diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Simultaneously, cultural interpretation and growing circulation of a particular version of Chineseness is also co-constructed by the audience.

It is important to note that the audience from the Mainland formed groups to see the uncut version of *Lust, Caution* in Hong Kong in order to support freedom of art. The controversial seven-minute-long sex scenes were removed by Chinese government. One audience says in the blog:

It is the coolest thing to form a group to go to Hong Kong to see the uncut version of the film...people of PRC use a peaceful way to defend their 'freedom' and 'right' to see that '7 minutes' (removed by the Chinese government), and to express our appreciation of art...the meaning is beyond seeing the film itself; it is that we have more freedom today...(Cat, 2007)⁷²

To support Ang Lee's films, for some Chinese audiences, is to support freedom of the art and market. Interestingly, the film still received high popularity in Mainland China.

Theme three: Emotions and reflexive selfness

After *Lust, Caution* won second Gold Lion Award, former Taiwanese president Chen explicitly points out that the most touching fact is not only that Ang Lee's international achievement honors the country Taiwan, but also he always remembers and respects his cultural roots, asserting he is a director from Taiwan in his award acceptance speeches. Chen says, "because of this, international media are very impressed by the

⁷² Cat, 'Forming Groups to See *Lust, Caution* in Hong Kong', (1 October, 2007), <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4a59649201000bjl.html>.

country Taiwan”⁷³. Additionally, Tainan Mayor Hsu Tain-tsair designated April 28 as “Ang Lee Day” after Ang Lee became the first Asian to earn the Academy Award as Best Director for *Brokeback Mountain*⁷⁴. He tells everybody “I am proud to be a Tainanese. Now it seems as if the Tainanese are also proud of me, and that gives me a special sense of accomplishment⁷⁵”. Even the current Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou expressed his deep sentimentality and almost sobbed after watching *Lust, Caution*. He said, “I am very moved by the movie, yet I feel very heavy. It reminds me of the old days...many people were sacrificed for the country because of the war...”⁷⁶ Additionally, many Taiwanese officials such as premier Chang Chung-hsiung offered public congratulations: “Ang Lee’s international achievements bring glorification to Taiwan, and honor this country; he contributes tremendously to our movie industry.”⁷⁷

Such sentimentality toward Ang Lee’s international success, especially the representation of history, and the ambivalent, complex relationship among the characters, also appear as a dominant theme in Taiwanese audiences. Being strongly emotionally attached to the story, *Lust, Caution* presents as more than just entertainment, but more as a site of reflexivity, self-affirmation, and therapy. In other words, audiences relate details of the scenes and dialogue to themselves and their life experiences, that is, a partial

⁷³ Quoted in Wong Zong-ming, Ang Lee Explicitly Stated ‘I am Taiwanese’ While Receiving the Award; President Chen: It Is the Most Touching Fact, *Nownews*, 3 September, 2007 <www.nownews.com/2007/09/13/301-2156887.htm>

⁷⁴ Tainan Celebrates ‘Ang Lee Day’ *Taipei Times*, 29 April, 2006 <<http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2006/04/29/2003305154>>

⁶ Quoted in *China Review*, 25 September, 2009 <www.chinareviewnews.com>

⁷⁵ *Taipei Times*, 2006

⁷⁷ Premier Chang Chung-hsiung congratulates Ang Lee’s international achievement, *Epoch Times*, 22 January, 2001.

articulation of self. They immerse themselves into the tragedy to experience the pain, struggles, and repression of the characters in the film. Further, through the viewing process, for some audiences, the film presents as a site for audiences to engage in self-affirmation, nostalgic imagination, and look for self-identity and subjectivity that involves sets of reflexive process.

Engaging in strong emotionally charged experiences throughout the film is the predominant theme in the public discourses of ordinary Taiwanese audiences. It involves both the passion toward Ang Lee as a public figure and the sentimentalism toward Chinese culture and the particular historical context. For example, bloodgas (2007) described his or her emotional intensity after seeing the film:

I have been haunted by the patriotic story and the ‘love story’ between Yee and Wong, even one month after seeing the film...it is not so much about sadness, but it is a kind of melancholy that I have been deeply experiencing in my body and soul. My mind was completely absorbed in the film...my heart was beating so fast. The sex scenes made me so uncomfortable, yet they ironically are the expression of the ‘love’ between Yee and Wong...⁷⁸

Along the same line, Catiggy (2007) commented on her own affective connection as indescribable, “I cannot put my feelings into a single word after seeing *Lust, Caution*, because I have too much on my mind but I can’t find capable words to describe them. Love is too complex in the film⁷⁹.” In his/her review, Ewin (2007) notes, “many different layers are presented in this film that aim to reveal the complexity of humanity, such as the struggle between evil and justice, the constraint of one’s freedom during that historic period. Numerous close-up shots used for showing the characters’ facial expressions

⁷⁸ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁷⁹ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

really led me to understand their complicated hidden emotions...the film is an oasis for my soul⁸⁰.”

While some audiences express their love of the film, some explain their emotional shock. Powerapple (2007) stated “The film is so intense that the 158 minutes passed fast. I have been haunted by Mr. Yee’s expressions in his eyes, his violent behavior s because of his deep inner fear of love, and his emotional connection to Wong. His tears in the final scene really gave me goose bumps. Kuang’s final performance—the despairing look at Wong before they are executed—really got me⁸¹.” Matrix31 (2007) expressed his complicated, indescribable feeling after seeing the film, “The heavy repression of emotions in the film makes me tear up, especially when I can’t help recall the scenes and the story again and again...The emotions and feelings are so exquisite...⁸²” Another audience member, FM (2007) said “I feel strongly about this film and I am so glad to see the future hope of Taiwanese film. Even though this film is internationally financed, we understand the film better because of the culture [compared to international audiences]...⁸³”

Lust, Caution clearly becomes a site of emotional sentimentality and outbursts for the audience. Moreover, it becomes a site of the *hauntedness* of history and a sense of *unsettledness*. To the majority of Taiwanese audiences, the film challenges various notions regarding morality and humanities. The repercussion of loss, nostalgia, fantasy, affective desire, and mourning represented among characters in the film are the most

⁸⁰ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁸¹ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁸² bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁸³ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

frequently discussed subjects. In other words, besides a strong sense of narrative reflexivity in the audiences' public discourse, it seems that the "melancholia" can then become contagious within this community, and the permeability of self-reflexivity especially makes the discourses interesting to read. Kasheran (2007) wrote an essay that reflects his relationship with a loved one:

From the first day I saw Wong Chia Chi, I immediately couldn't help but connect her image to you. I was drawn into a deep whirlpool of memory. I felt so heavy; I had enormous sorrow and melancholy. I compared you and Tang Wei, the woman with an oval face and thin lips. Not only do you and her have a very similar aura, but also our relationship was even comparable to Wong and Yee. I cried hard that night, and even on my way to school next morning. After this movie, I cannot handle another heavy, strong sentimentality so soon afterward...⁸⁴

For audiences, the pain and intense emotional shock is drawn from the perceived ambivalent relationship between personal agency and social, historical structure.

Freedom is always deeply constrained by politics, and social structure.

Ang Lee destabilizes patriotism in a preposterous way. Audiences ask the question "what would I do if I were Yee or Wong?" Such discomfort and unsettledness result from a reaction to their sense of fundamental humanities that are being challenged. Namely, the emotional shock comes from realizing that love and morality are no longer the same as one's preconceived normalcy of these notions. *Lust, Caution* becomes a site of reflection and practice that produces ambiguities, ambivalence, and instabilities. These uncertainties seem to be antithetical to the demands of a static, fixed grand narrative of a nation's history and identity. Magnolia (2007) commented on the patriotic drama conducted by the students in the film, especially focusing on their seemingly blind

⁸⁴ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

patriotism and passion toward the Chinese nation during WWII⁸⁵. The slogan “China will not fall” indeed reflects the intense emotion at that historical moment. Magnolia asked “Under what condition would a naïve, simple, young college female student like Wong would transform herself into a special agent and sacrifice her virginity in the name of patriotism?” For the young generation who has not been through wartime, patriotism is incomprehensible. Further, private imagination is no longer in conjuncture with a collective, unified political exigency. Mckey (2007) stated,

I am not sad about the failure of Kuang’s patriotic mission, but instead I disagree with the recklessness and blindness of his act. Ang Lee employs Kuang as a character to critique the incompetence of a naïve, clueless literatus. It unsurprisingly leads to such a tragedy, especially the sacrifice of a woman’s virginity during that time. Wong is just a token, being manipulated not only by her patriotic fellows, but also the social, historical structure. One’s humanity is sacrificed during wartime, in the name of patriotism. Politics is extremely cruel, manipulative, and cunning. All characters pay the price...love between Wong and Yee is both passionate and frantic, and that is why it is so ambivalent...I had tears in my eyes when I saw Yee sitting on Wong’s bed with the look of enormous sadness⁸⁶.

“I feel a deep sense of loss, especially toward Mr. Yee,” Deliver (2007) noted in his/her review. “This thorough tragedy makes me ponder *repression* and desire for a long time. How ironic it is that after making love, you can only cry, not laugh. National identity is always defined as much more important than individual identity, yet endless people suffer from such political ideology...⁸⁷”

For many audiences, love becomes a contested site. It is no longer an easy concept to define. Owlonoak (2007) said, “Yee is like black coffee, bitter, emotionless,

⁸⁵ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁸⁶ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁸⁷ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

cautious, and yet somehow passionate, just like the author Zhang Eileen. I wonder whether or not his emotional attachment to Wong represents the truth of love?⁸⁸

Jellyfish721 (2007) remarked,

Most films or novels only promote and present a romantic side of love. *Lust, Caution* points out the essence of love, that is, it can be both painful and pleasurable. Both Yee and Wong desire for true love strongly. Wong lost her father when she was a teenage girl. She has been searching for love from a man that could be the substitute for a father's love. Ang Lee's portrayal of her searching for love is like moths flying into fire—such “love” brings destruction upon oneself⁸⁹.

Zooka (2007) echoes this point by stating that Ang Lee presents several different layers to show the complexity of humanity and love. Ang Lee employs a very concrete yet abstract narrative style to tell the story. On one hand, the theme surrounds “love” which is a universal concept that across cultural and national boundaries; on the other hand, the depiction of the role of Wong Chia Chi and the three explicit sex scenes is a symbolic representation of a woman's journey of *self-exploration*. Combining the style of social realism which closely relates the story to a historical context, and the fictive representation of the dramatic storyline of the characters, Ang Lee is able to reach broader audiences ranging from cultural critics and intellectuals to ordinary people. Therefore, for some audiences, this film is both national and transnational, both authentic and fictitious.

To illustrate, the public discourse of Taiwanese audiences surrounds the question of love, the relationships among characters, their self-reflexive emotions and life.

⁸⁸ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁸⁹ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

Through such debate about the characters and the story, audiences also immerse themselves in the process and constantly renegotiate their own cultural identity.

Theme four: Sexuality, chastity, and national identity

Sexuality is the important aspect of the ambivalent representation of love in *Lust, Caution*. For audiences from Taiwan, China and overseas, the three controversial sex scenes are the much-debated topic. For the majority of audiences from Taiwan, these scenes are very essential to the development of the story. In other words, the relationships among Yee, Wong, and Kuang's patriotic group are interpreted as the cruelty of the reality of one's life during wartime and severe political and social constraints. The sex scenes present the deepest human desire--love could be both constructive and destructive.

The first sex scene between Yee and Wong happens during their reencounter three years after the students' patriotic act failed. Audiences clearly see an animalistic, violent "love" that is progressing, appearing as a pure act of sexual domination. The scene ends with her face in an astonished, anguished mix of anger and pleasure, and an imperceptible smile. The second sex scene presents a subtle change in their relationship, as their sexual positions vary. Wong feels more sexual pleasure and emotional exchange with Yee, yet he is still in a dominant position. In the meantime, Wong also surreptitiously converts her role from being passive to being active. At the end of their sex, Wong and Yee face each other, signifying a more equal relationship between the two. The third sex scene happens in the dark, which connotes a progression between Yee and Wong, as Yee never had sex with her in the dark because of his fear of being killed. Further, their sexual position is Wong on top of Yee, who allows her to straddle him. Power shifts. At that moment,

Wong could easily use Yee's shotgun to complete her assassination mission; yet she only lets her tears flow from her eyes.

Nosweating (2007) said that the "forbidden" sexual behaviors between Wong and Yee are shocking. He said.

The first scene was very tricky since after Wong was raped by Yee, she smiled. Her smile was very ambiguous because it didn't give you (audiences) a static sense whether or not she is actually a pray of Yee. These scenes open to many different interpretations but they clearly demonstrate the change of Yee and Wong's relationship⁹⁰.

Sexuality and sexual desire have always been an obscure, mysterious and somehow taboo subject for traditional Chinese society. It is not surprising to read audiences' reactions to Ang Lee's explicit portrayal of sex in *Lust, Caution*. The sex positions are frequently debated among the audiences for their underlying symbolic meanings. Nosweating remarked:

Sexual desire is very normal; Ang Lee is very bold to present it on the big screen, and adds more complexity to love and desire because it exists between a traitor and a patriotic agent. I don't think we should use moral judgment to look at the story because Wong made her own final decision to let Yee escapes. As long as it is her decision to sacrifice herself because of her true feeling, outsiders can hardly judge whether or not it is a right or wrong decision⁹¹.

For the majority of Taiwanese audiences, rather than judging the "moralistic" aspect of the story, to honestly face one's own inner desire is the more important lesson they learn from the film. As previous quotations suggest, it is precisely such representation of the indeterminacy of human desire and the politics of sexuality that should be opened to interpretation, enabling most audiences to reflect back to their own life.

⁹⁰ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁹¹ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

Love and sexuality could be interpreted as a site of power struggle. Wong's body functions as a symbolic power struggle, audience member Reke (2007) responds,

Wong's body is politicized; it is a symbol of power struggle. Through various institutions such as the patriotic student group, Yee, and the national institution, the body is exploited over and over again. The double bind situation of Wong presents an intrinsic and typical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. The sexual intercourse hence becomes a site of *power negotiation*⁹².

Nosweating (2007) said ,

I couldn't really look straight at the screen. I felt the pain and great anguish between the two individuals in the scenes. They both can only *feel* themselves through such intensive sexual behaviors. The love is not romantic at all, but instead it becomes a sort of domination...⁹³

Jalinfy (2007) explained: "I realized the deep sorrow of a lonely, repressed man. I was very moved by Yee when he tears up in the scene in which Wong sings 'Girl singing from the Earth' ...their love seems so fragile..."⁹⁴

Emerging from these numerous posts is a greater sense of ambivalence of love and sexuality, as both notions are perceived as indeterminate. The public discourse of audiences from Taiwan, however, barely reveals an intense sense of nationalism, Chinese national identity, or any strong sentimentality toward reunification of Chinese nation. Instead, the discourse indicates a very thin sense of national identity, as the majority of audiences emphasize the dialect and/or ambivalent relationship between the social structure and the self. What attracts the most response for Taiwanese audiences, is not Ang Lee's constant reiteration of recreating an authentic Shanghai during wartime, and evoking a sense of Chineseness, but the complexity of love and desire. Such trait is easily

⁹² bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁹³ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

⁹⁴ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

observed from the lack of discussion of Ang Lee's "national achievement" and the embodied Chineseness in *Lust, Caution* (that are constantly addressed by professional film critics or news media) among ordinary Taiwanese audiences.

As I discussed in chapter two, in contemporary Taiwanese society, the sense of national identity is no longer rooted in the cultural imagination of China. The current rise of an indigenous Taiwanese identity not only weakens a sense of Chinese national identity, but also enables an act of disassociation with it under the Taiwan independence movement. It is not difficult to understand audiences' response to the national patriotism presented in the film as "funny" and/or incomprehensible. There are only a few audience members such as coldgoddess (2007) who would describe the patriotic scene as "the sentimentalism of grandparent generation"⁹⁵." Chinese nationalism becomes only a laughable and contestable terrain. It is also through their discourse and the very textual ambivalence that one sees the symbolic meaning given to the nation as equivocal, indefinite, and indeterminately ambivalent; hence one needs to reconsider the nation as entity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examine audience perception of *Lust, Caution* and *Crouching Tiger*, the ways in which the discourse of the two films engage and/or disengage with their audiences, as well as the discourse of Chineseness and cultural nationalism being deconstructed and reconstructed. I do not intend to condemn or to endorse cultural nationalism that has been formed by the audience members from different Chinese

⁹⁵ bbs://ptt.twbbs.org

origins; but rather to show how ambivalence toward the national identity characterized the discourse. I advocate a thorough understanding of forms of cultural nationalism, and cultural identity that are indeterminate, constantly being negotiated and renegotiated.

The chapter contributes to a further understanding of transnational films under a diasporic conditioning. Ang Lee and his different sets of cultural sensibilities and creative trajectories have yet been explored thoroughly in the genre of Chinese national cinema that usually associated with films from the Mainland China, or New Taiwanese Cinema that closely emphasized Taiwanese local society and social problems represented by Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tsai Ming-liang. I analyze *how* and *why* a specific version of Chinese nationality is being performed, the ways in which an individual or a community remains invested in remaining a racial or ethnic subject and a continuation of a distinct version of culture.

Dealing and “revising” the taboo part of history, Ang Lee employs a deconstructive and subversive lens to (re)present it. As history itself is narrative that should be subjected to interpretation and challenge, I argue that rather than being loyal to Eileen Chang’s original novel, Ang Lee adds complexities to it by unfolding the unanswerable ambivalent nature of *humanitas* and questioning Chinese nationalism. Instead of objectifying whether or not he is presenting an authentic part of history, we should ask “what is authentic about his cinematic discourse?” In other words, a multiplicity of partial reality of the history, people’s lives in that era, are regenerated by filmmaking; that is, a fluid and “identity-in-the-making” is constructed and actualized through the process of making and seeing the film. Through representing and watching,

Ang Lee simultaneously narrated his personal memories and constructed a personal history that is closely intersected (or disassociated) with the larger historical narrative. Through *Lust, Caution*, specific *version* of history and Chineseness is constructed and contested.

In creating such transnational films such as *Lust, Caution*, Ang Lee employs cinematic discourse not only to resist the predominant Western film markets to (re)claim the cultural proposition, but also create a possibility of a cross-boundary space that allows cross-cultural collaboration, even just symbolically. The cinematic language Ang Lee uses as a discursive medium to enact or enforce a particular cultural imagination is not ahistorical or simply instrumental. Even though the Western cultural imperialism still alive in the deep-seated cultural identification and the structure of cultural formation as the audience response reveals, “the transnational is no longer the old Western imperialist order” (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p. 222). The vibrant and prevalent active discussions of Ang Lee and his works, and the popularity of his transnational films reveal the fact that the “East” has been gradually interacting more *equally* and *actively* with the West. It also indicates that they have already been participating in the game of world film market, gradually formed as a “reverse cultural flow.” In other words, world film directors do not need to worry about if they have a chance to participate in the global market, but more about *how* they participate in it in contemporary society.

Chapter Six—Who performs for whom?: The Dynamic of Self-Representation and Spectatorship in an Age of Cosmopolitanism

What theoretical sense can we make out of ambivalence, the framework I propose in this project to aid our understanding of audience research and media representation on a broader level? How does the notion of ambivalence assist in revealing how the politics of national and ethnic identity destabilize the process of identity formation that was once viewed as objective and “given?” I suggest that ambivalence serves as a theoretical construct that interrogates the ideological, determining which ideologies fix the unquestioned identity formation. The equivocal notion of Chineseness subjected to historical and political forces, as I discussed in chapter two, is a site of contestation and no longer the guarantee of ethnic solidarity. The “great reconciliation” (Chen, 2002) of Chinese and Taiwanese identity in a postcolonial and transnational context like Taiwan seems to be impossible. The politics of national identification is translated and transformed into a historical emotional structure and affective space that signifies a broken promise of collective national consciousness. And, such affective space is actualized and communicated in and through Ang Lee’s transnational cinematic discourse and its audience receptions.

In this research, I began to develop the notion of ambivalence, theoretically challenging ideological constructions of racial and ethnic identity that are objectively defined within a static nation-state mechanism in a global context. The focus of the

project is the relationship between communication practices and media as a source of constructing one's identity and cultural community. I use Ang Lee's transnational works *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Lust, Caution* as my case studies to explore the ambivalent representations of Chineseness. Extending postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, my research expands the theoretical discussions on the politics of national identity and cultural syncretism represented in transnational cinema. By taking into account the complex political, social and historical conditionings in forming and transforming cultural identity, I argue that national identity is no longer a guarantee for ethnic solidarity; instead, it has become a site of cultural and political struggles.

In addition to analyzing representational strategies for recognition of non-Western artists to gain a foothold in a global economic market, I examine the use of transnational media from audiences of different cultural communities. I analyze online audience discourses produced by communities from different Chinese origins to deconstruct audiences' positionalities, examining the ways in which they participate in constructing and/or consolidating a particular sense of national and diasporic identity and forms of nationalism, yet simultaneously producing and strengthening a cosmopolitan sense of being a world citizen.

To carry these discussions, I first examine the contemporary theoretical debate surrounding the emergence of new cultural politics of the representation of ethnicity and nationality in transnational films. Second, I situate the debate of Chinese identity and its complex impacts in the socio-political and historical context of Mainland China and

Taiwan, closely intersecting with the U.S. after the Cold War. Then, I move forward to propose the notion of ambivalence as the theoretical framework to provide a more comprehensive view to understand Chineseness as a political site. Finally, incorporating audience discourses from three cultural positionalities—Mainland China, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities--I argue that the transnational cinemas of Ang Lee become a discursive site of infinite intercultural processes, communicating and enabling a cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. The vibrant discourses demonstrate the contribution of various interpretations and meanings to “Chineseness” in a transnational and postcolonial context. That is, it is indeed the various processes of interpretation that invite a productive cultural dialogue that enhances our understanding of disparate identities and positionalities.

Framework of Ambivalence

I developed the theory of ambivalence from Bhabha’s notion of ambivalence. Bhabha (1994) addresses the equivocal power relation between the colonial authority and the colonized subject, the power and the powerless, the periphery and the center. He is critical of the paralyzing dichotomy. The key question is if colonial authority, whether it be governmental, official, or Christian missionary, has absolute power and effect in eradicating native cultures with all their differences and contradictions. By challenging the historical logic and its continuing authority and transformative power, Bhabha suggests that ambivalence characterizes the splitting of the (colonized) subject at the moment of its enunciation. That is, the colonial center is disrupted by the unclassifiable, indefinite, equivocal borderline.

Bhabha's ambivalence is developed from the psychoanalysis where ambivalence was first described as a simultaneous desire and repulsion from an object, and a fluctuation between longing for one thing and its opposite. His idea of constitutive ambivalence lies in the native's inappropriate mimicking of the colonizer's power. The imperfect accented mimicry represents the threat to the colonial power. Further, the distinction between internal "self" and the external "Other" is no longer clear because the moment the "self" is actualized is through the recognition of the Others. Hence self-identity can only be constructed through and mediated from a nexus of affective projection, representation, language practices, desire, memory and fantasy. For the colonized, the play of self, or the play of self-as-other is indeed enacted through the mimicry yet mockery practice of the colonizer. The envy and desire to become the "Other" characterizes the ambivalent relationship between the colonized and the colonizer.

I extend Bhabha's discussion of ambivalence to understand the ways in which it has been transformed on the side of the minority subjects. I suggest that ambivalence represents itself as a struggle for constructing a holistic sense of self; even it is mediated through, and co-constructed by the Other's gaze. It is a coexistence of contradictory feelings, emotions, affective toward a memory, a person, or one's analyst self. In my research in particular, the cinematic discourse of Ang Lee's transnational films simultaneously embody a sense of cosmopolitanism and a distinct national cultural imagination—pan-Chineseness recurred with the ideas to construct a reserved cultural flow to reclaim the native self-representation. The syncretic representational method such

as the combination of Chinese tradition and Western filmic aesthetics, juxtaposes the political priorities of nationality, ethnicity, gender and sexuality through a constant repackaging, contestation, and revision of the meaning of “Chineseness.” Such self-representational strategy should be considered a tactic that disrupts, rather than reinforcing the West’s imagination of the “exotic East,” through the mainstream of the contemporary film industry, pushing them to seemingly familiar yet unrecognizable limits.

Further, I posit that ambivalence also lies in a strong nostalgic sentimentality, as a way for the marginalized, such as diasporic subjects, to sustain and reaffirm their self-identity. The burden and commitment to preserve one’s cultural roots, traditions, values, and beliefs in the realms of post- and transnationalism is significant. Nostalgia becomes an important way to (re)search one’s roots, and to retain the cultural authority while participating in a political milieu. It is only through taking on the historical and cultural burden can the marginalized subjects liberate themselves and become complete. In other words, nostalgia reflects an affective desire to search for the past and reconfirm a certainty of cultural identity, helping to conceal the feelings of rootlessness, fear, frustration, and anxiety. The longing for the past, intense emotional attachment, and affective desire of a national culture expressed through collective discourse not only reflects a long-term defensive mechanism toward Western imperialism, but also enables us to reconsider the symbolic meaning ascribed to the nation.

National Imagination in an Age of Cosmopolitanism

The post-Cold War effects are embedded in one's cultural memory and sentimentalism. As "America" has been internalized as a desire, Westernization, or specifically Americanization is deeply embodied in one's everyday cultural practices. "National identity" is not only a political issue, but also a representational problem. Ang Lee's "dream of China" is mediated through the cinematic representation of the nation, which reflects a complex postcolonial ambivalence. Namely, the (re)searching for a "lost" cultural root represents a fundamental ambivalence toward the politics of recognition in a globalized context. The naming (or categorizing) of *Lust, Caution* and *Crouching Tiger* becomes a contestable task. When confronting the seemingly irreversible trend of transnationalism, a postcolonial immigrant filmmaker like Ang Lee on one hand bears the inscribed mission of presenting an "authentic" native culture that draws on a distinct nation-state political boundary, and on the other hand, needs to be "recognizable" cross-nationally, and to coalesce into a borderless arena. The embodiment of both the "Third World nativism" and globalism characterize a fundamental irony of the ideology of cosmopolitanism. The inherent paradox highlights the ambivalent relationship of nationalism and globalization and the ways in which native culture engages globalism.

In discussing the relationship between cosmopolitanism and particularism, Appiah (2006) states that "cultural purity is an oxymoron" (p. 203). Cosmopolitanism celebrates the cultural differences, global intermingling, yet implies that there are universal values of human beings. The ideology of cosmopolitanism lies in the presumption that there are origins and purity of each different culture; that differences

matter yet do not matter as the “universal standards,” which are still deeply centered in the West. Accordingly, “differences will remain, naturally, but they will remain precisely in the spheres that are morally indifferent: cosmopolitanism about these spheres will be fine, but surely only because they are, from a moral point of view, of secondary importance” (Appiah, 2003, p. 202). This point echoes Charles Taylor’s theory of an inherent paradox of the politics of recognition, which is simultaneously built on the assumption of a universal humanity and incommensurable differences. Such ambivalence is inherent in the cultural phenomenon of the success of Ang Lee’s transnational works.

In an age of cosmopolitanism when representations of multicultural and diversity becomes a commercial necessity that usually leads to high market value, representation of cultural particularities is deeply involved with the politics of recognition. As a postcolonial and transnational diasporic immigrant figure who constantly oscillates between Western and non-Western cultures, the “in-authenticity” of Ang Lee’s “accented cinema” precisely speaks to the ambivalent nature of the politics of recognition in an era of cosmopolitanism. In this project, therefore, I am primarily concerned with ambivalence being performed in his works and its function as a representational device as a possible tactic of aesthetic and political intervention. Indeed, the revitalizing and/or the creation of another “new transnational Chinese cinema” should be considered a potential reserved cultural flow that disrupts the long-term predominant Western cultural hegemony. Instead of viewing ambivalence as a problem or negative connotation, I suggest that the deployment of ambivalence is considered to be an empowering practice and a site of possibility.

My analysis belies a binary conceptualization of the transnational films of Ang Lee, that they are either cultural sellouts or cultural products that only reap the full commercial benefits. Instead, emerging in the discourse of audiences is a strong sense of liberation and celebration from such repackaging of Chinese national identity. At the same time, cultural nationalism is an essential component for the audience, signifying a reaction to a long-term complex emotional structure toward the Western gaze. The reversed cultural flow of *Crouching Tiger* and *Lust, Caution* is considered a collective “ethnic and national pride,” integral to regaining the right to self-determination, previously denied agency, and achieving a sense of political solidarity and being able to re (present) the historical context in the native’s terms. The symbolic liberation from a long-term subjugation of Western cultural imperialism is achieved.

An emerging popular cultural market of East Asian countries like China, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, etc, becoming “visible,” as Chow (2007) asserts, is more of “a matter of participating in a discursive politics of (re) configuring the relation between center and margins, a politics in which what is visible may be a key but not the exclusive determinant” (p. 11). That is, ambivalence is a self-representational strategy for the ethnic “Other,” who is historically denied access to representation, to contest and subvert the conventional stereotyping and simplification of one’s subjectivity.

Further, by analyzing the audience discourse, I am able to conceptualize their reactions as communicative moments that co-construct the meaning of the film text. This research provides a good example of the familiar cycle of ambivalent emotion toward the West, in the aftermath of postcolonialism. China and Taiwan’s long history of engaging

in a subordinate relationship with the West enhances the resurgence of ambivalence. Audience discourse reveals that the West has been simultaneously desired and feared, admired and hated, essentially contributing to a Chinese person's self-identity, value, and self-esteem. While "America" has long been the internalized desire for the Chinese people, the sense of self is co-constructed and consolidated by the achievement of winning Academy Awards, and being seen, recognized, and validated by American audiences. Through such communicative practice, "the West," circulated in and through various audience communities, becomes a construct that the "non-West" constantly needs to refer to, rely on, and consult with. Under the burden of representation, it is not difficult to understand why an ethnic minority like Ang Lee commits to representing Chineseness in globalized cultural productions.

Discourse of Ambivalence

From the audience discourse, one sees a deep-rooted sense of anxiety and defensiveness that closely intersects with nostalgia. The national sentimentalities simultaneously re-examine, (re) search, and (re) create the value of Chinese culture, its history, cultural value and people, as they are perceived to be gradually lost due to the dominance of Western modernity in current Chinese society. While audiences celebrate the needs and success of present and future global visibility, their reminiscing of China's past is concurrently omnipresent. Nostalgic sentimentality is derived from an emotional longing for the past—the glories of Chinese history. Thus, the audience discourse centers the debate over what Chinese culture is and how it ought to be represented in a global film market.

“Reserving” an authentic Chinese cultural root, whether it is fabricated or imagined, becomes a concrete yet abstract, an important yet difficult task for the audiences, especially within the context of cosmopolitanism. The nostalgia that is invoked goes beyond the commercial intention to perform for the West; but it harkens back to the essential purpose—the recreation and re-imagination of a cultural past, a reawakening of the feeling of a historical period whether or not that period is fraudulent or authentic. For communities from Taiwan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Chinese diasporas, the cross-national success of Ang Lee’s works becomes an invisible cultural bond and a way to remind and reaffirm their sense of self. Communication technology such as the Internet further provides a cross-boundary space to continue the talk of cultural identity; such mundane yet continuing discourse plays an essential role in constructing transnational networks and reifying one’s cultural practices.

Under the drastic social, political and economic transition of contemporary Chinese society, nostalgic sentiments expressed through both films and audience discourse are inextricably intersected with their self-reflection, personal memory that is intersected with a collective history. Both film function as an essential source of reconstructing one’s sense of cultural belonging and identity. The emotional solidarity expressed through both the audience and the text is a result of viewing one’s historical existence is being recognized, and represented in their own terms as a conceived way of self-determination. “History” becomes a structural feeling and a way of reconnect for the postcolonial and transnational communities. And, exactly at this juncture of a seeming emancipation from previous subjugation of Western ideological domination, that the

postcolonial ethnic community holds such putative solidarity so fiercely, when they finally begin to enjoy access to the representation of their own cultural and historical existence.

The cinematic discourse of sexuality in *Lust, Caution* is another significant theme that embodies profound ambivalence, and perceived ambivalently by audiences. Representation of sexuality in *Lust, Caution* raises cultural resentment toward the film among audiences from Mainland China, as it can be understood that it further adds to a long-term inferiority complex toward the West. The politics of sexuality in the film is interpreted as disparaging to China's national spirit because it implies the "backwardness" of a nation; and, it should not appear on the big screen for Western audiences. Such emotional structure typically and ambivalently finds its moment of anger at and hatred of the West, as the West has long been a critical gaze that carries the power of determining Chinese identification as the predominant legacy of history.

In the analysis, we clearly see the scathing criticism of the representation of gender and sexuality as it reflects the moralistic ideology of sexuality as a way to police one's virtue. Sexual relations need to be regulated and orderly, as sexual aberrations are considered a threat to the maintenance of a "moral society." To put it another way, a love relationship between a female spy and a perceived national traitor is not only perceived as a sexual transgression, but also a disturbance of China's national spirit by some audiences from Mainland China. Sex and politics, for some audiences, are considered a question of morality and, subsequently, a responsibility that a film director should or should not have

in guiding or representing a “non-normative” sexual relationship in a pop cultural product like *Lust, Caution*.

Positionalities of audiences play an important role in perceiving a cultural text differently; namely, the reception context demands more attention when analyzing audience reception. The representation of sexuality, likewise, is the much-debated topic among Taiwanese audience communities. As love and desire are not represented as a “recognizable” way, that is, they are both constructive and destructive, audiences reflect back to their life to reexamine their belief system. The uneasiness and unsettledness is evoked by the indeterminacy of human desire and the politics of sexuality presented in the filmic discourse.

Postscript

While the majority of Western audiences perceive Ang Lee’s films as a medium for learning a different ethnic culture, his cultural texts ironically also function as a site for the local audiences to regain and negotiate their cultural identity. What this phenomenon says is that in an era of globalization, namely, a postcolonial world, *both* West and non-West, marginalized and the dominant, respond to the diversity of cosmopolitanism by re-searching their own ethnic certainties. Globalization dissolves the spatial boundary yet simultaneously produces rampant cultural fragmentation, identity, and uncertain and intermixing cultural, political, and economic spheres. When discussing transnational media products, we can no longer draw a distinct line between the subject and the subjected, the local and the global, the margin and the center. In this case, the question of self-representation should move beyond the one layer dimension and

totalizing theory that native non-Western artists always invariably resort to Western means to express themselves with the aim to please the West. This line of thought actually embodies the danger of privileging the Western audiences and reinforcing their superior status. While we see the passionate discussions of Ang Lee's films within the local communities, such a claim can be challenged rather than validated.

Within the dynamics of self-representation and spectatorship I show throughout previous chapters, trans-cultural representation of Ang Lee not only turns the Westerner's gaze onto themselves, but also enables the local, Chinese-speaking audience communities from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas to reexamine themselves and cultural agency in their own terms. In the contemporary film market, the question whether or not the marginalized has opportunities to come into representation is no longer sufficient. Rather, one must ask: *who performs for whom? Who interprets whom? Who "distorts" or "authenticates" whom, and in what context? Who is the object and who is the subject?* The line between the performers and the audiences, the spectators and the performers is far from discrete, and indeed ambivalent. Hence, the question of cultural authenticity moves beyond the context of the cultural production and its audience receptions.

My interest in examining both cinematic texts and online audience discourse enables me to have a further understanding of identity politics and how films, and by extension media technologies, become specific agents for communities in different societies. Using Ang Lee and his transnational films as a case study, I argue that the space of paradox does not always lead to the hatred or eradication of the "self" and the

“Other,” but rather, the space of ambivalence can be empowering and enable one to reexamine one’s positioning in the world, indeed the “global village.”

My case studies illustrate that geographical and cultural displacement creates new forms of cultural belonging, and increasingly informs us of the local-global cultural dialectics. The impact of transnational forces, such as the rapid circulation of images, goods, information, and movements of diasporic populations, indeed demonstrates the limitation of the nation-state framework. When a term like “world citizen” articulates a rhetorical meaning of boundedness across boundaries, a utopian ideal of transcendence differences, and embodies symbolic universalistic cosmopolitanism become a heated slogan, I can’t help but wonder what exactly play a crucial role to bind each of us together in such a global community? My own take is media and information technology.

Representations become a significant and predominant way to mediate our bodily experiences, to connect and collaborate with one another, and to form and inform one’s cultural identity. Communities are formed by representations through modern communication technologies. Representations provide a site in which participants share a common story, memory, value, or history. It is through the participation and sharing, virtually or in real life, does one form a communal self-identity and solidarity.

My research furthers the theorization of the ways in which new media technologies impact and alter the human interactions between peoples from various cultural, social, and political contexts. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how ideologies in media shape peoples and societies, one should incorporate the analysis of audiences’ mundane discourse, their life experiences and relationships with media, and

take into consideration their active interpretation of mediated texts which help shape their perceptions of selves, the Others, societies, identities, cultures, and the world.

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