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How did Hou Hsiao-Hsien change Taiwan cinema? A critical reassessment

Ti WEI

ABSTRACT *Hou Hsiao-Hsien has been one of the central members of Taiwan New Cinema (TNC) since the early 1980s and subsequently took on the rising trajectory of becoming an internationally famous film master. In contrast, during the same period, the Taiwan film industry diminished dramatically and nearly collapsed. Based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production and the thesis of political economy of communication, this article regards Hou as a social agent and accordingly analyzes the dynamic interactions between him and the structural factors related to the broader transformations of Taiwan film industry. Hou seemed to choose his filming and production mode subjectively from the beginning, but actually the possibilities he got at the time were limited by the social structures. In addition, his rising trajectory also has been embedded in the dynamic processes of global cultural economy. Paradoxically, by the same local and global processes, Taiwan film industry has been seriously declining.*

KEYWORDS: cultural production, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, position-taking, structure-agency dialectic, Taiwan cinema

Hou Hsiao-Hsien has been one of the central members of Taiwan New Cinema (TNC) since its rise in the early 1980s. His winning of the Golden Lion Award at the 1989 Venice Film Festival further confirmed his prominent status in the international as well as domestic film communities. Hou then gradually became the leading figure in Taiwan cinema. His route to success has become a model that successors of Taiwan cinema tend to follow. Not only has his film aesthetics been imitated by young Taiwanese film creators, he has also been recognized as one of the most influential persons in the implementation of the government's film policy and in the allocation of related resources.

The other side of the story of Taiwan cinema, nevertheless, is that the film industry diminished dramatically during the same period. What actually was the role Hou played in the recent transformation of Taiwan film industry? How important was

he within the Taiwan film industry and how did he change it? This article attempts to answer these questions not by exploring the aesthetic and artistic aspects of Hou's masterpieces, but by examining the social significance of Hou's practice in the field of Taiwan cinema as a social agent in the past 20 years. To avoid an instrumentalist and individualist explanation, the thesis of critical political economy of communication and Pierre Bourdieu's theories of 'cultural production' and 'cultural capital' are applied to analyze the dynamic interactions between Hou and the structural factors related to the broader transformations of the Taiwan film industry.

For Bourdieu, the logic of social practice can only be understood in linking up properly the objectivism (explained mainly by structures, laws, system of relationships, etc) and subjectivism (explained mainly by individual's will, consciousness, intention,

etc). In the field of cultural production, Bourdieu argues,

All agents, writers, artists or intellectuals construct their own creative project according, first of all, to their perception of the available possibilities afforded by the categories of perception and appreciation inscribed in their habitus through a certain trajectory and, secondly, to their predisposition to take advantage of or reject those possibilities in accordance with the interests associated with their position in the game. (Bourdieu 1993: 184)

In any specific field, different agents (here artists) occupy different positions and select their action/creation strategies according to the specific interest they are concerned with. This is what Bourdieu calls position-takings, such as a distinct style, genre, or political and ethical positions. Agents make their position-takings and struggle in the field to maintain or overturn the existing order of relations. It is very close to a kind of game. By entering the game, agents tacitly accept the constraints and the possibilities inherent in that game. But no matter how great the autonomy of the field, the result of these struggles is never completely independent of external factors (Bourdieu 1993: 184). As Golding and Murdock argue, we need to 'discover how far this autonomy can be exercised given the consequences of the broad economic structure of the media' and 'to what extent the economic structure of the media prevents some forms of expression from finding a popular outlet and audience' (Golding and Murdock 2000: 83). In the case of the cinematic arena, the political economy of domestic and international film industries and markets should be taken into account.

The process also related to another theory of Bourdieu, which is about the concept of 'capital'. For Bourdieu, various forms of capital, like aces in a game of cards, are used by agents to struggle for the appropriation of scarce goods in the field. There are four fundamental forms of capital, they are, firstly economic capital; secondly cultural capital; and thirdly two forms of capital that are very strongly correlated –

social capital, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1987: 4). The position of the agent in the social space is according to the global volume of capital they possess, to the composition of their capital, and to the evolution in time of the volume and composition of their capital; that is, their trajectory in social space (Bourdieu 1987: 4).

Based on these theoretical discussions, the article will first inquire into how Hou came to be a prominent figure both in Taiwan and international cinematic field, by examining the existing conditions in the field at the time and, considering these external factors, how he used and possessed various forms of capital to gain his distinct position. Secondly, the article then goes in a reverse direction, to look closely on how Hou, in turn, brings change to Taiwan's film industry and film creation during his rise to an internationally recognized film master.

The process of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's position-taking

Among the major young film directors of the so-called TNC, such as Edward Young, Wan Ren, Ko Yi-cheng and Tseng Chuang-hsiang, Hou is the only one that had worked for several years in the local film industry and did not go abroad (mainly the US) to academic institutions to study film-making. Indeed, before he participated in directing the three-episode *The Sandwich Man* (1983), which is the path-breaking film of the TNC, Hou was a very experienced director and screenplay writer in mainstream commercial films. The three Romance films (*wenyi pien*) he wrote and directed in the early 1980s, *Cute Girls* (1980), *Cheerful Wind* (1981), and *The Green, Green Grass of Home* (1982), were all quite successful in terms of box-office takings. Although these three films, as Lin argues, were more 'realist' in comparison with other Romance films at the same time (Lin 2000), Hou was no doubt capable in making popular and profitable films.

Participation in *The Sandwich Man* project, however, substantially changed Hou's career as well as the state of his film aesthetics. He developed his famous film style of so-called observational realism, using 'long takes' and a 'fixed camera set-up' thereafter in his subsequent works, including *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984), *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985), and *Dust in the Wind* (1986). These films won awards everywhere from Locarno to Turin, Nantes, Rotterdam and Berlin, and Hou became recognized as one of the world's most original film directors. When *A City of Sadness* (1989) won the Best Film Award at Venice in 1989, he 'has been a fixture on the international festival circuit ever since' (Berry and Lu 2005: 1). However, the path from a local mainstream film maker to an internationally known art-film master was not natural and smooth. Rather, it involved complicated dynamics, interplayed between various factors of cultural, economic and social aspects, and intersected at different level by the personal, local and global fields.

In the process – and after – of making *The Sandwich Man*, Hou became intimate with those young directors who studied film-making abroad, and also some key figures in Taiwan's literature and art circles, particularly the Chu sisters (Chu Tien-wen and Chu Tien-hsin). These young cultural elites, who have strong cultural capital, apparently had a great impact on Hou. In an interview, he said,

After completed shooting *The Sandwich Man*, I have been keeping in touch with them who came back from abroad ... I felt we have many things in common. But sometime I felt anxious, too. It seems that I could not make it [film] systematically. You know what I mean? It is like 'self-consciousness' ... I could not manage them, such as what kind of technique or what kind of narrative should be used in making specific kind of film. Then you feel anxious. When you shoot films unconsciously you shoot anything you like. Isn't it? Once you are self-conscious but you cannot manage the shooting, then you feel afraid. (Quoted in Mong 2000: 31–32)

Hou might not have had doubts about himself when he first met these cultural elites, but he felt strongly that he lacked something that the others had and that would be very important for him in making his next film. What he wanted at the time, in my view, is a distinct theory, a set of discourses, and the competence of making films in a style, which can be spoken and interpreted theoretically. In short, he needed to rationalize his way of shooting films and to distinguish himself from his 'new wave' fellows. Then Chu Tien-wen helped to give the answer. She introduced the book *Shen Cong-wen's Autobiography*¹ to Hou as he was confused. For Chu Tien-wen, Hou was characterized as a director who has strong vitality and nativity and it would be sad if he lost his distinctiveness because he was shocked by foreign film-making patterns and techniques. Through the intermediation of Chu, Hou discovered the world-view of Shen harmonizes perfectly with his early thoughts of creation. 'The book uses an objective and understated narrative to let the reader feel that even the saddest and most terrible thing can be tolerated by kindness and love', he says, 'I decided to use this point of view to make my next film' (quoted in Mong 2000: 33).

We can see this sense in his works thereafter. However, it is hard to tell whether Hou found an appropriate philosophical track to settle his original creative talent or the thoughts and theories influenced his subsequent creations. However, it was a 'must' for Hou to play the 'art-film game'. Bourdieu has described this process comprehensively:

[To] the extent that they occupy a position in a specific space, that is, in a field of forces (irreducible to mere aggregate of material points), which is also a field of struggle seeking to preserve or transform the field of forces, authors only exist and subsist under the structured constraints of the field (e.g. the objective relations that are established between genres). They affirm the differential deviation which constitutes their position, their point of view – understood as the perspective from a given point in the

field – by assuming, actually or virtually, one of the possible aesthetic positions in the field (and thus assuming a position in relation to other position). By being well situated – and writers or artists have no choice but to situate themselves – they distinguished themselves, even without searching for distinction. (Bourdieu 1993: 184)

It is also related to the broad industrial conditions. In Taiwan, the local film industry had entered into serious decline since the late 1970s and therefore gradually lost its competitiveness in large-scale production and the mainstream film market. This was also one of the reasons for the birth of TNC as well as the recruitment of Hou into some experimental projects by the Central Motion Picture Company (CMPC) – the ruling party-owned and largest film company in Taiwan. These conditions pushed local film production toward to ‘restricted production’ and this was linked with the global dynamic of the internationalization of the art-film.

In the context of the cultural economy of globalization, the production of art cinemas has become more internationalized. The stratification of cultural capital and taste in national societies has been restructured into a global framework. In the global cultural dynamics, along with the global ‘Hollywoodization’ of the popular cinema market, the elite art-cinema market is also integrating globally. As a result, a global system of the production, distribution, and consumption of art cinema has been gradually shaped. In this global art cinema system however, the markets and companies in advanced capitalist countries (particularly Western European countries, Japan, and the US) are still dominant. For these markets, art-films, from the developing or underdeveloped societies and with exotic cultural elements, are especially attractive and maintain stable market demand (Wei 2005: 108).

In comparison with other Taiwan new wave directors, particularly Edward Young, whose film style was widely recognized as modernist and metropolitan, Hou apparently showed more ‘nativity’ or, we may say, from a western point of view, more

‘oriental’ and ‘exotic’ characteristics, both thematically and aesthetically. It is therefore not surprising that Hou has surpassed his peers and become internationally known as the most important representative of TNC. Although, possibly lacking in cultural capital from the onset, Hou now enjoys great reputation worldwide for his film-making. Hou himself has turned into a person with large cultural capital and his works have become legitimated cultural capital eagerly aspired to by art-film fans in Taiwan and around the world. The change is related to two processes of ‘capital’ transformation. First, Hou rationalized and enhanced his distinct aesthetics with the assistance of his social capital (in the form of his social relations with cultural elites). Secondly, all the prizes and awards that Hou’s films won in international film festivals brought huge symbolic capital for him, and that was transformed into cultural capital in general.

The cultural capital was also converted into economic capital. Of course, art-film making would not make big money for Hou and this is not the logic of restricted production. Nonetheless, in comparison with the feeble and bleak situation Hou and other new wave directors faced after their short glorious days in the early 1980s in Taiwan, the status Hou gained in the international art-film field and financial investments from international film companies has guaranteed him to be economically viable, at least for continuing his creation steadily. Although his art-films could not make a good box-office profit in their domestic market, with the exception of *A City of Sadness*, an international art-house film market that is composed of many top-tier elite audiences across the globe could sustain the demand and, therefore, some foreign companies would like to keep financing him.

One more point worth noting is that Hou’s symbolic capital and cultural capital is now also transforming into political capital. During Taiwan’s 2004 presidential election, Hou and some of his friends, including Chu Tien-Hsin, Tang Nuo, Hsia Chu-Joe and other intellectuals, set up the Alliance for Ethnic Equality to warn against the

manipulation of ethnic issues by the two oppositional camps. Hou was selected as the convenor because he 'is a person without political hue' (Hou *et al.* 2004: 20). As Hou said, 'I had a selling image' – that is, symbolic capital. Interestingly, Hou was helped by almost the same group of cultural elites to form his artistic position-taking and the success in the international art-film field thereafter. By now, they conversely relied on his symbolic capital, which accumulated through his artistic works, to campaign for their ideas in the domestic political field.

The 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien model'

The first generation of Taiwan's new wave directors, particularly Hou, created a strong cinematic tradition of realism in Taiwan cinema, and has influenced many younger directors. The realism has two dimensions: thematic and aesthetic. First, Hou's early semi-autobiographic films on Taiwan's social changes from the 1960s to 1980s, along with other early TNC works, created a cinema wave of consciously exploring Taiwan's past. As Edward Yang puts it, 'it was the first film in which we began to ask ourselves questions about our history, our ancestor, our political situation, and our relationship with mainland China and so on' (quoted in Chen 1993: 47–48).

Hou extended and deepened the exploration with his subsequent so-called Taiwan trilogy, composed of *A City of Sadness* (1989), *The Puppetmaster* (1993) and *Good Men, Good Women* (1995), which covers the earlier period of Taiwan's history. These films have become exemplars of making film as a serious investigation into Taiwan's specific historical context and complicated identity-related themes. They are accompanied by Wang Tung's *Straw Man* (1987), *Banana Paradise* (1989), and *Hill of No Return* (1992), Edward Young's *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), Wu Nien-jen's *A Borrowed Life* (1994) and *Buddha Bless America* (1996) and so on.

Secondly, and more importantly, Hou's film style had a profound influence on his peers and many younger successors. His unique 'long take' and 'long shot' film

language, use of non-professional actors, and so-called observational realism aesthetics were replicated in some second-wave directors' works. For example, Hsu Hsiao-ming, who had been Hou's assistant director in *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*, completed his first feature film *Dust of Angels* (1992) under the supervision of Hou. The film depicts rebellious and hopeless youngsters from the south of Taiwan and is apparently narrated in Hou's film language. Hsu continued the style in his second film, *Heartbreak Island* (1995), in which he reinterpreted the *Formosa Incident* in a more tragic manner.

Lin Cheng-sheng is also an apparent example. He learned film-making by participating in a training course organized by some TNC movement promoters, including Peggy Chiao and Huang Chien-ye. Lin admitted that he was enlightened by early TNC works, particularly Hou's works and film style (see Chiao 2002). His works have been continually praised by European film critics and he won the Silver Bear Best Director Award in Berlin Film Festival in 2001 with *Betelnut Beauty* (2000). One film critic from the Cannes Film Festival commented on Lin's debut film *A Drafting Life* (1995) that 'the film has the sense of typical Taiwan cinema'. He said more precisely, 'let me connect with Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* and Wu Nien-jen's *A Borrowed Life*' (quoted in Xiao Qiu 2005). Some foreign film critics even contested that Lin 'is the successor of Hou Hsiao-Hsien' (see Chiao 2002).

Another director who has been increasingly noticed internationally, Chang Tso-chi, who was the assistant director in Hou's *A City of Sadness*, may be widely seen as the most prominent example of the heir of Hou's film aesthetics. His first feature film² *Ah-chung* (1995), which focused on the marginal members in a rapidly changing society, was 'a plain and simple film close to documentary or the early Taiwan New Cinema'. Moreover, Chang has gone further than any other Taiwan director in working with 'non-professional actors, filming in the documentary style, and telling stories in a fragmented and undramatic manner that

uses complex metaphor' (Lu 2005: 139–140). As Lu argues, Chang not only traced the heritage of TNC but also developed a new cinematic language in his next film *Darkness and Light* (1999) (Lu 2005: 140). In an interview, however, Chang stated that Hou's influence on him is 'one hundred percent' (quoted in Lu 2005: n. 6).

Like Chang Tso-chi, many younger directors, and Hou himself, have developed some new varieties in film language and narrative and moved their thematic focus from the past to modern Taiwan society in the post-TNC era (see Chiao 2002), Hou's early pioneering innovations in film aesthetics and language had a considerable influence on Taiwan cinema. However, Hou's most influential impact on younger directors in Taiwan may not be in film content but in the definition and practice of filmmaking. Chiao argues that,

Before his (Hou's) rise, no one in the (Taiwan's) film community dared to take the word 'art' upon their film. For Taiwan's popular audience the cinema was for leisure and entertainment and the outlet of relieving their depression. For general film companies and producers the cinema was merely a cash-making machine. But it was Hou Hsiao-Hsien's works that changed this fact. They linked up Taiwan cinema with 'art' and 'taste'. They also challenged the audience's viewing habits and forced some relatively sensitive audiences to read deeply on their extraordinary film language ... since *A*

City of Sadness has created a box-office record in history, film businessmen never saw New Cinema as the 'box-office poison' and that opened up a way of survival for some ambitious new directors. (Chiao 2000: 26–17)

Chiao is partly right in pointing out that Hou has largely contributed raising the relative status of cinema in the hierarchy of Taiwan's culture and art field. Praise from both domestic and international cinematic communities has approved the artistic value of Hou's as well as other TNC directors' works. As the symbolic capital largely increased, cinema, or at least a kind of cinema, has partly turned over its public recognition from mere entertainment to art. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the international festival oriented production could sustain his creations through continuing foreign investment and minor but relatively stable income from the international art film market.

According to a press report in 1989, from 1983 to 1988, eight films directed by Hou had clocked-up 113 showings at international film festivals. These films demonstrated that revenues from overseas sales could eclipse box-office takings at home and sometimes push the film into profit (Table 1 shows some examples). In addition, once a film or film worker has won a major award in an international film festival, they can obtain rewards from Taiwan's government and increase their chances at the domestic box-office. Although overseas market performance has remained unpredictable,

Table 1. A comparison of overseas and domestic revenues of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's early works* (in NT\$ million)

Year	Title	Cost	Domestic revenues	Overseas revenues	Profit	Times attending film festivals
1983	<i>The Boys from Fengkuei</i>	6.0	3.3	7.4	4.7	15
1984	<i>A Summer at Grandpa's</i>	5.8	5.6	6.0	5.8	19
1985	<i>A Time to Live, A Time to Die</i>	8.0	8.0**	5.16	5.16	31
1986	<i>Dust in the Wind</i>	8.0	9.34	5.22	6.56	23

*The data of revenues and times attending film festivals were accounted till the end of 1988.

**The amount included rewards won at home.

Source: *Independent Evening* (in Chinese), 16/01/1989.

aiming at these markets has become normal practice and also a profitable strategy for some art-film directors. Hou has created a strong and prominent 'model' that younger directors tended to follow.

However, the real effect of the 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien Model' on the local cultural field and film industry is not as simple as Chiao's observation. On the one hand, in Chiao's words, although the 'challenge to an audience's viewing habits' by Hou's work has its serious cultural significance, should not be mystified as an heroic act. Its consequence was closely related to the complex dynamics of cultural struggles and stratification within the local society. On the other hand, Hou never actually created an economically viable route for the art film in the domestic film industry. This is not only because *A City of Sadness* was the only exception of Hou's works that generated a substantial profit domestically since he developed his distinct film style in *The Boys from Fengkuei*, but also because of the truth that all new directors who followed the model were mainly supported by state subsidies and international market revenues rather than local film companies and viewers. Indeed, the effects of the 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien Model' in cultural field and film industry interplayed to profoundly reshape Taiwan cinema as a whole, and this will be discussed further in the next section.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien did change Taiwan cinema... in a way

TNC was born in the conditions of an already declining local film industry and the overwhelming domination of imported – mainly Hollywood and Hong Kong – films. TNC was more like one of the solutions to solve the industrial problem rather than an original creative movement (see Wei 2002). Some limited success in the domestic market in its early stage proved that a new cinema, with more a realist film style and more local concerns, could be appreciated by local viewers. However, due to the lack of proper film policies and the fundamentally unchanged industry structure, TNC could

not continue or expand its popularity by only a handful of young directors. In addition, bad-quality films, produced by private companies that had jumped on the TNC bandwagon, made the situation worse. Since these companies were only interested as long as the results proved popular, once the genre began to fail in the market they withdrew as quickly as they had joined.

In comparison with the bleak conditions at home, as mentioned above, new wave directors found that going overseas could win them both fame and money. The 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien Model' became clear and workable. Major film directors and their successors continued to orient themselves toward the international art film market and to 'keep a distance' from the local market and audiences. In making their movies, some were totally unwilling to compromise on matters of cinematic form and style. They freely explored their own artistic objectives without considering how to communicate effectively with the majority of local audiences. Popular audiences therefore gradually lost patience with having to work at 'interpreting' films. In contrast, the relatively more entertaining products, particularly Hollywood films, have been fully available and have proved unbeatable in the market, along with the implementation of the government's neoliberalist deregulation policies after the mid-1990s.

As a consequence, the entire film industry and market entered into a vicious spiral. The box-office revenue share of domestically made films decreased sharply all the way through the 1990s (10% in 1989 and only 0.4% in 1999). The local capital moved to other profitable industries, such as cable television program providers, and these conditions enhanced film directors who were more oriented toward overseas art film markets. The decline has not yet stopped, and there is no sign of revival. According to Taiwan's Government Information Office, in most years after the late 1990s, the market share of local film was still lower than 1%, Hong Kong film was between 1% and 6%, and other imported films (dominantly Hollywood) accounted for over 95%.

The process also related to some structural changes happening in Taiwan's cultural consumption in the 1980s and 1990s. The formation of consumer society and life-style society at the time fostered further stratification of cultural consumption. A group of art-film fans had shown that they were not only solid supporters of Taiwan's art-film directors but also widely received art-films from all over the world, particularly Europe. They are virtually connected with art-film audiences in many countries and constructed the transnational art-film market system – just like the formation of a more integrated global popular-film market system at the same time.

In his first mostly internationally financed film *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998), Hou focuses on the love affairs between high-class prostitutes and their clients in Shanghai in the nineteenth century, which was a change from the Taiwan-related themes in his previous works. Although the film was highly praised by both local and foreign film critics and Hou was regarded as bringing his artistic talent and individual style into full play in the film, it was notably unsuccessful in the domestic market. For Hou, the situation is very clear and he knows it very well. He has stated in an interview that the size of the audience for his *Flowers of Shanghai*, is 'twenty thousand in Taipei, two hundred thousand in Paris'.

In fact, the film industry did have other 'models' during the key transforming period. Chang Yi, for example, who made one of the four episodes in another early TNC work, *In Our Time* (1982), was regarded as the most skillful in telling popular and melodramatic stories among new wave directors. His 'Women Trilogy', *Jade Love* (1984), *Kuei-Mei, A Woman* (1985), and *My Love* (1986), all became domestic box-office hits and won him several prizes in the domestic major film festival, the Golden Horse Award. Chang Yi's film language was regarded as more intimate to local popular audiences; however, as an author he was much less known internationally. He has never won a major title in international film festivals. Without the support from

local capital and, more importantly, from international film markets and capital, Chang Yi finally had to stop filming in 1987. The 'Chang Yi Model' has never been re-established or continued.

On the other hand, the 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien Model' was not helpful in producing more 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien'. Strictly speaking, except for Hou and Edward Yang, only Tsai Ming-liang successfully replicated the international art-film model.³ We do have some other internationally known young directors, such as Lin Cheng-sheng and Chang Tso-chi, but their opportunity of getting funded has been much less and the condition of film production has been much severer, no need to mention the other even younger filmmakers. Indeed, for the international film capitals and markets, they do not need so many art-film directors from one single place. They only need two or three from Taiwan, two or three from Iran, two or three from South Korea, and so on. The scale of art-film economy is relatively small and investors also need to reduce risk as in mass market. A few 'star' directors will remain their primary choices. For younger directors likely to reproduce the 'Hou Hsiao-Hsien Model' successfully, the price would be much higher and the probability much lower. The worse thing is that even if they want to choose a different route of filmmaking, the domestic conditions are worse than their predecessors ever faced.

Conclusion: how could Hou Hsiao-Hsien change Taiwan cinema?

Hou Hsiao-Hsien certainly could not change the Taiwan film industry by himself. In fact, Hou has been expressing his worries about the decline of the domestic film industry and also publicly giving critical suggestions on policy issues. In addition, he often shared his own resources with his peers as well as some junior and independent film workers. At the individual level, as a leading figure in the industry, Hou has done what he believes to be helpful to the industry. However, as a social agent with large cultural and

symbolic capital in the cinematic field, the consequences of his acts have been much more complicated. The model of cinematic practice he pursued, as discussed above, did closely relate to the transformation of Taiwan cinema in the past 20 years.

Hou made his name in film creation in the early 1980s and subsequently took on the rising trajectory of becoming an internationally famous film master. He seemed to choose his filming and production mode subjectively, but actually the possibilities he got at the time were limited by the cultural and economic structures. His rising trajectory also has been embedded in the dynamic processes of the local and global cultural economy rather than happening in social vacuum. Paradoxically, by the same continuous processes, of which Hou himself was also a significant part, the Taiwan film industry nearly collapsed. This case demonstrates the dialectic relationship between structure and agency and, through this perspective, the role Hou Hsiao-Hsien played in Taiwan cinema could be better understood. So, what is to be done with Taiwan cinema?

Notes

1. Shen Cong-wen (1902–1988) is one of the major writers in China's early Republican era. In his works, Shen praises the beauty of humanity and approves a philosophy of the harmonic coexistence of humans and nature.
2. In fact, Chang directed his debut film, *Gunshot in the Night*, in 1993. But because of a disagreement on the final cut of the film with the film producer he refused to have his name appear as the director.
3. Ang Lee is another newly-developed model that is hard replicate, see Wei (2005).

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