

# **Stylistic Innovations and the Emergence of the Urban in Taiwan Cinema: A Study of Bai Jingrui's Early Films**

*Shiao-ying Shen*

## **ABSTRACT**

This study looks into the early films of Bai Jingrui and discusses how Bai's work can be explored in the context of a re-examination of Taiwan's Mandarin-language film. The modern aesthetics Bai experimented with in his urban films brought forth the visual emergence of Taipei as the city center of Taiwan. Bai's early films - such as *Lonely Seventeen* (1968), *The Bride and I* (1968), *Accidental Trio* (1969), and *Home Sweet Home* (1970) - initiated the features of an emerging middle class onto the screen, affirming modern romance and an evolved sense of family in the forms of urban comedies and family melodramas. The urban sensibility Bai displayed in his early films later contributed to the middle class sense of romance in the Qiong Yau films of the 1970s. With his *Goodbye Darling* (1970), Bai tried to inject a realist sensibility into Taiwan's film scene, which did not catch on in the 70s but was later given full expression in the early 1980s by a group of films we now identify as Taiwan New Cinema.

## **KEY WORDS**

Bai Jingrui, Taipei, urban comedy, family melodrama, Qiong Yau film, *Lonely Seventeen*, *The Bride and I*, *Accidental Trio*, *Home Sweet Home*, *Goodbye Darling*



Journal papers on Taiwan cinema these days mostly deal with post-Taiwan New Cinema (TNC) films. This phenomenon is partly due to what is available on video or DVD on today's market, and what is available are mostly films after the 1980s. One of the most exciting events about Chinese cinema in the last decade must be the release of Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers' films on DVD. Recently, Hong Kong's MP&GI (Motion Picture and General Investment Co Ltd) films have also gradually come out in Taiwan. These DVD-releases of Hong Kong films not only facilitate the understanding of earlier Hong Kong commercial cinema, they also help in our understanding of Taiwan cinema of the pre-TNC decades, about how Taiwan films of the late 1960s and 1970s evolved in the context of competition from Hong Kong products.<sup>1</sup> In our own market, CMPC (Central Motion Picture Corporation) has long made their productions available on video and later on DVD. Now Li Xing (李行) has put many of his non-CMPC works on the market, and TCMPC's (Ta Chung Motion Picture Company)<sup>2</sup> films are also now accessible. We can also find more and more Qiong Yao (瓊瑤) romance films in the stores these days. All this makes for a renewed scenario for Taiwan cinema studies.

Scholars of Taiwan cinema have already produced several texts on Taiwan film history: Lu Sushang, Huang Ren, Ye Longyan, Lu Feiyi, Li Tienduo have all looked into post-occupation Taiwan cinema. Recently Mamie Misawa has published her study of Taiwan's film policy during years of the Japanese Occupation (1895–1942). Our Film Archive has contributed to the field by publishing memoirs or transcriptions of interviews with figures who were major players in our film industry.<sup>3</sup> Huang Ren has also consistently produced research on

important past Taiwan filmmakers. In English, June Yip's *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* gives a good historical and literary background to the rise of Taiwan New Cinema, to the emergence of Hou Hsiao-hsien's films in particular. Yeh Yueh-yu and Darrell Davis's *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* focuses more on Taiwan's postwar cinematic history and closes in on the works of Hou, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang. All this certainly serves as a good foundation for further exploration of Taiwan films, especially more nuanced readings of pre-TNC works. And this paper is written in such a context.

This paper's interest in Bai Jingrui (白景瑞, 1931–1997) arose from the availability of his early CMPC films. Watching Bai's early work on DVD, I was struck by the bold style and also the sense of humor in them, and the kind of Taipei he registered. With the publication of Huang Ren's book on Bai Jingrui in 2001, the basic information on this filmmaker has been sorted out. Comprehensive and close analysis of Bai's significant work of *all* the different stages of his career is as yet not quite feasible since many of Bai's work are not only unavailable in the market, but also not collected in our Taipei Film Archive.<sup>4</sup> Due to the fact that Bai's innovative style, humor, and urban sensibility are the elements that I find most appealing, and since these qualities dissipated when Bai moved to make Qiong Yao films in the 1970s, a focused study of Bai's early work is a more practicable option.

Bai Jingrui, in a career that spanned more than two decades (1967–1990), is a filmmaker who has pioneered different film stylistics that contributed much to the variety of film presentations in Taiwan cinema. Bai has attempted period drama (*Fire Bulls*, 還我河山, 1967; *Forbidden Imperial Tales*, 嫁到宮裡的男人, 1990), films of indoctrination (*My Father, My Husband, My Son*, 我父、我夫、我子, 1974; *The Coldest Winter in Peking*, 皇天后土, 1980), the ever-popular Qiong Yao films (*Because of Love*, 第六個夢, 1969; *Fantasies Behind the Pearly Curtain*, 一簾幽夢, 1976), realist drama (*Goodbye Darling*, 再見阿郎, 1970), and urban films (*Lonely Seventeen*, 寂寞的十七歲, 1968; *Home Sweet Home*, 家在台北, 1970). Amidst all these endeavors, what marks as the highpoint of Bai's career

are the filmic innovations he introduced in his urban films in the late 1960s. Before focusing on Bai's urban films, a short exploration of Bai's *Goodbye Darling* reveals an aspect of his background and cinematic ambition, and a pregnant moment in Taiwan's film development.

### Goodbye Darling (再見阿郎)

In 1960 Bai began his Italian connection when he was assigned as the foreign correspondent for two Taiwan newspapers,<sup>5</sup> an experience many believe later led to the realist impulse in *Goodbye Darling*. In 1961 Bai chose to fully immerse himself in the Italian art and film scene: he learned the language, explored art in an art institute in Rome, and studied film in the Centro Studi Cinematografici (C.S.C.). Bai returned to Taiwan in 1964 and started his association with CMPC. After establishing himself as a bankable director – all of his directorial efforts up until 1970 (six films) have all made it into the annual top-ten box office hit list – Bai earned his chance to make *Goodbye Darling* and experiment with a realist filmic sensibility.

Film writers identify *Goodbye Darling* as one of Bai's representative works, and as an effort that shows Bai's absorption of the style of the Italian neorealist films.<sup>6</sup> However, as we consider the film more in the historical context of Taiwan cinema, *Goodbye Darling* is an awkward film, oscillating between realist stylistics and conformist aesthetics. Its didactic voice-over opening and ending, such an overtly moralizing framing seems quite unnecessary in a film that embodies realist tendencies. This voice-over framing wants to set a tone that is somewhat out of tune with the whole picture. The insistence of inserting Mandarin onto Taiwanese-speaking characters in *Goodbye Darling* feels quite awkward for today.<sup>7</sup> It is a fact that this practice was the norm at that time in Mandarin cinema, a trend launched by "wholesome realism"<sup>8</sup> films such as *Oyster Girl* (蚵女, 1964) and *Beautiful Duckling* (養鴨人家, 1965). But these wholesome realism films had more studio sets, had an artificiality in their style, stressed more the "wholesome" part of the film policy, thus making their

linguistic choice perhaps a bit more tolerable; whereas *Goodbye Darling* wanted more realism in its style and subject, which made the Mandarin dialogue quite uncomfortably conspicuous. The casting of Ke Junxiong (柯俊雄) and Zhang Meiyao (張美瑤) as the leads of *Goodbye Darling* had instantaneous box-office appeal.<sup>9</sup> The presence of these stars was good for business, but their star persona did not help highlight the youthful recklessness or the social protest veiled in the film. Bai Jingrui is a filmmaker very adept at incorporating pop songs in his urban comedies. Pop tunes might have been too commercial for the subject of *Goodbye Darling* – the underclass struggling to deal with the overwhelming changes in Taiwan’s urbanization – but the choice of the lyrical instrumental soundtrack rings false with the “passion” of the male protagonist, and the mournful music further dilutes the film’s social commentary. The generally more conventional film style – Bai tries none of his lively filmic experimentations here – contributes to make *Goodbye Darling* a lamenting drama about young people abandoned by the tide of progress. The awkwardness that permeates *Goodbye Darling* in a way exposes the tension between what the filmmaker wanted to voice and what was allowed at the time<sup>10</sup> – the tension between investigating the forces related to social malaise and expounding the positiveness of collective progress.

The awkwardness in *Goodbye Darling* found its resolution in the 1980s with the youth films of Taiwan New Cinema. Think of Hou Hsiao-hsien’s *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (童年往事, 1985). Hou’s voice-over framing is personal rather than didactic; the film’s language encompasses Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Hakka; its lack of star presence facilitates its realistic film style; and its lyrical soundtrack enhances the nostalgia and wistfulness set up by Hou’s opening voice-over. In other words, the flipside of *Goodbye Darling*’s incongruities is the manifestation of its failed but bold attempt at veering away from “wholesome realism,” an attempt which paved the way for the fruitful realist aesthetics of the 80s’ Taiwan New Cinema.

*Goodbye Darling* did not succeed either at the box office or at the Golden Horse Awards.<sup>11</sup> After *Goodbye Darling*, Bai did not again attempt such realist aesthetic, but regained his place in the film industry

in the most commercial of 70s film genres - in the Qiong Yao style romance films. In the second part of Bai's film career (from the mid-70s to 1990), five of his films made it to the annual top-ten list, and four of them are romance films. His success in this genre lies partly in his early endeavors in urban drama, in his adeptness at representing middle-class urban sensibility. If we consider *Goodbye Darling* as an important realist contribution to Taiwan cinema, then Bai's early urban films must also count as a major factor in how the urban is later presented in Taiwan cinema. And an exploration of Bai's urban aesthetics should start with his first feature, *Lonely Seventeen*.<sup>12</sup>

### Lonely Seventeen (寂寞的十七歲)

Today when we think of Taiwan youth films, we might immediately associate it with works of Hou Hsiao-hsien in the 80s and films of Tsai Ming-liang in the 90s. But if we look further back to pre-Taiwan New Cinema years, Bai Jingrui's *Lonely Seventeen* (1968) would also count as an important work in this subgenre. Youth films deal with narratives of coming of age, of loss of innocence, of tales of initiation. They register young people's moment of existential crisis through which they gain valuable knowledge, and in the end make an adjustment toward or integrate into the adult world. Bai aptly chose an initiation story in his first feature work - *Lonely Seventeen*. The film has a female high school protagonist, who is thrown into the ways of the world through her romantic impulses, and experiences a loss of will and life force as her desire is thwarted. *Lonely Seventeen* is a typical initiation story but with stylistic attempts that are quite noteworthy. Its color design is beautifully rendered (for which it won Best Color Cinematography and Best Color Art Design in the 1968 Golden Horse); it tries jump cuts and frontal shot reverse shots. What is most stimulating is its spatial presentation: instead of a lot of studio sets and the confining spaces of school and home life, *Lonely Seventeen* gives us montages of Taipei. We roam the city with the protagonist, and oftentimes the film chooses dramatic spaces (moving merry-go-round, mini Ferris wheel) and striking architecture to externalize the inner

state of the high school girl. And as the girl completes her process of initiation, Taipei is also spatially initiated into the complexities of the modern city. The film ends with the young protagonist overcoming her sense of guilt and loss and happily starting anew amongst pure snowy hills on a ski trip with her classmates. The ski-trip ending not only clashes with the plotline of the film, but also the tone and style of the work: the bright snow attacks one's eyes, the non-diegetic song with "la-la-la" lyrics cannot be more cheerful, and the happy youths seem hollowly wholesome. Critics have expressed chagrin at the overly wholesome ending of *Lonely Seventeen*, and Bai Jingrui himself expressed dismay at how he had to modify the ending at CMPC's suggestion.<sup>13</sup> With *Lonely Seventeen*, Bai was initiated into the ideological world of the 1960s film industry and national cultural policy.

Examining urban films in Taiwan cinema, Edward Yang's *Terrorizer* of the 80s and Tsai Ming-liang's *Vive l'Amour* of the 90s come forth as representative works of the genre. Distantiation, simultaneity, fragmentation, and the collage structure are also often cited as the aesthetics of modernity embodied in these films. However, should one further explore this genre, one would then notice these modern stylistics already emerging in local films in the late 1960s. And Bai Jingrui's late 60s films stand as significant urban films of that period. The films Bai made after *Lonely Seventeen* show a sense of urbaneness that is unique amongst filmmakers of that era. His *The Bride and I* (新娘與我, 1968), *Accidental Trio* (今天不回家, 1969, also listed as *Not Coming Home Today*), and *Home Sweet Home* (1970) pioneered a type of urban comedy that is still refreshing to watch today. These films employed multiple story lines, experimented with split screens, exaggerated mise-en-scene, and cartoon opening credit sequence, mastering a style that displays well the urbanization of Taiwan.

The topic of the publication for the 1995 Golden Horse Film Festival was set as, "Focus on Taipei through Cinema, 1950–1990."<sup>14</sup> All the papers in the publication, when surveying pre-1970 Taiwan films, mention Bai's *Home Sweet Home* in their discussion. This film,

however, is repeatedly considered as a patriotic film or as a policy film promoting Taipei as an emerging city and an embracing city capable of recalling its wandering sons and daughters from the US. Only Liao Jinfeng's paper, "The Vanished Feature: A Comparison in Cinematic Practice between Taiwanese and Mandarin Films in the 1960s," approaches *Home Sweet Home* from a stylistic angle, and analyzes its innovative filmic techniques.<sup>15</sup> Before also looking into *Home Sweet Home*, I shall first proceed with Bai's *The Bride and I* and *Accidental Trio*. And in my analyses, I shall expand Liao's observations and further study the significance of Bai's filmic experiments; at the same time I shall tackle how Bai's films set the grounds for urban film comedy, and how they relate to a particular type of 70s romance film.

### The Bride and I (新娘與我)

Film writers have noted that with Bai Jingrui coming into Taiwan's Mandarin film making, a contemporariness, a playfulness, a lightness is felt in the film scene, especially in the titles of his early work (Huang 100, 105, 106).<sup>16</sup> For example the 1969 Qiong Yao adaptation, *Because of Love*, is named in Chinese both as 第六個夢 and 春盡翠湖寒: the former is straight-forward and viewer-friendly, while the latter more literary. The former won out in the end and is officially cited as the film's title. The Chinese and English title of *The Bride and I* are the same and point to the film's two main characters and suggest its dual narrative structure. "*Accidental Trio*" brings out the film's three-way plot; its Chinese title 今天不回家 (meaning *Not Coming Home Today*) is playfully straightforward and mischievously defiant of the all-important notion of home and family. *Home Sweet Home* has everybody coming home; the Chinese title 家在台北 (meaning "home in Taipei") submits to the notion of home and specifies Taipei as the all-Chinese urban home. Surveying Bai's early features, one would also notice how English titles and credits are included in their opening sequences.<sup>17</sup> The time when Bai joined CMPC was also a period when Taiwan's Mandarin film companies, learning from Hong Kong's MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, began to



explore their room for overseas distribution. In other words, the “lightening” of titles and inclusion of English titles and credits reveal the KMT-related CMPC, with Henry Kung at the helm, established “wholesome realism” as the company’s production guideline, toned down the ideological aspect of its product, presented more viewer-friendly and commercially viable products, and made itself a potential competitor against Hong Kong films both in the local and export market. And Bai, with his European experience, was the perfect director to bring a sense of cosmopolitanism and contemporariness into Taiwan’s Mandarin film products.

Another way of considering the contemporariness of Bai’s work is not only to look at the urban setting or the titling of his early films, but also in the structure of their narratives. *The Bride and I* adopts a “he say she say” structure. The story is about the trials the male and female protagonists go through before making it to the altar. The film begins with a cute and colorful cartoon credit sequence, compressing the two protagonists’ encounter and introducing a tubby and balding male figure (looking very much like Bai Jingrui), who uses a red thread to help them tie the knot. The film then stages, in a mocking tone, a sequence of different ways of making it to the altar in different ages, a sort of history of different modes of wedding. The story proper is first presented from the point of view of the groom as he walks towards the altar, showing us his recollection of the different courtships he undertook before meeting his future bride. We then have the flashback of the bride’s version. As the story moves back into the bride and groom’s relationship, there is another “he say she say” episode from the point of view of the bride’s and groom’s best friends, each telling them how to maneuver the upper hand in the power struggle of love. After the couple overcome further differences and misunderstandings, the film ends with the bride and groom back at the church altar, declaring their “I dos.”

When we consider film history, by the 1960s, it is nothing new to tell a story from the viewpoints of a film’s different characters (think of Joseph Mankiewicz’s *All about Eve*, 1950; *The Barefoot Contessa*, 1954). And oftentimes a viewpoint is paired with the voice-over of the

respective character. What is noteworthy of Bai's *The Bride and I* is that although segments of its story are shown from different male and female perspectives, its voice-over narration does not belong to any one of the characters. We do not really know the identity of the male-voiced narrator. People familiar with Taiwan's Mandarin actors of that era might recognize the voice as that of the actor Wei Su (魏蘇), who plays the bride's father in the film; but the film itself does not make or show this connection, besides the tone of the voice-over is too teasing and mocking for the father character. The narrator addresses the audience, comments on the story, and can even direct the action – as near the end when the bride refuses to say “I do” and runs away from the altar, the voice-over calls her back, reverses the action, stops the film from a runaway-bride ending, and insists on giving us a proper happy ending. Bai Jingrui further enhances the comic tone of the film by having the voice-over enforce its narrative power over the cartoon figure. In the middle of the film, after a major fight between the protagonists, Bai inserts the cartoon tubby figure from the credit sequence (Bai's own look-alike) to prematurely close the film, but then has the narrator address the cartoon figure, stop it from drawing the curtain, and re-launch the bride and groom's relationship. In the end, it is also with the narrator's permission that the cartoon figure can finally draw the curtain on the happy-ending story. In other words, there is the story of the bride and groom, there are also the cartoon insertions that bracket the story, then there is the voice-over narration that comments on and directs the story. All this makes *The Bride and I* a uniquely self-reflexive Taiwan urban comedy. One cannot help but wonder, after Bai's *Lonely Seventeen* experience, Bai might well be using *The Bride and I* to mock at how a director does not really pull the strings on a film production, but that there is an all-powerful voice that controls how a film story goes.

By the late 60s, the insertion of cartoon clips, the use of non-linear or two-viewpoint narrative, or the employment of intricate voice-over are no longer innovations in the history of film style; however, Bai's combined usage of them in *The Bride and I* was new in Taiwan. The amusing story and refreshing style of the film helped it

gross two million NT in its opening four days. Bai's daring directorial experimentation also won him the Best Director prize in the Seventh Golden Horse Award. With this excellent result, Bai made further stylistic attempts in his next two urban comedies, *Accidental Trio* and *Home Sweet Home*.

### Accidental Trio (今天不回家)

With the confidence gained from the success of *The Bride and I*, Bai, together with Hu Chengding and Li Xing, set up Ta Chung Motion Picture Company (TCMPC), which produced his next feature, *Accidental Trio*. As suggested in the English title, this feature weaves together three lines of story, with Zhen Zhen (甄珍), star of *The Bride and I*, leading the most substantial line. If we consider the top female stars of Taiwan Mandarin film of that era, Zhen Zhen would count as one embodying the best comedic sense. With Zhen Zhen starring in *Accidental Trio*, the audience would expect another urban comedy, and TCMPC would hope to reprise the box office success of Bai's last CMPC feature.

This urban comedy begins with an old couple walking out of a four-storey apartment building in the bluish dawn light; the old man objects about the wife always tagging along, and mumbles that there is no reason to follow him - he *will* come home. Then the credits are presented with gradual whiter light, with shots of apartment buildings, new high-rises, panoramas of the awakening city; these are all unveiled along with the catchy song "Not Coming Home Today." *Accidental Trio* in a way is like a dramatic city symphony. It begins with the non-descript old couple at dawn, follows with the young woman played by Zhen Zhen, who is preparing for her second-time college entrance exam, leaving home in the morning to escape her father's constant admonition. Then a newlywed husband kisses his wife and pretends to leave for work but is actually meeting his old girlfriend from the US. Finally a salary-man father of four leaves home, claiming early morning overtime to escape his rowdy boys and cluttered home. All of them are leaving from the same apartment building. All of them will

demonstrate challenge to their familial identity and relationship, challenges provided by the aleatory nature of the city. Their ventures in the city will show us a modernizing, westernizing Taipei. And after this tour of the city, after these different-aged Taipeians have had their taste of the city, all of them come home late at night - just as the old man reassured at the beginning – reconciled to their familial place as the city winds down and prepares for another day. The film ends with a return to the initial old couple, with a final freeze of them hand-in-hand walking towards the screen/audience in bluish light.

*Accidental Trio*'s three-line story is presented less flashily than the "he said she said" plot of *The Bride and I*. The latter is an outright comedy with splashes of slapstick, while the former is a more toned-down comedy mixed with a touch of family melodrama. With *The Bride and I*, Bai seems to want to exhaust all filmic techniques with showy camera movements and angles, numerous editing tricks – slow motion of romantic outings,<sup>18</sup> fast motion paired with silent-movie acting, freeze montage, etc. With *Accidental Trio*, Bai subdues filmic experimentations and fine-tunes his narrative technique. The storyline of the restless teenager preparing for her second college entrance exam is like an extension of *Lonely Seventeen*, but this time the teenager actually encounters an interested older man who is a journalist.<sup>19</sup> The newlywed couple is like a follow-up to the bride and groom of *The Bride and I*; all the suspicions and hesitations in a pre-marriage relationship are further tested out in this post-honeymoon marriage. The salary-man accountant father manifests the ordeals of family – four loud kids, visiting parents-in-law, harried and harrying wife. This trio's venture in the city brings them to the brink of wrecking their home life: the teenager invites the older man's amorous approach in her drunken state, the husband practices borderline betrayal as he insists on showing Taipei to his former fiancée behind his wife's back, the accountant father is duped out of his office money by a pro as he showers excitedly in a hotel expectant of a rare sexual tryst. But, we have been promised a comedy, and so everybody does go home, home to each person's forgiving family. The emerging urban provides escape from, and at the same time tests conventional human relationship. And in 1969, the

family can still show itself to be a stronger contender. The film in the end, by having everybody come home, reasserts the institution of home – with ironic humor.

The kind of humor in *Accidental Trio* and the comedic pacing of *The Bride and I* are achieved through not only Bai's distinctive sensibility but also tools and techniques he brought into Taiwan's film industry. Bai brought back from Italy the tape splicer, outdating the glue splicer, which wastes two frames of film. Bai also recommended to CMPC to purchase the three-spool editing machine, facilitating better synchronized sound and film editing (Kung 134).<sup>20</sup> Taiwan did not attempt full-scale color features before the late 50s;<sup>21</sup> once attempted, scenes were preferably studio sets to better control light and color schemes. Bai favored real locations and natural light. CMPC assigned Lin Zanting (林贊庭) as the cinematographer for Bai's first feature *Lonely Seventeen*, which won them both their first Golden Horse for Best Directing and Best Color Cinematography in 1968. *Lonely Seventeen's* use of natural light in the numerous outdoor settings gave a fresh sense of color to Taiwan cinema. Lin Zhanting became Bai's favorite DP (director of photography); their collaboration numbering 19 films; all of Bai's films analyzed in this paper have Lin as the cameraman. It is with Lin that Bai came up with their unique "screened" framing: shots are framed with decorative objects in the foreground – blurred beaded curtain or a lampshade or a bowl of fruit – character and action in the middle-ground. This framing makes the shots in *Accidental Trio* "busier," giving the film an immediate comedic feel. The many refreshing elements in Bai Jingrui's urban comedies also made them competitive against Hong Kong's Shaw Brothers' martial arts movies, which dominated the Mandarin film scene in Taiwan in the late 60s.<sup>22</sup>

With the success of *Accidental Trio*, Bai was asked back to CMPC to make a multi-plot film for them.<sup>23</sup> Although CMPC restrained Bai's film ideas with their "wholesome realism," it was also the place where Bai obtained solid film production training. When Bai came back from Italy and worked for CMPC, Henry Kung first assigned him as production executive, then asked him to join the script

team and assist in the editing department before giving him the chance to make *Lonely Seventeen*. It is apt then that in 1970 Bai returned to CMPC and made another coming home film, *Home Sweet Home*, which came to be his representative urban film.

### Home Sweet Home (家在台北)

In the 1960s Bai Jingrui is *the* Mandarin filmmaker who can best bring out the sense of the modern. This becomes evident when we take a look at one of the films of his contemporary, Li Xing. In 1970, after the box-office coup of Bai's *Accidental Trio*, Li also made a three-part film for TCMPC called *Love Styles XYZ* (愛情一二三, meaning "love 123").<sup>24</sup> But there is none of the weaving together of the three lines of story as in *Accidental Trio*; Li simply lines up three stories in consecutive order, and the three stories are introduced as Love 1, Love 2, Love 3. Although *Love Styles XYZ* has a contemporary urban setting, the sets have a rustic, local feel. There is no vividness or luster in its lighting and color. There are no flamboyant filmic techniques. The leading lady's look is modern, but every time she changes a hairstyle in the first story, she seems to be changing a wig. *Love Styles XYZ* was meant to be a comedy, but it has none of the humor or lightness of Bai's comedies; Li's comicalness is predictable, and his three parts verge on being three little morality tales.<sup>25</sup> With Bai Jingrui, when he sets his films in an urban setting, one can sense an eagerness for the modern, and this eagerness is injected into his presentation of Taipei. With *Home Sweet Home*, the city Taipei comes to the fore, is named as part of the Chinese title of the film (家在台北, meaning "home in Taipei"), and displays its exciting transformation.

Ever since *Lonely Seventeen*, Bai has been eager to incorporate the international into Taipei. The male lead in *Lonely Seventeen* is placed in the then top-rate Ambassador Hotel, and as the female teenager goes to visit him there, Bai inserts an Italian couple frustratingly communicating with the concierge in Italian. In this throwaway little episode, Bai reveals his European connection and shows that the international does not merely comprise of Americans

and English. In fact by *Home Sweet Home*, Bai shows a criticalness towards the Yankophiles in Taipei. *Home Sweet Home* begins with a scene on a plane,<sup>26</sup> and in this chartered US-Taipei flight, its Chinese passengers express an array of attitudes toward the contention of whether the US or Taipei is one's proper home.

Like *Accidental Trio*, *Home Sweet Home* opens with a catchy song. This theme song might not have been as popular as that of *Accidental Trio*, but anyone who has heard of it will remember how the word "Taipei" keeps being repeated in the lyrics. On the visual side, Bai uses not only split-screen shots but also fragments his shots with pockets of images (can number up to 36 pockets in one shot).<sup>27</sup> The Taipei song, paired with this very modern visual design, brings an immediate energy to the beginning of the film, and we are led to anticipate the unfolding of an exciting Taipei story. Numerous characters are introduced in the opening scene on the airplane and in the Songshan Airport, showing again Bai's adeptness at directing ensemble casts.<sup>28</sup> The film then sifts into three stories, with a comedy in the beginning, a difficult romance in the middle, and a substantial family melodrama in the third part.

The beginning comedy shows Bai's typical flamboyance. This time with split and fragmented screen, a sense of simultaneity is highlighted even more than the multi-plot interweaving design of *Accidental Trio*.<sup>29</sup> *Home Sweet Home* also shows us a more varied picture of Taipei. The first part comedy involves farming parents welcoming home their son and daughter-in-law from the US, so we witness the hilly part of Taipei, romantically green and pastoral. In this part, a trip to the bucolic Sun Moon Lake is also included. In the end the son and the daughter-in-law respond to the call of the idyllic land and decide to stay in Taipei. The middle romance story involves a male artist and his long-time love interest who is older than him and returning from the US after many years to finally be with him. This part is very much an urban tale with apartment living decorated with Warholian photo collage, with nightclub scene blasting with a song played by a female electric guitar band. In this segment the artist also makes a sketching trip to a scenic site with palatial architecture at

Yangmingshan. This story ends with the artist's woman friend donning a very decent blue cheongsam,<sup>30</sup> responding to the traditional and maternal call of her orphanage-running friends, deciding to stay in Taipei and work in the orphan house.

The third story shows the return of an engineer, who made his success as a water management expert during his ten-year stay in the US. He returns to Taipei to seek a divorce from his wife so as to be back with his American girlfriend. His travails take us to lower-income housing neighborhood and the expensive Central Hotel, to the plebeian food market where his wife vends pickled vegetables, to the textile factory with shining machinery where his brother works, to the grand construction site of the Zengwen Dam where his friend operates. In the end the engineer resolves to stay, moves his family to a high-rise apartment, and joins the forces of national construction. With the dairy farm, Sun Moon Lake, Zengwen Dam, viewers might see *Home Sweet Home* as showing us more of Taiwan than Taipei, but this is exactly what Taipei is meant to be. In 1970 Taipei represents the nation, a home for Chinese families. *Home Sweet Home* formulates a Taipei that embodies the ideals of a nation. The first story has modern forces bond with agrarian development (the returning son worked in IBM in New York). The romance story brings about the joining of capital and social improvement (the returning woman comes back with hard-earned money from the US). The third melodrama promises the welding of science and technology with nation building. And so the idea of returning to Taipei, the idea of home in Taipei, translates into an affirmation of the City as the site of Chinese modern development.

Bai's early films map the course of an emerging city. *Lonely Seventeen* shows the arrival of the TV age (the black and white TV screen shows educational program and commercials) and the establishment of Christian churches in the city. The melancholia and nervous breakdown of the protagonist can then be seen as the ailment resulting from the desire and the fear of facing the onset of inevitable modernizing forces. *The Bride and I* further stresses the rooting of the modern in a comical tone, such as with its opening sequence in which weddings move into the motor era and the aerial age (couples marry on



motorcycles and in a parachuting ceremony). The film's bride and groom marry in a Christian church and recollect their first date in the rising neighborhood of the city. The Foremost restaurant in which they date is located in the then very new eastern part of Taipei, and the Americanized western food served there reveals the arrival of transnational capital. The female protagonist wears mini-skirt; the male protagonist works in the communication/PR business and designs new fabrics. The film's highlight involves a fashion show in which new fabrics are used and the female protagonist models the final bridal gown. There is no sense of nostalgia in *The Bride and I*; it shows middle class nuclear family; it affirms the new way of romance (instead of matchmaking by parents); it supports new economic forms.

*Accidental Trio* continues to present signs of the modern in its details, urban setting, and film form. It further attempts to convey a sense of the modern in the figure of an erotic city, full of seduction and temptation. Taipei provides its residents with escape from the family, with the excitement of alluring possibilities, with the potential of "the making and remaking of selves" (Mumford 116). The City facilitates the meeting of the husband with his woman friend from the US; they play golf, change clothes in a hotel and dance in a nightclub, all along testing their own control from veering into an affair. The City presents the teenager with an encounter with the American news agency correspondent who calls himself a "demon." The demon wines and dines and dances with the teenager, but stops short of actually seducing the tipsy minor. The City offers the accountant-father a chance for anonymous sex, at the same time exposing his shameful ineptness and gullibility when faced with the erotic urban. There is again no nostalgia in *Accidental Trio*, but it shows ambivalence towards our ability to manage the erotic allure, the power of the City. Bai's urban films exhibit the modern in appealing ways, at the same time they subtly question the modern. They are rooted in the now and here, investing in the modernizing Taipei. And *Home Sweet Home* represents this modernizing Taipei into a model Chinese city, into a site for wholesome homes for all Chinese who are keen on contributing to the Taiwan homeland. This image of Taipei was successfully conveyed not

only domestically<sup>31</sup> but also across the Strait. According to Bai, *Home Sweet Home* is the first Taiwan film to be publicly screened in many cities in China, and China's filmmaker Xie Jin (謝晉) responded to the film's depiction of Taipei with, "now we know Taiwan people are not suffering from a hellish existence," and the general response in China was that the film "speaks well for Taiwan" (Chen 147). *Home Sweet Home* must count as one of the most effective CMPC policy/propaganda films, registering Taipei as the emerging pan-Chinese modern city.

*Home Sweet Home* not only performed well at the box office, on the propaganda front, as a subject for film writers, but also as Bai's representative work in which his filmic expressions have reached its most established and appealing form. Bai's urban films are a source from which later Taiwan filmmakers acknowledge his legacy. One of Taiwan's few female directors, Sylvia Chang (張艾嘉), in her 1996 film *Tonight Nobody Goes Home*, pays tribute to Bai by making the Chinese title of her film the same as Bai's *Accidental Trio*, and reuses *Accidental Trio*'s famous theme song with an upbeat disco re-arrangement. Chang's work is an urban comedy with four lines of story in which everybody leaves and then comes home. Bai's *Accidental Trio* is framed by an old couple leaving and coming home; Chang's *Tonight Nobody Goes Home* is not only framed by an old couple - or rather an older couple who are fresh into their sixties - but also concentrates on the older couple's erotic encounters in the city. When we look into Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), is it not another urban comedy with four storylines in which characters test their erotic chances in Taipei? And both Chang and Lee's film employ the female lead of *Home Sweet Home*, Guei Yalei (歸亞蕾), quarter of a century later. Most people might not think of Hou Hsiao-hsien as a filmmaker of urban comedies, but if we review his early 80s work - *Lovable You* (aka *Cute Girl*, 就是溜溜的她, 1980), *Play While You Play* (aka *Cheerful Wind*, 風兒踢踏彩, 1981) - they are commercially successful romantic comedies with Hou's typical city-country dichotomy. These early Hou films display filmic humor, which was a quality that characterized Bai's early work; they further and modify the

romantic melodrama – Qiong Yao films – that identified 1970s' Taiwan cinema of which Bai Jingrui was one of its major directors; they also embody a realist sensibility that Bai once tried so forcefully, yet not totally effectively, to convey.

Bai is a Taiwan director who dared to be comic at a time when the annual award for Mandarin film was named after the two Taiwan islands which heroically faced China's attacks,<sup>32</sup> whose *The Bride and I* was the first light comedy to win big in the Golden Horse. Bai Jingrui is a director who, as early as 1971 with his *Goodbye Darling*, adapted the work of Chen Yingzhen,<sup>33</sup> a contemporary of Huang Chunming. Chen and Huang are considered today as novelists who wrote about Taiwan people and social issues – Taiwan realities – that were ignored by the literature of their time; Huang Chunming is also the writer whose work was adapted by directors in the early 80s which launched Taiwan New Cinema. Bai Jingrui is the filmmaker whose sense of the urban and of the international<sup>34</sup> was most effectively employed by the Qiong Yao romantic melodramas of the 1970s, a Taiwan film genre that helped establish Taiwan popular cinema in the worldwide Mandarin film market. I hope this paper has, through the early work of Bai Jingrui, brought forth a glimpse of the aesthetics and the context of Taiwan Mandarin film production during the late 1960s, and presented a possible way of viewing, tracing, and connecting the modern and the realist elements in Taiwan cinema.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The understanding can also involve post-TNC films. For example, with the availability of Hong Kong's MP&GI's classic *Mambo Girl* (曼波女郎, 1957), one can speculate about the possible thoughts behind the title of Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Millenium Mambo* (千禧曼波, 2001) – thoughts about the fascinating contrast in the representation of Chinese young women half a century apart.

<sup>2</sup> TCMPC was established in 1968 and stopped production in 1982; Li Xing and Bai Jingrui were both amongst its founding partners.

<sup>3</sup> Sha Rongfeng's and Tong Yuejuan's memoir are recent examples: Sha

was the producer of the groundbreaking *Dragon Inn* (龍門客棧, 1967); Tong was a producer of Chinese films made in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The Film Archive's *The era of Taiwanese film* also provides much information on Taiwanese films.

<sup>4</sup> Bai's *Because of Love* (第六個夢, 1969) is unavailable; and his *Girl Friend* (女朋友, 1975) is collected only in film form.

<sup>5</sup> *Independent Evening News* and the now *China Times*.

<sup>6</sup> Aside from the essays collected in Huang Ren's book on Bai Jingrui which point out *Goodbye Darling's* realist effort, for earlier Chinese analysis of Bai's films, see Cai Guorong's *A study of recent Chinese wenyi films*, in which he looks into four of Bai's works: *Home Sweet Home* (1970), *The Autumn Love Song* (秋歌, 1976), *Love in a Cabin* (白屋之戀, 1974), and *Goodbye Darling* (1971).

<sup>7</sup> Taiwanese films were also a major force in Taiwan's movie scene of the 60s; Taiwanese film directors such as Xin Qi (辛奇) made compelling work (e.g. *Dangerous Youth*, 危險的青春, 1969), and mainlander filmmaker such as Li Xing also began his film career with Taiwanese movies (e.g. *Liang-xiang-hao*, 倆相好, 1961, a work inspired by Hong Kong's *The Greatest Civil War on Earth*, 南北和, 1961). In the mid-1960s, as productions moved to color film, dubbing was utilized instead of sync-sound, and this made possible the move of many actors from Taiwanese films to Mandarin films – *Goodbye Darling's* Ke Jungxiong and Zhang Meiyao both made successful transitions under such conditions. Lin Zanting (林贊庭) explains the technical background behind Taiwan cinema's change from sync-sound to dubbing in his *Cinematography in Taiwan* (223–26).

<sup>8</sup> “Wholesome realism” (健康寫實) is a film guideline formulated by the KMT-related CMPC to, on the one hand, promote “wholesome” ideological tenets of the governing party, and on the other, manufacture products that are more viable for the market, which needs to be “realistic” enough to invite popular identification.

<sup>9</sup> The two stars were married at the height of their careers around the time of *Goodbye Darling*, and Zhang announced her retirement right after this film.

<sup>10</sup> *Goodbye Darling* was financed by the Hong Kong Wansheng film company, giving Bai perhaps more creative leeway than CMPC would; however, in 1970 Taiwan's film censorship system was already firmly in place,

and every film had to be checked for its ideological soundness. For a history of the establishment of film censorship by the KMT government, see Ye Longyan's *Post-liberation Taiwan film history*.

<sup>11</sup> The Golden Horse Award was established in 1962 by the GIO (Government Information Office) to bring recognition to and encourage Mandarin film production.

<sup>12</sup> *Fire Bulls* (1967) should not count as Bai's first feature since he was only one of its three directors, and professionally the most junior.

<sup>13</sup> Such comments can be found in Cai's *A selection of famous Chinese directors and films of the 1960s* and in Huang Ren's book on Bai.

<sup>14</sup> Bai was also the Director General of the Executive Committee of that year's festival.

<sup>15</sup> A more extended version of this analysis is also included in Liao's 2001 book.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* is a good example of Chinese film titles in the 1960s: the film was given the Chinese title 一樹梨花壓海棠, which suggests pedophilia, but the suggestion can only be grasped by people with good Chinese literary knowledge. In contrast, Bai's titles were direct, understandable, and playful.

<sup>17</sup> The inclusion of English titles happened gradually as Mandarin films began considering overseas distribution. If we look into a series of Li Xing's films, in *Liang-xiang-hao* (兩相好), there is no trace of any English; in *Jie-tou-xiang-wei* (街頭巷尾, 1963), the English title *Our Neighbor* is crudely scratched on; by 1963, as Li joined CMPC, his *蚶女* has "Oyster Girl" pasted on, but English names of major production figures and the leading star already appear in the opening credit sequence (e.g. producer, Henry Kung; star, Wang Mochou).

<sup>18</sup> A staple of 70s Qiong Yau films is shots of a romantic couple happily traipsing scenic spots accompanied by lyrical music; Bai's slow motion episode in *The Bride and I* is really a forerunner of such later formulaic design.

<sup>19</sup> Ke Junxiong, who plays the object of desire of the teenager in *Lonely Seventeen*, makes a short guest appearance in *Accidental Trio* as the colleague-friend of the interested older man.

<sup>20</sup> *Lonely Seventeen*, *The Bride and I*, *Home Sweet Home* all won Best Editing in the 1968, 1969, 1970 Golden Horse.

<sup>2</sup>*Jin-hu yu-li* (金壺玉鯉, 1959) is the first Taiwanese color feature. Film writers of Taiwan cinema tend to skip this film when discussing color in feature film; Lin Zanting corrects this in his book (97–100); this film is also cited in *The era of Taiwanese film* (69–70). In 1962, CMPC collaborated with Japanese studios for its first color features (秦始皇, 金門灣風雲), but they are technically Japanese films. *Oyster Girl* (1964) should count as CMPC's first widescreen color feature.

<sup>22</sup> The top grossing Mandarin film of 1968 in Taiwan was the Shaw Brothers' *The One-Armed Swordsman* (獨臂刀王), directed by Zhang Che (張徹) and starring Wang Yu (王羽); in 1969, among the ten top-grossing films, three were SB martial arts (swordplay, *wu xia*) movies; and the Hong Kong-Taiwan ratio on the top-ten list was six to four, and amongst the Taiwan four included Bai's *Bride* and *Trio*.

<sup>23</sup> Before making *Home Sweet Home* for CMPC, Bai, together with Li Xing, King Hu (胡金銓), and Li Hanxiang (李翰祥), made the omnibus film *Four Moods* (喜怒哀樂, 1969). Bai made the "Xi" (joy) part of the film in which he experimented with a humorous period story involving no dialogue but with lots of music and sound – Bai's short is like a silent movie with no intertitle.

<sup>24</sup> Li Xing already attempted multi-plot film in *Our Neighbor* (1963), but this was a heavy drama about the struggles of people in a Taipei ghetto.

<sup>25</sup> One can also take a look at the work of another one of Bai's contemporaries, Li Jia (李嘉). Li's *Fake Tycoon* (妙極了, 1972) attempts a modern story with a female detective; its erratic editing and storyline contrast out the poise in Li Xing's filmmaking and the ingenuity in Bai's film craft.

<sup>26</sup> Air travel in Taiwan was still the height of the modern in 1970. In 1958, MP&GI, a premium Hong Kong film studio of the 1950s, invested its first color feature in the subject of air travel and made *Air Hostess* (空中小姐) – a film about a young woman's desire and the process of becoming a stewardess. In Taiwan the technically and thematically modern *Air Hostess* was the third top-grossing Mandarin film of 1958, revealing the intense interest in this new way of traveling.

<sup>27</sup> These shots were not only new for Taiwan's screens but its innovativeness is accounted for through how the Japanese were impressed when they helped develop *Home Sweet Home*'s color print. Lin Zanting tells of

the intricate process of making these shots possible and his experience in Japan in *Cinematography in Taiwan 1945–1970: History and Technical Development* (244–46).

<sup>28</sup> In *The Bride and I* and *Accidental Trio*, each has up to at least 20 speaking parts and identifiable actors.

<sup>29</sup> Lin Wenchi, in his “The Representation of Taipei in Taiwanese Films,” does not see much simultaneity in the storyline of *Home Sweet Home*; for Lin, simultaneity occurs more in the film’s style, especially in its music (80, 87). Still, Bai is the filmmaker of his era who most consistently attempted to present simultaneity and the sense of the modern in the storyline and in the style and form of his films.

<sup>30</sup> In this post-*In the Mood for Love* age, one might associate cheongsam with feminine and erotic silhouettes, but *Home Sweet Home* was made in the era of mini-skirts, and Bai’s films associate cheongsams more with the older generation.

<sup>31</sup> *Home Sweet Home* was number eight amongst the top ten Mandarin films of 1970.

<sup>32</sup> Namely, Jinmen and Mazu islands. *Jin* in Chinese means “gold”; *ma* means “horse”; thus, Golden Horse Awards.

<sup>33</sup> Namely, “A Race of Generals” (將軍族).

<sup>34</sup> Aside from trying to insert a cosmopolitan feel to Taipei in his early urban films, Bai was first amongst Taiwan filmmakers to execute substantial foreign location shoots: *Fantasies Behind the Pearly Curtain* did shooting in South Korea; *There’s No Place Like Home* (異鄉夢, 1977) was shot in Italy; *Twilight in Geneva* (aka *Sunset in Geneva*, 日內瓦的黃昏, 1986) was shot in Switzerland, Africa, and South Korea.

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**Shiao-Ying Shen** is Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Taiwan University. Her papers on Western and Chinese-language cinema have been published in a number of anthologies and also in *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly*, *Film Appreciation*, *Post Script*, and *Tamkang Review*. She is also co-editor of *Passionate Detachment: Films of Hou Hsiao-Hsien*.

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## 台灣電影中的風格創新與都會浮現： 白景瑞早期電影研究

### 摘要

本論文審視台灣導演白景瑞的早期作品，討論其電影在台灣國語片史中的定位。白景瑞電影中的風格創新帶引出了台北的現代都會風貌；其早期的一系列電影—《寂寞的十七歲》(1968)、《新娘與我》(1968)、《今天不回家》(1969)、《家在台北》(1970) —也型塑了台灣浮現出的中產階級。白的都會喜劇及家庭倫理片確定了台灣電影中現代的、摩登的感情樣貌及家庭概念。白景瑞作品中的現代性及都會感也建構了七〇年代瓊瑤片中的中產感情觀。白景瑞在其都會片之後的《再見阿郎》(1970) 嘗試以寫實技法呈現底層社會；雖然這寫實風格在七〇年代沒能得到迴響，卻為後來八〇年代台灣新電影的懷舊寫實開了先路。

關鍵字：白景瑞、台北、《寂寞的十七歲》、《新娘與我》、《今天不回家》、《家在台北》、《再見阿郎》、瓊瑤片、都會片、喜劇片、家庭倫理片