

**The Idyllic Country and the Modern City:  
Cinematic Configurations of Family in  
*Osmanthus Alley* and *The Terrorizer***

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**SUMMARY**

This essay presents a kind of structuralist analysis of the configurations and transformations of the family, with respect to cinematic narrative patterns and ideology, in two Taiwan films of the 1980's. Set in the country, family life in *Osmanthus Alley* is depicted along a vertical axis (parent-son relationships) and has a diachronic structure, representing the autobiography of the woman protagonist. Set in the modern city (Taipei), family life in *The Terrorizer* is narrated on a horizontal axis (husband-wife) and has a synchronic structure: the film proceeds not temporally (diachronically) toward closure but by spatially mapping out the complex and fragmented personal relationships of the characters. The latter film especially has the effect of awakening the audience out of their habitual way of perceiving reality.

**KEY WORDS**

configuration  
diachronic  
spatiality  
mapping  
patterns

synchronic  
temporality  
axis  
narrative  
ideology



The purpose of this study is to identify two types of configuration of the family, as exemplified in two Taiwan films, *Osmanthus Alley* (桂花巷, d. Ch'en K'un-hou 陳坤厚, 1987) and *The Terrorizer* (恐怖分子, d. Edward Yang 楊德昌, 1986).<sup>1</sup> The focus of the study is a differentiation of the narrative patterns underlying the transformations of family in the country and the city, and the ideological forces behind these transformations. The terms "country" and "city" are not intended entirely in the sociological sense; rather, they are used in the light of contemporary cultural criticism as important shaping forces that provide momentum to social and intellectual changes.

The two fundamental axes in family organization, as Hsiao-Tung Fei 費孝通 has observed, are the parent-child and the husband-wife relations.<sup>2</sup> *Osmanthus Alley*, with its basically idyllic, harmonious country settings, concentrates primarily on the former, while *The Terrorizer*, set in a chaotic modern city, deals more with the latter category. These two structuring patterns of family organization thus provide a point of departure for the present study of two Taiwan films.

### A Virtuous Woman in the Country

*Osmanthus Alley* begins with a brief, rather saddening funeral scene in a graveyard. The death of the mother leaves poor T'i Hung 剔紅, ten, and her younger brother orphans (their father had died even earlier). The scene of misfortune

quickly cuts to the kitchen of a shabby village house, where T'i Hung emerges now as a beautiful, dutiful, and smiling adolescent. The subsequent scenes work to enhance her unmistakable charm: her full-blooming beauty attracts a young fisherman; her unflinching commitment to bringing up her brother wins praise from her relatives and villagers; her charming smile and her skillful needlework lead her to propose marriage into a rich family.

The emphasis up to this point of the film is placed on T'i Hung's *virtues* in the traditional sense. She possesses all the feminine qualities (e.g., She's hard-working in the household, warm-hearted to her brother, shy and quiet in public, skillful at needlework, etc.) that are expected from a country girl. In particular, she is praised for her filial piety. She fully displays her sense of obligation and self-sacrifice by refusing to consider marriage until her brother gets married. but an unexpected misfortune occurs at this juncture: her brother is drowned when the fishing boat he works on is overturned in the stormy sea.

In a characteristically joyful mood, T'i Hung, now totally free of all family obligations, is married into the Hsin family, a rich family that owns not only lands in the country but also shops in town. Her husband, whose parents died several years before, turns out to be a very nice man, mild in temper and gentle in speech. Since "[t]he main purpose of marriage, in the village, is to secure the "continuity of descent," or continuity of "incense and fire" (傳香火) as a popular Chinese saying has it,<sup>3</sup> the shy bride quickly moves to fulfil her most important duty by giving birth to a son. More secure now in the new household, T'i Hung enjoys to the full her care-free, well-respected life as the "lady" of the Hsin family.

This "perfect" married life is all but transient, as a third misfortune strikes out of the blue—her husband dies suddenly. T'i Hung, a young widow overnight, has to face this daunting domestic test: to raise her small son on her own and to manage

a big household until her son comes of age. With the conspicuous absence of the male figures (first a father and then a husband), T'i Hung's situation is probably not an ideal one for a study of the Chinese extended family. The complex and sensitive relationships among various members in the Hsin family, however, provides T'i Hung with a big stage on which to perform her role as a young matriarch. Widowhood, according to Maurice Freedman, "was paradoxically a great opportunity afforded to some women in Chinese society," who quickly acted to "enjoy the fruits of domestic power."<sup>4</sup> T'i Hung is obviously such a "lucky" one. It is to this aspect of her life that *Osmanthus Alley* devotes most of its narrative time. By contrast, the three personal misfortunes (the deaths of her parents, her brother, her husband) are treated merely in passing. What impresses the viewer most in the film, therefore, are not T'i Hung's tears, but her unfading radiant smile, behind which lie her undaunted will and desire.

### **The Matriarchal Authority: Will, Power, and Desire**

The story of *Osmanthus Alley*, then, can be seen as a story of "matriarchal authority," manifested as it is in T'i Hung's three personal relationships: mother-son, master-servant, and lover-seducer. There is no question that T'i Hung should retain her virtues by means of fulfilling what the Confucian codes dictate to a young widow: bringing up her son to be a well-educated gentleman. For this purpose, which is actually to further strengthen her position in the Hsin family, T'i Hung works meticulously. For instance, she once severely beats up her son because he just idled away his time listening to a man servant playing flute in the back yard. The son is thus "disciplined," brought to a full awareness of the class distinctions between him and the servant, and obediently submitted to T'i Hung's matriarchal authority. When her son later completes his secondary education in town, he is sent to

Japan for advanced study.

In her relations to the servants, T'i Hung relishes the power of "master" by constantly giving domestic orders. The man who plays flute for her son, for example, is dismissed by her, and ordered never again to enter the front gate of the Hsin family. Also dismissed is the family accountant who failed to keep clear records of the family expenditures. In spite of her smiling face, the formerly shy bride has been transformed to a stern matriarch, supervising her son's education on the one hand and managing family affairs on the other.

Nevertheless, behind her apparent iron will lie her feminine "weaknesses"--the long suppressed desires for pleasure in life. This is hinted first in the scene of the stage performance. As a move to please her husband's paternal uncle (her arch rival in the Hsin family) as much as to please herself, T'i Hung invites a theater troupe to perform in the Hsin house for three days in a row. She is fascinated by a young actress, with whom she develops an intimate friendship. It is not until her devoted maid reminds her of her neglected duty to her son that T'i Hung suddenly realizes the danger of her indulgence in theatrical performance.

Both the actress and the maid, in this case, serve as the "alter ego" of T'i Hung, but each in a different way. The maid, obviously representing "the reality principle," signals T'i Hung to the "virtues" that are constantly expected from her. The actress, on the other hand, works as "the pleasure principle," which brings out the suppressed desires within T'i Hung--the desires to do whatever she fantasizes.

At one moment, the pleasure principle gains the upper hand. Intoxicated by the opium (to which she becomes addicted after her son leaves for Japan) and the warmth of her "empty" bedroom, T'i Hung gives in to the seduction of her handsome young opium servant. The moment of pleasure is, again, short lived and costly, as T'i Hung soon finds out about

her pregnancy. As is characteristic of a shrewd matriarch, she acts quickly to end the affair by framing her dandy lover in a case of theft. And, in an equally characteristic manner, her dutiful maid helps her conceal the dangerous secret by suggesting that T'i Hung have her son return home and bring her to Japan for a visit. After a few shots of beautiful scenery in Japan, T'i Hung's grown-up son is seen in a room, handing a new-born baby to a middle-aged Japanese couple. Since the agony of T'i Hung giving up her baby is not directly presented in the film, one may speculate that she also feels relieved, because by abandoning the baby she not only saves face but returns once more to the top of the power structure of the Hsin family.

Perhaps very clearly by now, what demands special attention in the cinematic configuration of family in *Osmanthus Alley* is that, in all three of her relationships, T'i Hung displays nothing like deeply-felt personal involvement. It seems as if the director Ch'en K'un-hou deliberately avoids in-depth treatment of human feelings, opting instead for a smooth succession of events in mostly descriptive terms. Such an avoidance, it must be pointed out, is not without its ideological purpose. By putting aside the dark, tragic side of human life, *Osmanthus Alley* is, indeed, an *idealization* of a seemingly harmonious, idyllic country life.

#### **Idealization: A Defense of Social Hierarchies**

Hsiao Li-hung 蕭麗紅, the author of the original novel, writes that T'i Hung is to represent "the most lovable old-style Chinese woman."<sup>5</sup> The idealization of the "idyllic" family life in *Osmanthus Alley*, according to her, comes from "a nostalgia for the old culture of the bygone days,"<sup>6</sup>--the culture, that is, of the imagined "idyllic" country. The word "idyllic" is put in quotation marks because, as is evident in the film, the country life is full of disasters. As far as T'i Hung is concerned, her

mother dies of poverty, her brother dies in a fishing accident, and her husband dies of an incurable disease. What happens in an idealization of the country is that these dark sides are pushed to the murky background, seemingly forgotten and forsaken, while the foreground of the film is permeated with a happy, harmonious ambiance of the idyllic.

From a historical perspective, the idealization of the "idyllic" country, as Raymond Williams argues, "at once spring[s] to the defence of certain kinds of order, certain social hierarchies and moral stabilities, which have a feudal ring...." Following Williams, it may be argued that *Osmanthus Alley* is an unreflecting celebration of a stratified hierarchy of "feudal" society, as exemplified in the Hsin family under T'i Hung's supervision. Given the absence of the legitimate masters (father and husband), T'i Hung becomes an essential element in the structure of the Hsin family. Enclosed in this highly stratified hierarchy, T'i Hung is confronted with two alternatives: either to conform to the existing order by performing her specified role (which she fulfills to an amazing extent), or to destroy herself by stepping down the hierarchy (to which she comes near once before quickly amending her "error").

To further speculate in theoretical terms, the family structure represented in *Osmanthus Alley* bears a remarkable resemblance to what Michel Foucault describes as the power structure of discipline. Foucault's argument that "[i]n fact, power produces; it produces reality"<sup>8</sup> is demonstrable in the context of *Osmanthus Alley*: it is not so much that individuals create a power structure (like the one in the Hsin family), as that the technology of "discipline" itself produces individuals, each fixed in a highly specified position in the power structure.

The relatively stable hierarchies in the country have given rise to so-called "knowable communities." In Raymond Williams' words, "a country community, most typically a village, is the epitome of direct relationships: of face-to-face

contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal relationships.”<sup>9</sup> On a smaller scale, the Hsin family is such a knowable community, one in which all individuals have an intimate knowledge of each other and are inevitably entangled in a network of relationships.

Furthermore, the idealization of family life in *Osmanthus Alley* carries with it what Richard Sennett ably terms “an ideology of intimacy”: “The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The reigning aspiration today is to develop individual personality through experiences of closeness and warmth with others. The reigning myth today is that the evils of society can all be understood as evils of impersonality, alienation, and coldness. The sum of these three is an ideology of intimacy.”<sup>10</sup> The ideology of intimacy, then, not only sums up the values of the idyllic, “knowable” country life; it traces out as well the shaping forces behind an idealization of the country in the film *Osmanthus Alley*. Moreover, with its oppositions between warmth and coldness, closeness and alienation, Richard Sennett’s thesis is also relevant to a reading of the chaotic city as represented in *The Terrorizer*.

### The Chaotic City: A World Without Order

The world of *The Terrorizer* is a chaotic world, a world without order. The stable hierarchy people used to take for granted in a family has been totally subverted in the film. The young photographer refuses to live with his rich parents in a luxurious mansion; instead, he prefers to wander along the streets, taking snapshots of whatever comes into his view. In a more rebellious manner, “White Chick,” a Eurasian street girl, lives an adventurous life against her mother’s will. As if the domestic troubles on the parent-child axis alone are not enough, the film dwells heavily on the husband-wife axis of family relations.

The family life of the troubled writer Chou Yu-fen 周郁芬 and her career-oriented, unimaginative husband Li Li-chung 李立中 is simply devoid of any depth of meaning: the husband goes to work every weekday, while the wife writes stories at home, sometimes late into the night. As it turns out, she wants to have a child but has had no luck as yet. Without a child who, according to Hsiao-Tung Fei, "helps the development of intimate relations between husband and wife" and thus "stabilizes the relations in the domestic circle,"<sup>11</sup> Chou Yu-fen sees no definite future before her. Disappointed and dismayed, especially when she has used up her literary imagination, she turns to her former lover, leaving her husband all alone.

*The Terrorizer* is set in a time when Taiwan witnessed a major influx of villagers into cities and a consequent drastic change in the family structures.<sup>12</sup> The extended family in the country was no longer stable when young people tended to break away. What is more, even the nuclear family in the city was under constant threat of disintegration or even destruction. Family life in the modern era has been re-examined in Taiwan film and literature. In her sociological study of modern Taiwan fiction, Ai-Li Chin concludes that "the prevailing mood in fiction is one of disengagement from family ties and of a disenchanting search for meaning in the encounters between liberated young men and women."<sup>13</sup> The same holds true for the film *The Terrorizer*. It seems as if the country values of closeness and warmth are gone forever in the once "knowable communities." What is left instead is the *stranger* in a strange place: husband and wife are strangers, so are parents and children. In a compelling manner, the image of the stranger comes to the foreground of the modern city.

### The Image of the Stranger

Raymond Williams asserts that "perception of the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the

beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets."<sup>14</sup> He cites these lines from Wordsworth in support of his assertion:

endless stream of men and moving things! ...  
 . . . the quick dance,  
 Of colours, lights and forms; the deafening din;  
 The comers and the goers face to face.  
 Face after face.<sup>15</sup>

This is such a familiar scene in *The Terrorizer* that it may not be an exaggeration to claim that Wordsworth's vision has been actualized in Edward Yang's film. The young photographer wanders aimlessly in the streets, his camera dangling from his neck. White Chick hangs around at street corners, aggressively soliciting the passers-by. Chou Yu-fen rushes through crowds, feeling emotionally upset and intellectually exhausted. Li Li-chung walks blindly in the crowd, carrying a pistol with him on a vengeful killing spree. In fact, many of the shooting scenes in the film are done in an apparently random manner, as if the viewer is just following no one in particular in the urban crowd.

As a result of the seemingly random sequences in the film, the audience is lost in the *labyrinth* of the modern city. For a long time in the film, they know very little about the relationships between, say, the young photographer and White Chick; nor are they assisted by any verbal explanation of the relationships between White Chick and Chou Yu-fen. It is not until the scene of the prank phone call that all three narrative strands converge: White Chick's random phone calls bring all three major characters into direct encounters with each other.

A deeper layer of meaning needs to be unraveled with regard to the image of the stranger. As Georg Simmel brilliantly remarks: "wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptual opposite to fixation at such a point."<sup>16</sup> The stranger, seen in this light, is

an individual liberated from family ties and other social obligations. And wanderings (with their logical consequence, chance "encounters") turn out to be an effective means through which one seeks new meanings in life and achieves a new identity in a strange social environment. The modern city is, therefore, not merely a negative place of coldness, impersonality, and alienation. It is at the same time, in Simmel's words, "the locale of freedom."<sup>17</sup>

Paradoxically, the freedom to depart from the norms, to choose among unconventional alternatives, to create new types of identity, may also imply a sense of loss--the loss of traditional values and family bindings. As a fully "liberated" individual, Chou Yu-fen is a stranger to the city as well as to her husband--she claims no "givens," not even the conjugal obligations, in her family life, except in her tiny study which is packed with books, magazines and manuscripts and littered with cigarette butts. Just as she fabricates a fiction on a blank piece of paper, she has to produce her meaningful existence practically out of a void. Crisscrossed by the comings and goings of other strangers in the city, her perception of the world remains forever fragmentary.

### Fragmentary Experience: Fiction, Reality, and Language

The concept of *fragmentary experience*, related as it is to the image of the stranger, is best illustrated in the apartment the young photographer rents as a hide-out from his wealthy parents. One side of the room is decorated with a wall-size, mosaic photo of a mysterious girl's face, and the windows are covered completely so that the room is left entirely in the dark. Since White Chick and the young photographer never met face to face before (she lost her consciousness when he sent her to the hospital after the police had raided the apartment in the opening sequence of the film), it is quite a surprise when she later drops in and finds her old apartment

transformed to a darkroom, with her photos scattered everywhere. A few minutes later, the photographer returns and tries without success to engage the girl in a meaningful conversation. To him, the girl is always a total stranger. The actual presence of the mysterious girl does not make the encounter seem any more real to him. He wakes up next morning, only to find his camera missing. Out of anger, he tears the window covering into small pieces. The room is suddenly flooded with sunlight, revealing all the pieces of fragmented prints of White Chick. The photographer looks out of the window and catches sight of the backs of the two strangers (White Chick and her boyfriend) disappearing on a motorcycle down the street.

Unlike the knowable community in which one can establish a personal relationship with others on a face-to-face basis, here in the modern city even direct personal encounter leaves nothing durable in one's memory. The camera, originally designed as an instrument to register reality in a tangible form, functions in the opposite way as it randomly records the fragmentary, miscellaneous, and isolated experiences of the photographer. The same can be said of the function of the telephone in the film. Originally invented as a modern device to facilitate interpersonal communications, the telephone in *The Terrorizer* proves an effective instrument for telling lies and alienating people. Locked up in a room by her infuriated mother, White Chick plays with prank phone calls, making up stories as she speaks to whomever she gets hold of.

One of her calls, it so happens, reaches Chou Yu-fen, who has exhausted her sources of literary imagination. White Chick pretends to be the mistress of Chou's husband. This prank phone call, though upsetting Chou for a long while and further alienating her from her husband, actually furnishes a fresh idea for her nearly aborted story. As it turns out, her new story about a jealous husband killing his wife and her lover wins a literary award. Her personal life is immediately

publicized and, against her repeated insistence that the story is nothing but fiction, parallels are drawn between the fictional narrative and her actual life.

In an ironic twist, Chou's husband takes her fiction to heart and traces her to the office of her lover (who offered her a job to help her escape her otherwise boring family life). Two endings are consequently provided in the film: in the first, the husband breaks into the bedroom in which his wife and her lover are found sleeping together, killing the man in the act; in the second, he takes his own life in the old-fashioned bathroom of a house belonging to his detective friend, and the sound of shooting, in a bizarre way, wakes up the wife in bed with her lover. Thus ends the film *The Terrorizer*, with Chou Yu-fen staring right into the eyes of the audience.

The relation between fragmentary experience and the film language needs more elaboration at this point. For Chou Yu-fen, the fragmented experience of family life is projected into her fiction, thus attaining a form of reality in itself. The ability to differentiate between fiction and reality, however, is beyond her husband, who follows the reality line by performing in real life what has been imagined in his wife's fiction (i.e., murder and suicide). Moreover, as an off-screen twist of irony, the audience may realize on second thought that the "real" ending of the film--and perhaps the film as a whole--is but a fiction in itself. Understandably, the question "Who is the terrorizer?" is never clearly answered in the film.

The unwillingness to answer the question of who is the intended terrorizer is an ideological expression of the film's particular way of perceiving the world. It is as if among crowds of strangers in a modern city, "the most deeply known human community is language itself," and therefore the fragmentary experience of metropolitan life "is to be actualized on the senses in a new structure of language."<sup>18</sup> What Raymond Williams has said about Joyce's *Ulysses* throws new light on an understanding of Edward Yang's *The Ter-*

rorizer--"It is an abstracted or more strictly an immanent pattern of man and woman, father and son; a family but not a family, out of touch and searching for each other through a myth and a history. The history is not in this city but in the loss of a city, the loss of relationships. The only knowable community is in the need, the desire, of the racing and separated forms of consciousness."<sup>19</sup> *The Terrorizer*, arguably, is just one such story of man and woman, "liberated" from family obligations and alienated in a modern city, constantly searching for each other in an abstract pattern of myth and/or history.

#### Conclusion: Two Modes of Representation

This study has so far identified the narrative patterns in *Osmanthus Alley* and *The Terrorizer* and the ideological forces behind two types of cinematic configuration of family in these films. The concluding section is devoted to outlining the contrasts between the two modes of representation in terms of different conceptualizations of the country and the city.

Set in the "idyllic" country, family life in *Osmanthus Alley* is depicted mostly along a *vertical* axis, that of parent-son relations. The film's *diachronic* emphasis entails recurring signals of the lapse of time. The entire film, in this sense, resembles a visual configuration of the (auto)biography of the woman protagonist, T'i Hung, and its linear progression is marked by the succession of generations (the cycle of life and death) in the film. The mode of representation in *Osmanthus Alley*, then, conforms to the most important expectation of Chinese family life: to secure a continuity of "incense and fire."

Set in the modern city, family life in *The Terrorizer* is unraveled along a *horizontal* axis, that of the husband-wife, or more precisely, that of stranger-to-stranger relations. "*The Terrorizer*," in Edward Yang's own words, "could also be seen

as a cross-section of Taipei society, but it's a horizontal slice."<sup>20</sup> This *horizontal* mode of configuration is demonstrated in its synchronic emphasis in cinematic narration: in all three narrative strands, events occur almost simultaneously, and characters encounter each other seemingly without awareness of any consequences. The film progresses, therefore, not toward a definite closure (as in *Osmanthus Alley*), but rather by way of spatially mapping out the complex and fragmented personal relationships of the characters. The sense of space, in other words, dominates the sense of time in *The Terrorizer*, as if time alone has no meaning to, say, the desperate writer Chou Yu-fen.

Due to such different emphases in the two modes of cinematic configuration, *Osmanthus Alley* presents an idyllic picture of harmony among the individuals of a knowable community, whereas *The Terrorizer* seems to offer nothing but chaos in a modern city of wandering strangers. The sense of harmony in *Osmanthus Alley* comes from the seemingly stable and highly stratified hierarchies of "feudal" society: each individual is fixable or fixed in his or her own position in an entrenched power structure. The sense of chaos in *The Terrorizer*, on the other hand, can be seen as a result of a subversion of the old social hierarchies: the child no longer obeys the parents, nor does the wife listen to the husband. Ironically, once "liberated" from family obligations, the individual in the city is ruthlessly thrown into a sea of strangers, and is subsequently "sentenced" to an eternal search for his or her new place (identity) in a world apparently without order.

The idealization of the idyllic country, to be sure, implies an ideology of intimacy: warmth and closeness in personal relationships are viewed as "natural" and valued as morally good. The projection of the modern city in *The Terrorizer*, on the contrary, imposes an "ideology of alienation": human experience is fragmentary, miscellaneous, and isolated; mutual

understanding is anything but possible (e.g., Chou Yu-fen yells to her husband again and again: "You don't understand!"); and the meaning of life immediately recedes before you whenever you attempt to register it in language. As opposed to the prevalence of "emotion" in the "natural" country, to survive in the modern city requires a great deal of "intellect." To quote Georg Simmel's comment: "Intellectuality is thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life . . ." <sup>21</sup>

In keeping with the "prerequisite" of intellect in the city, fiction comes to be a dominant mode in *The Terrorizer*. Chou Yu-fen starts her story with a blank piece of paper; the young photographer starts with unexposed films in his camera; and White Chick tells lies to whoever receives her prank phone call. Spatially unlimited, fiction provides an intellectual and emotional outlet for the characters to redefine their personal identities against an endless stream of strangers in a city. Theater, it may be argued, is a more appropriate metaphor for understanding *Osmanthus Alley*. If the Hsin family is a big stage, T'i Hung appears then as an extremely experienced player. More than just watching performances, she acts consciously in real life. The drastic difference between fiction and theater in this case is that while the former leaves ample space for "free" imagination, the latter has "fixed" roles for individuals to play. What T'i Hung can achieve, in terms of this difference, is simply to act out what is specifically expected of her.

It may be contended that in *Osmanthus Alley* family is configured as a "reality," a tangible network of real relationships, within which T'i Hung has lived throughout her entire life--from her earlier loss of mother, brother, husband, to her later loss of an unnamed baby, till the very end when she is projected as an old granny sitting in an armchair, reflecting on her life in a retrospective mood. In *The Terrorizer*, however, family is represented as a mere intellectual abstraction. In a

modern city where individual identity has been lost, there seems to be little hope of constructing a meaningful concept of family on the basis of miscellaneous pieces of fragmented and alienated human experience.

*Osmanthus Alley*, with its enthusiastic but unreflecting celebration of the idyllic country life, is criticized as "a film of impressive set-pieces rather than one of real epic scope."<sup>22</sup> To be sure, the film certainly offers a great deal of visual pleasure and nostalgic substance in its nuanced configuration of the country. However, as a mainstream film in the dominant Hollywood style, Ch'en K'un-hou's *Osmanthus Alley* poses little intellectual challenge. At its best, it is a cinematic expression of a society that takes pride in its prestigious cultural past and its affluent present existence.

But with its complex and at times obscure narrative language, Edward Yang's *The Terrorizer* is an outspoken cultural critique, a critique of the unreflecting mentality prevalent in present-day Taiwan society. As such, it has been critically acclaimed as one of the best examples of Taiwan's "New Cinema," characterized by avant-garde experimentation. What needs to be further stressed is that the strangeness of the city life it presents vividly to the audience is not merely social, but perceptual as well. In fact, *The Terrorizer* exemplifies a new way of perceiving--and therefore a new mode of representing--human existence in the modern city. As a perceptual, intellectual "terrorizer," the film is meant to awaken the audience out of their conventional way of seeing--powerfully captured in Chou Yu-fen's awakening at the end of the film--in its exploration of the fullest possible meaning of the present.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a brief entry on *Osmanthus Alley*, see Derek Elley in *International Film Guide* (London: Tantivy, 1989) 321. For reviews of

*The Terrorizer*, see July Gilfillan in *Free China Review* (July 1987): 50-52; Verina Glaessner in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 56,662 (March 1989): 69-70; and Markus Nornes in *Film Quarterly*, XLII, 3 (Spring 1989): 43-47. Fredric Jameson offers a critical study of *The Terrorizer* in the terms of Western modernism in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 114-155.

<sup>2</sup> See Hsiao-Tung Fei, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley* (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 29. His entire Chapter Three, "The Chia" (Family), pp. 27-55, is a useful background reading of the duties (or "virtues") expected of a young girl in Chinese villages. For further discussion of Chinese family, see Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London: Athlone, 1966) 43-67.

<sup>3</sup> Fei, pp. 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Freedman, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> See Hsiao Li-hung's "Afterword" to her novel *Kui-hua hsiang* 桂花巷 (Taipei 台北: Lien-ho-pao she 聯合報社, 1977) 477.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 36.

<sup>8</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 194.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 259.

<sup>11</sup> Fei, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> For sociological studies, see Alden Speare, Jr., "Migration and Family Change in Central Taiwan," and Bernard Gallin and Rita S. Gallin, "The Integration of Village Migrants in Taipei," both collected in Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, eds., *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) 303-358.

<sup>13</sup> See Ai-Li S. Chin, "Family Relations in Modern Chinese Fiction," in Maurice Freedman, ed., *Family and Kinship in Chinese*

*Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970) 87.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> See Kurt H. Wolff, ed. & trans., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950) 402.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419.

<sup>18</sup> See Williams, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Tony Rayns, "Taipei Story: An Interview," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 56,662 (March 1989): 70-71.

<sup>21</sup> *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, p. 411.

<sup>22</sup> This criticism has led Derek Elley to deny *Osmanthus Alley* more space in his entry on Taiwan films in *International Film Guide* (1989), pp. 320-325. The same criticism is found in Huang Chien-yeh 黃建業, *Jen-wen tien-ying ti chui-hsun* 人文電影的追尋 (Taipei 台北: Yuen-liu 遠流, 1990) 133-137.

