

Making Southeast Asian Migrant Workers Visible in Taiwanese Cinema: *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai*

Tzu-Chin Insky Chen, University of California, Los Angeles

Chen, Tzu-Chin Insky. 2019. "Making Southeast Asian Migrant Workers Visible in Taiwanese Cinema: *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai*." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 33: 185–210. <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-33/chen>.

Abstract

In Taiwan, the term for "migrant workers" (*waiji yigong*) refers to non-Han immigrant populations—including those from Thailand and the Philippines—whose numbers have been increasing since the 2000s. As these populations have grown, they have become part of the public conversation, and cinematic representations of migrant workers have increased as well. Immigrant films function as a form of recognition and thereby challenge the homogeneous Taiwanese national identity. Two questions arise: Is it possible to change existing stereotypes and cultural conflicts? And, how can we avoid a crisis of oversimplified presentations of immigrants? In order to address these questions, this article examines two films: Ho Wi Ding's *Pinoy Sunday* (*Taipei Xingqitian* 台北星期天 2009), a comedy that focuses on two Filipino immigrant workers' lives in Taipei, and Tseng Ying-ting's *Ye-Zai* 椰仔 (2012), a crime film with a plot that involves tracking down "runaway migrant workers" (*taopao wailao*). The author employs three different lenses or paradigms to consider the establishment of migrant-worker subjects in these films in order to fully understand the power dynamics at play in the workers' interactions with Taiwan's broader society. Because of state and social attempts to control these migrant workers, the first important paradigm is the act of "running away," which makes border restrictions in Taiwan clear and creates a space to explore strategies of escape from routine lives. Second, by considering how different powers intersect, the author explores the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, and how migrant workers can become the subjects, not just the objects, in this paradigm. By employing two techniques of visualization—the gaze and symbolism—these films present migrant workers' emotions and desires, which are rarely shown in mainstream cinemas, and encourage viewers to recognize the perspectives of migrant workers. Finally, the author suggests the use of the language act as a means of resistance to show different affiliations and identities in both films; the visibility of these migrant workers challenges their discrimination.

Keywords: Taiwan, Taiwanese film, *waiji yigong*, migrant workers, immigrant labor, *Pinoy Sunday*, *Taipei Xingqitian*, *Ye-Zai*, ethnoscaping, non-Han-Taiwanese identities

Introduction

In 2010,¹ when Malay director Ho Wi Ding was seeking to release his film *Pinoy Sunday* (*Taipei Xingqitian* 台北星期天) in Taiwan, one theater manager rejected his proposal out of concern that if the film was released there, many Filipino migrant workers would gather in front of the theater and negatively affect business. This was not an isolated case as several other theaters expressed similar concerns. Even though *Pinoy Sunday* was released in very few theaters, it earned more than one million New Taiwan Dollars (NTD), a relatively strong showing at the Taiwanese box office (Taiwan Film Institute 2011, 62). This anecdote points to the complicated attitudes reflecting multidimensional social and cultural relationships in Taiwan, including the negotiations of power in urban spaces and the acceptance and recognition of migrant workers both as the subjects of film and as its consumers. The difficulties of distribution reflect fears about, and unfriendly attitudes toward, migrant workers. These fears and attitudes result from a social imagination suggesting that Taiwanese society is homogeneous, thereby sustaining a hierarchical differentiation of migrations. By shedding light on attitudes about who can use the city's spaces, the anecdote informs our understanding of how discrimination excludes certain groups in Taiwan. It is also a story of success, because *Pinoy Sunday* successfully attracted audiences despite these barriers.

Taiwan is an immigrant society. Waves of people have moved to the island from many different places, but historically the majority of the population has been made up of Han immigrants from China who built a strong Han-centered Sinophone community.² These Han settlers consider themselves to be the dominant culture in Taiwan, pushing out or ignoring indigenous populations and excluding other immigrant populations from non-Han ethnic areas. After Japanese colonial rule ended in 1945, the Kuomintang (KMT) government retreated to Taiwan from mainland China in 1949 and established political control based on a stronger Han-centered "Taiwanese-as-Chinese" ideology aimed at continuing five thousand years of Chinese tradition. Although during the 1990s Taiwanese consciousness differentiated itself from *waishengren* 外省人 (mainlander) consciousness, it is still built on a Han-centric imagination that excluded the Austronesian peoples in Taiwan who had lived there for a thousand years. This ideology of settler colonialism excludes not only indigenous people but also immigrants who arrived after the dominant settlers. This imagination of a homogeneous Taiwan has

¹ *Pinoy Sunday* was invited to the NHK Asian Film Festival and first released in Hong Kong in 2009. The official release in Taiwan was in 2010. See https://www.nhk.or.jp/sun-asia/aff/about/index_e.html.

² Chou Wan-yao describes the history of the large number of Han immigrants who moved to Taiwan starting in the late Ming period (the early seventeenth century) and whose numbers continued to grow during the Qing dynasty. As a result, many indigenous people lost their land and were either assimilated into Han society or forced to migrate into mountains. The Han settlers gradually became the dominant ethnic group, bringing their lifestyle from their homeland in China and narrating history from their own point of view (Chou 2015,102).

been challenged by changing demographics, ethnicities, and cultures, and has been especially influenced by non-Han migrants from Southeast Asia since the 2000s.³

In Taiwan, the term *waiji yigong* 外籍移工 (migrant workers) refers to non-Han immigrant populations—including those from Thailand and the Philippines—whose numbers have been increasing since the 2000s. As these populations have grown, they have become part of the public conversation, and cinematic representations of migrant workers have increased as well. Immigrant films function as a form of recognition and thereby challenge the homogeneous Taiwanese national identity. Two questions arise: Is it possible to change existing stereotypes and cultural conflicts? And, how can we avoid the crisis of oversimplified presentations of immigrants? In order to address these questions, this article examines two films: *Pinoy Sunday* (2010), a comedy focused on two Filipino immigrant workers' lives in Taipei, and Tseng Ying-ting's *Ye-Zai* (2012), a crime film whose plot involves tracking down "runaway migrant workers" (*taopao wailao* 逃跑外勞) or "workers who cannot be contacted" (*shilian yigong* 失聯移工).⁴ Before the release of these two films, Taiwan had produced very few full-length feature movies depicting migrant workers, especially "runaway migrant workers,"⁵ and most films focused on the experiences of domestic female workers and the relationships between employers and employees.⁶ In this article, I extend the scope of migrant workers outside the household and considers how the structure of Taiwanese society confines these migrant workers and their strategies to resolve their struggles.

Both *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* suggest identities for these immigrants that are born out of specific restrictions on life and identity. These films push against the boundaries of interethnic and transcultural relationships and challenge not just mainstream Taiwanese ideas about immigrant workers, but also the definition of Taiwanese identity more broadly. They are part of a new imagination of the heterogeneity of Taiwan's society. Both films examine the suppression of Southeast Asian immigrant workers from an insider perspective. *Pinoy Sunday* looks at male Filipino migrant workers. *Ye-Zai* is

³ Kuei-fen Chiu, Dafydd Fell, and Lin Ping report, "In Taiwan it has been customary to talk in terms of four ethnic groups: the aboriginals, Hokklo (Hokkien speakers), Hakka, and Mainlanders (*waishengren*)" (2014, 2). However, the migration trends of the past two decades have made this standard typology of ethnic differentiation increasingly untenable. The new immigrant groups are now larger than both the aboriginals and first-generation Mainlanders.

⁴ *Shilian yigong* is a more neutral term for migrant workers who leave their primary employers without permission, whereas *taopao wailao* has the negative connotation of a "runaway." In this article, I use *taopao wailao*, because it is the term used in the film.

⁵ Before *Pinoy Sunday*, Li Chi's *Detours to Paradise* (2009) was the first feature film in Taiwan to depict the subject of "runaway migrant worker." However, the film did not perform well at the box office, and the DVD still has not been released.

⁶ Tsung-yi Michelle Huang and Chi-she Li (2012) discuss three cinematic representations of domestic migrant workers in one documentary, *Hospital 8 East Wing* (2006) and two feature films, *Nyonya's Tasty Life* (2007) and *We Don't Have a Future Together* (2003). They indicate how the cinematic images draw these migrant workers as family and create a cinematic intimacy between the characters and audiences.

concerned with female domestic workers from Thailand. By considering these two representations of different populations, in this article I argue that both media productions are grappling with ways to negotiate mutual understanding between Southeast Asia and Taiwan. Both films offer self-criticism as well as strategies for building alliances and seeking new forms of resistance by showing these immigrants' struggles.

Immigrant cinema is also a mediascape in which cinematic practice is related to various local filmmaking conditions. Even though these two films present completely different articulations of the issue of invisibility, they challenge the dynamic relationship between Southeast Asia and Taiwan in order to expand the notion of "who fits" into society. These films challenge the Han-centrism and Han hegemony that have had an impact on the boundaries of Sinophone communities.⁷ In both films, the figure of the "runaway" traces these communities and margins and is a significant part of the way restrictions on these immigrants are enacted and their predicaments are explored.

In order to fully understand the history and impact of *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai*, in this article I consider their production process, audience, and social impact on Taiwan's mainstream society. I am also concerned with how the creators imagined and pursued their target audiences. These movies are not isolated phenomena. The filmmakers had to raise money for their productions in a variety of ways, and distribution was negotiated via particular challenges, all of which required the filmmakers to situate the films within other discourses. My exploration shows that mere representation is not enough—these immigrant films do not just play with the role of recognition. In their production and distribution, they also challenge the stiff and fixed mainstream articulations of Taiwanese national identity centered on Han ethnicity.

Significantly, these two films are situated in different genres, thus providing alternative perspectives to understand the immigrants they portray. *Pinoy Sunday* is a comedy that successfully brings its audience into immigrants' everyday lives. *Ye-Zai* is a detective film that presents tensions between local people and immigrants and eventually finds a way to resolve this strain. By deploying different genres, these films create a variety of modes for audiences to understand immigrants.

Changing Demographics in Taiwan

Since the 1990s, the Taiwanese government has allowed many migrant workers, especially those from Southeast Asia, to be employed in Taiwan. Although the total

⁷ Another important dimension of migrant worker representations in Taiwanese films is connected to discourses surrounding recent mainland Chinese immigrants to Taiwan. In recent years, films such as *Marriages on the Borders* (2003), *The Fourth Portrait* (2010), *The Moonlight in Jilin* (2012), and a series of microfilms produced by Mainland Affairs Council, Republic of China in 2019 have all explored these social phenomena. Because of the different set of political issues in relations between Taiwan and the PRC, discussion of those films lies beyond the scope of this article.

number of migrant workers has increased to nearly 700,000,⁸ they still face discrimination and stigmatization in Taiwanese society. Taiwan first opened its doors to low-skilled migrant workers in 1992, with the passage of the Employment Service Act. This act was meant to respond to the demands from industries to loosen regulations, and transformed economic structures so that migrant workers could be recruited as inexpensive labor. However, in order to protect job opportunities for local labor, the Taiwanese government restricted migrant conditions of employment by setting maximum limits on their stay and enforcing certain restrictions so that employers were only allowed to supplement local labor in certain job categories.⁹ Male workers were confined mostly to manufacturing and major infrastructure construction, and female workers were hired predominantly as domestic caregivers. The act also set strict limits on the length of contract or length of stay in order to avoid the possibility that these migrant workers might become citizens. Sociologists in Taiwan have critiqued the unfair structure of hiring migrant contract workers, suggesting that these contracts often place them in “legal servitude.” According to sociologist Lan Pei-chia, the structures controlling those migrant workers are composed of three major mechanisms: “quota controls and other rules that render migrants’ transient and immobile,” “aggravated competition among recruitment agencies,” and “deprivation of the freedom for workers to transfer employers freely” (Lan 2007, 108). These restrictions have increased the segregation of these migrant workers, alienating them from the rest of the Taiwanese workforce. Taiwanese activist and writer Ku Yu-ling (2019) criticizes the habit of binding the right of residence with work, suggesting that this type of regulation deepens the power differential between the employer and employee. Migrant workers pay a lot of money to agents to secure work (many of them are in debt) and then find that their employers can quickly lay them off, forcing them to return to their home countries.¹⁰ It is very hard for many migrant workers to negotiate any terms of employment with their employers. Those who want to stay in Taiwan longer than their time limitation might choose to leave their employers and become undocumented immigrant workers.

⁸ According to statistics from Taiwan’s Ministry of Labor, the number 700,000 includes migrant workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and elsewhere. Specifically, from 2008 to 2018, the population of Filipino workers increased from about 80,000 to 150,000. By contrast, the population of Thai migrant workers decreased from about 80,000 to 60,000 during the same period. See <http://statdb.mol.gov.tw/statis/jspProxy.aspx?sys=210&kind=21&type=1&funid=q13012&rdm=hodocUYc>.

⁹ Lan (2008) points to the binary system in which the length of stay for white-collar workers is unrestricted but blue-collar workers can only stay for a maximum of six years.

¹⁰ Ku (2019, 101–103) indicates that the agent benefits from the fee paid by migrant workers. The employers do not pay any fee to hire these migrant workers. The workers pay half of the money before they go to Taiwan; the other half is deducted from their monthly salary. If a migrant is laid off by an employer, he or she cannot ask the agent for a refund. Ku argues that “the quota” of permission for hiring migrant workers becomes a commodity, so these agents can easily earn huge profits from these migrant workers.

To put this phenomenon into a larger historical context, the openness of Taiwan to migrant workers is related to a particular national policy. In 1994, the Taiwanese government introduced the Go South policy to create alternative alliances with Southeast Asia in order to develop industry and policy coordination. It promoted trade diplomacy as well as investment and economic cooperation. However, sociologist Chen Kuan-hsing (2010) has criticized this southbound policy, noting that it specifically legitimated the ethnic discrimination built into Han Chinese imperialism, substantiating the existing imaginary order. Moreover, the government in Taiwan uses the quotas as diplomatic tools to negotiate international disputes.

From a geopolitical perspective, migrant-worker flows are an international phenomenon that can be seen as an effect of both neoliberalist policies and the accelerated development of globalization. Filipino activist Antonio Tujan Jr. (2008, 8–9) argues that migrant workers are a result of the “flexibilization” of the host country’s labor regimes and that they meet shortages in national labor market. Discussing the relationship between neoliberal globalization and migration, development studies scholars Raul Delgado Wise and Humberto Marquez note that “cheapening labor is one of the main engines behind the new capitalist machine,” one of the features of neoliberal globalization (2013, 1). A lack of job opportunities at home forces these people to migrate. The original debates of neoliberalism focused on political and economic issues: lifting regulations, opening the door for foreign companies, privatizing state enterprises, cutting social services, and so on. However, behind the scenes, the consequences of these free-market policies include the rising inequality between countries or regions. Countries that accept migrants can benefit from the supply of inexpensive labor but also must deal with increasing burdens on social welfare (Wise and Marquez 2013). The commoditization of labor leads to exploitation in transnational processes and increases migrants’ vulnerability.

Moreover, neoliberalism is not just limited to the economic and political arenas. Arguably, it also creates a feeling that affects subjects in their pursuit of individual fulfillment in the logic of capitalism. The neoliberal feeling creates false consciousness for these immigrant individuals, requiring to some extent that they ignore exploitation.¹¹ Lan further points out a process of racialization that not only marks these migrants as

¹¹ Regarding the affective life of neoliberalism, cultural-political geographer Ben Anderson has summarized several different scholars’ cultural approaches—including those of Stuart Hall, David Harvey, and Michel Foucault—to understanding the process of making the “neoliberal subject.” He writes that “particular neoliberalisms emerge as logics [and] are actualized in diverse forms of ‘neoliberal reason,’—by which I [Ben Anderson] mean the problematization and reordering of government and/or life through the market (in form of competition) via styles of thinking-feeling and diverse techniques of intervention (principally although not exclusively through formal mechanisms of calculative choice)” (2016, 740). Here, I extend the concept of immigrant subjects in transnational contexts to correspond to what Anderson emphasizes about “neoliberal atmospheres” (2016, 742), which is related to different conditions of neoliberalism “actually existing affectively” (2016, 735).

distinct from Taiwan citizens but also constructs different foreigner groups via nationality-based stereotypes. She argues that the labor brokers implement “stratified otherization” in the process of recruitment, which not only shapes the inclinations of employers when hiring their employees from specific groups but also sets up a competitive dynamic between different nations (Lan 2006). The media also represent migrant workers from different places via different stereotypes and differentiate between stereotypes by class—for example, white collar versus blue collar. The mainstream media predominantly present positive images that create support for the immigration of white-collar workers from developed countries and stigmatize working-class migrant workers from Southeast Asia, producing ill will toward them.

This article examines the representation of migrant cinemas, which allows us to rethink the issue of recognition and imagine possibilities for changing stereotypes and solving cultural conflicts. These (im)migrant movies provide an opportunity to question the legacy of the problematic discourses and policies deployed by the Taiwanese government over the past few decades.

Pinoy Sunday presents two Filipino immigrant workers, Dado Tagalog (portrayed by Bayani Agbayani) and Manuel De La Cruz (Epy Quizon), who work and live in a factory in the suburbs of Taipei City. Their only free day is Sunday. They pack this day with trips downtown that include attending church, enjoying food from their hometowns, meeting friends, and going on dates. The two protagonists (who have very different personalities) experience many frustrations in this comedic film. The film begins with both men failing in love. Manuel is a careless person who has a crush on Celia, a Filipina who is a domestic worker. He wants to win her heart, but instead his heart is broken when he finds out that Celia is dating her boss. Dado has a family in the Philippines but is having an affair with another immigrant worker, Anna. He finds out that his wife has been in a car accident and, as a result, he feels guilty and decides to break up with Anna. Mourning their lost loves, these two friends find an abandoned red sofa and decide to take it back to their dorm, believing that it will give them comfort during this time of sadness. On their journey, Dado and Manuel encounter challenge after challenge navigating the city. Ultimately, they abandon the couch but not their friendship, and eventually return to the Philippines. The abandoned red couch symbolizes these migrant workers’ desire and hope for acceptance in Taiwan, which is constantly articulated as a burden that other people will not accept or help make happen.

Ye-zai, the titular protagonist of *Ye-Zai*, is a bounty hunter who tracks illegal workers who have escaped from their original employers. At the beginning of the film, Ye-zai (Shih Ming-shuai) only cares about money: he blackmails employers by videotaping them while they are hiring undocumented workers, and then turns on those workers, handing them off to officers who will repatriate them. One day his sister-in-law calls him to the family home because their immigrant worker Kanya (Sajee Apiwong) has run away while Ye-zai’s father is in bed. Ye-zai’s brother and sister-in-law cannot do the heavy work of caring for the father, so they ask Ye-zai to trace Kanya. Ye-zai discovers that Kanya is searching for her mother—a woman who stayed in Taiwan and left Kanya

in Thailand. Instead of bringing Kanya back, Ye-zai joins her search. Unfortunately, Kanya is caught by the police. Ye-zai continues searching on her behalf, finally finds her mother, and is able to reunite mother and daughter. At the end, a postcard from Kanya reveals that Ye-zai is also a Taiwan-Thailand mixed child who longs to find his own mother.

Both independent films were made through transnational cooperation efforts. And both encountered difficulties because they concentrated on migrant workers, content understood to be unattractive to mainstream Taiwanese audiences. Unsurprisingly, both struggled with funding and theater distribution. Eventually, both received funding from different public media. *Pinoy Sunday* is also a transnational production: the director Ho Wi Ding was born and raised in Malaysia, attended film school at New York University, and produced his film in Taiwan. Because of this transnational background and the reputation of his short films shown at international festivals, the director not only sought funding from Taiwan, but also received resources from the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (*Nippon hoso kyokai*, NHK), which selects and invests in films that promote cultural understanding each year in Asia. In addition, Ho Wi Ding received local funding from the Department of Cultural Affairs, Taipei City Government, which has a mission to promote the image of Taipei as a city in film.

Ye-Zai also presents a transcultural encounter and adventure across generations and ethnicities, but as an MFA graduate work¹², *Ye-Zai* was a relatively small production that cost only 2.2 million NTD (supported by Taiwan's Public Television Service). *Ye-Zai* was not even released in theaters, but instead it was screened at film festivals and debuted on television on a program called *Life Story*, to which up-and-coming directors are invited to create or introduce their own stories. Even though *Ye-Zai* did not have international support, the film itself establishes transnational connections between Thailand and Taiwan. In contrast to *Pinoy Sunday*, in which the main characters are immigrant workers, in *Ye-Zai* the main characters represent second-generation immigrants. This characterization serves to emphasize the cultural hybridity that comes with negotiating identity in this second generation.

On the one hand, the distribution of *Pinoy Sunday* reveals the prejudices of Taiwanese society—the struggles of bringing the film to audiences mirrors the struggles of *waiji yigong* to be recognized and seen in Taiwanese society. On the other hand, the success of *Pinoy Sunday* suggests that the medium of film can function as a vehicle for mutual understanding between immigrant groups and the local society. Although the film was released in Taiwan, most conversation between two main characters is in Tagalog (the national language of the Philippines, also known as Filipino). Taiwanese audiences can only understand the dialogue through the Chinese transcription. Take, for example, the film's title. The English title *Pinoy Sunday* and its Chinese title *Taipei Xingqitian* (Taipei Sunday) convey different meanings. The term "Pinoy" is an informal

¹² The MFA degree program at National Taiwan University of the Arts requires students to produce a film and write a thesis explaining the ideas behind the film, as well as its process and result. *Ye-zai*, and the accompanying MFA thesis, was director Tseng Ying-ting's graduate school project.

demonym referring to Filipinos, so its use emphasizes the Filipino identity of the film's subjects, whereas the Chinese title emphasizes the city of Taipei. The different titles strategically address different audiences. Whereas the title *Pinoy Sunday* attracts migrant workers, *Taipei Sunday* attracts local Taiwanese audiences.

Even though the film, as a comedy, does not explicitly seem to offer moral judgments, the director Ho Wei Ding noted that he still encountered many distribution difficulties (as noted earlier). Most theaters rejected the film. These rejections embodied the very same discrimination that the film is attempting to point out. At first, only an art theater, the famous Taipei Film House in Zhongshan District, was willing to screen the film. Fortunately, even though the film was only released in a limited number of theaters, it received many positive reviews and had a relatively strong performance¹³ at the local Taiwanese box office.

Unlike the Filipino cast of *Pinoy Sunday*, Taiwanese actor Shih Ming-Shuai was cast as Ye-zai, a part that required him to learn to speak the Thai language. Because the part is played by a local Taiwanese actor, at the beginning of the film, it is not clear to the audience why Ye-zai might speak fluent Thai. Ye-zai uses his Thai fluency to trace fleeing foreigner workers. The film ultimately reveals that he wants to go to Thailand to search for his mother, and it is this linguistic ability that connects him to that search. Thus, his hybrid cultural identity is shown through his language fluency. In an interview, director Tseng Ying-ting noted, "We might be a foreigner someday, and these new immigrants will be a part of us Taiwanese" (Tseng 2013). Through the transformation of Ye-zai's identity, the film also allows the audience to experience and participate in a cosmopolitan world.

In order to fully understand the power dynamics in the workers' interactions with Taiwan's broader society, it is helpful to view the formation of migrant-worker subjects in these films through three different lenses. I will now move on to textual analyses of these three paradigms: how the films use the migrant worker's trajectory to remap Taipei's landscape, how the process of visualization can establish the subjecthood of the migrant worker, and how language can be a means of cultural identification for the migrant workers in these two films.

Escaping: Remapping the Cityscape through the Road Movie

Both *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* explore boundaries and present moments of tension between national control and individual freedom. Turning to an analysis of setting in the film, I draw on theories of cultural geography and anthropology that investigate who has the right to use the city, and how they are allowed to use city spaces, both of which are critical methods when it comes to defining culture, nation, and community. In these two films, mobility has been restricted for these migrant workers. The figure of the

¹³ According to Changhe Films, box-office revenues were about NT\$1,500,000 (US\$50,000) in Taiwan, a record for Taipei Film House (information provided to author by Changhe Films on November 11, 2019).

“runaway” then becomes an important thread. Both *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* have chase scenes that show the way foreign laborers’ movements are restricted. Running away can be understood here as a significant phenomenon for understanding the restrictions and predicaments of immigrants living or working in Taiwan. These workers are legally bound to their employers. If they are fired, they have to return to their home countries. The act of running away is not simply an escape. It is a moment that puts their existence in Taiwan at risk.

In *Pinoy Sunday*, Dado’s biggest fear is of not being able to get back to the factory on time. If he is late, he will lose his job and be forced to go home. The film heightens this source of tension through several events. At the beginning of the film, when Manuel and Dado arrive in Taiwan, Dado encounters a handcuffed Filipino who is going back to the Philippines. This abject other signals their possible fate if they do not behave. Another more shocking moment for Dado is when he witnesses his colleague Carros being arrested by police officers (figures 1 and 2). Similarly, in *Ye-Zai*, Ye-zai’s presence embodies the authority of national power toward these migrant workers (figures 3 and 4). He literally and figuratively captures them to remove them from the country after they have crossed boundaries.



Figure 1 (left). Dado sees his runaway colleague Carros forced to the ground by police officers. Source: *Pinoy Sunday*. Thanks to Changhe Films for authorization to use these pictures.
Figure 2 (right). In this reverse shot, Dado’s face shows his shock at the consequences of his colleague running away. Source: *Pinoy Sunday*.

Ye-Zai also shows the suffering of these immigrants via their restrictions and many forms of oppression based on their ethnicity, nationality, and gender. To “run away” can be to resist structure. Through cinema as an audiovisual medium, these films enrich the audience’s understanding of and compassion for these immigrants, and provide a chance for these marginal groups to articulate their voices. However, we have to be wary of any blind optimism in this mode of multiculturalism. The risk of the politics of recognition¹⁴ is that it can become a government tool for comforting citizens when it

¹⁴ Scholars including Charles Taylor, Peter Kivisto, Thomas Faist, Nancy Fraser, and others have discussed the “politics of recognition” in order to rethink the concept of multiculturalism. The

becomes another form of assimilative governmental discourse that avoids more actual and practical reforms of policy-making. A more complicated understanding needs to be established by observing a wide variety of different ethnic groups and their challenges. In this way, it is possible to avoid a simplified version of recognition. Noticeably, a movie intended to present these migrations can also possibly become another way of making stereotypes about these immigrants. For example, the representation of “running away” could reinforce negative impressions of these immigrant workers, so it is important to see how these films present and interpret their actions.



Figure 3 (left). Ye-zai chases A-pan down a narrow alley because A-pan is a runaway migrant worker (*taopao wailao*). Source: *Ye-Zai*. Thanks to the *Ye-Zai* production team for authorization to use these pictures.

Figure 4 (right). When A-pan is forced to leave with the officers, he calls Ye-zai a liar because he had trusted Ye-zai to help him. Source: *Ye-Zai*.

In order to understand how these figures’ surroundings influence and inform these moments, we can see the special formations of these two films by deploying the concepts of *ethnoscape* and the *third space*. First, both *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* show different ethnoscares in their respective cities, Taipei and Taichung. According to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, the concept of ethnoscape refers to “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourist, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential

recognition of disadvantaged groups is a process that is interwoven between social, economic and cultural conditions. Philosopher Charles Taylor emphasizes equal dignity for individuals as an assumption of a politics of recognition linked to liberalism and points out the possible conflicts of multiculturalism “as it is often debated today, which has a lot to do with the imposition of some cultures on others, and with the assumed superiority that powers this imposition” (1992, 63). Geographers Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist apply Taylor’s discussion to immigrant studies and argue that multiculturalism is “a potential mode of incorporation for contemporary immigrants” (2010, 171). Political scientist Nancy Fraser highlights the function of nation and discusses the relationship between recognition and redistribution, writing that “cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle” (1997, 11). The risk of the politics of recognition refers to the recognition-redistribution dilemmas that Fraser analyzed. I emphasize this point here to remind readers that cinematic recognition is not equivalent to redistribution for these immigrants in their real lives.

feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (1990, 33). Different ethnoscapas are created in different cultural and social contexts by mobile groups. Cultural geographer Edward W. Soja discusses lived space as “the third space,” which combines the first space (physical, objective) and the second space (symbolic, subjective) and then goes beyond the dualism of these two spaces (Soja 1996, 66–68). Soja, for example, analyzes how black feminist Gloria Jean Watkins (also known as bell hooks)¹⁵ chooses marginal places to resist mainstream power and is inspired by her claim of “the margin as a space of radical openness” (1996, 99) to consider how marginal groups perceive themselves. This awareness of what Soja calls “trialectic” thinking in the spatiality (1996, 53–82) of race, class, and gender can help us read how these protagonists travel in Taiwanese society. Therefore, I argue that re-routing and re-rooting can be two key methods for subjects, especially marginalized groups, to redefine places.

In *Ye-Zai*, the pursuit of Kanya, an immigrant domestic worker, is also sparked because of worker registration—the family does not report the fact that their domestic worker fled. Therefore, they cannot hire another, and no one can take on the burden of caring for their father. Ultimately the focus of journey is not on this search. Instead the focus is on Ye-zai helping Kanya find her mother. The trajectory of finding Kanya’s mother is a cinematic map of Thai immigrant workers’ ethnoscapas that includes a Buddhist temple and massage parlors (figure 5). Unfortunately, Kanya is caught by the police just when they discover where Kanya’s mother is. She is then sent to a detention center to wait for repatriation because Ye-zai’s sister-in-law has reported Kanya as a runaway worker. Thus in both stories, these migrant workers are restricted by their contracts and their interactions with the state, and they have only limited freedom.

Pinoy Sunday prominently shows Filipinos’ ethnoscapas, which previously had never come to the foreground in mainstream Taiwanese cinema. Even the film’s name shows how Sunday is important for these migrant workers, as it is the only day when they can escape their daily labor routine and engage in their own cultural practices.

Through this lens, the two films present third spaces with which most Taiwanese people are unfamiliar. In both movies, audiences can follow the protagonists’ steps to see these city landscapes and the routes they take. *Pinoy Sunday* starts with a Sunday morning bus ride toward the inner city, following a typical daily routine for these migrant workers and the routes they take. Dado and Manuel first go to church, and then to a mall to buy necessities. The film was shot on location in Jinwanwan (also known as Little Philippines), an area of Taipei’s Qinguang shopping district that has many Filipino shops, street food stalls, hair salons, mail services, gold stores, and grocery stores on the second floor. This shopping mall is located near St. Christopher’s Church in Zhongshan District, which offers English services. Many Filipinos come for church and spend their time here. Although the church in the film is not St. Christopher’s, the scene shows the religious and cultural life of these migrant workers.

¹⁵ The name “bell hooks” is an homage to Watkins’ great-grandmother, and the intentional use of lowercase letters is to “remove the focus from her as a person and place it solely on her writing” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/University-of-Wisconsin>).



Figure 5. Kanya prays about her search in a Buddhist temple. This scene shows the ethnoscape of Thai immigrants and provides a different imagination of Taiwan's landscape. Source: *Ye-Zai*.

At the beginning of *Ye-Zai*, Ye-zai walks in ASEAN Square—a space that is largely dominated by migrant workers in Taichung and thus represents Southeast Asia. The camera shows the square in two different ways. First, the camera is placed at a low angle, showing Ye-zai's power as a bounty hunter. Second, a handheld camera makes the viewer walk with Ye-zai through the place as he meets with a key character, Rige, who sells cell phones to immigrants and provides specific information about exchanging money in a local Thai restaurant. It is clear that food is one of the most important factors enabling people to connect to their hometown. In the sequences of Ye-zai searching for Kanya, the camera follows Ye-zai's steps to visit many local places, showing us the immigrant worker spaces as he moves through them. For example, Ye-zai visits a local convenience store to ask if they have seen Kanya. The store clearly displays the national flags of the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, clearly identifying this as a multinational space.

Interestingly, both films belong to the genre of the road movie, which both directors admit they consciously attempted to evoke. Inspired by Roman Polanski's short film, *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958), Ho Wi Ding's *Pinoy Sunday* is the journey of two migrant workers moving a sofa through Taipei City. Although Manuel and Dado do not drive a car as in a typical road movie, the narrative follows their steps. In his MFA's thesis, Tseng Ying-ting, the director of *Ye-Zai*, explicitly articulates his intention to draw on both road-movie and detective-movie genres to drive the curiosity of his viewers and motivate audiences to view the stories of migrant workers (figure 6).



Figure 6. Instead of sending Kanya back to Taipei, Ye-zai joins Kanya's search for her mother. This transition reveals that Ye-zai is not the cold-blooded bounty hunter shown at the beginning of the film; he is a compassionate person. Source: *Ye-Zai*.

To bring the genre of road movie and the concept of ethnoscape together, I argue that *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* show those ethnoscares as not just background scenery but spaces that play an important role in both movies. In *The Road Movie—In Search of Meaning*, author Neil Archer states that “the road in the road movie is never just a background: it is typically both the motivation for the narrative to happen, and also the place that allows thing to occur. Instead of being just a transitional space between A and B, it is this space itself between A and B that becomes the focus of the road movie” (Archer 2016, 3). Both films present the ethnoscares of these migrant workers as the spaces where they live their trajectories.

All of these migrant workers make the difficult journey from their respective hometowns to the host country, Taiwan. The structure of these road movies could have embodied the hardship of those journeys, but they do not. Instead, they concentrate on the daily journeys of immigrant workers in order to explore the meanings of their lives. In *The Road Story and the Rebel*, author Katie Mills states,

Road stories usually narrate a conflict, some disruption in a preexisting power dynamic, which motivates a character to go on the road; consequently, a study of the road genre reveals how conflicts change over time, thereby providing a useful chronicle of changing “power trips.” Furthermore, when writers and filmmakers exercise their agency by reinterpreting popular genres in order to reflect their subcultural identities, they often revitalize traditional tropes of autonomy and mobility falling back purposefully upon those vocabularies in order to speak new meaning. (Mills 2016, 10–11).

In *Pinoy Sunday*, Manuel insists that he and Dado must move the red sofa to their dormitory. The sofa is used as an allegorical tool to represent a place of comfort, where one can settle down and relax. Therefore, the sofa symbolizes home. However, in this film, the sofa is a constantly moving object filled with unrest, uncertainty, and weight (figure 7). Both movies are constructed as trips for the main characters to escape from their routine life. During their journeys, the protagonists may find their true desire or pursue their freedom and feel nostalgia for their hometowns. These trips may help these protagonists understand their purpose in life. This self-discovery process may change their perspectives on their lives and destinies.



Figure 7. The red sofa is an allegorical tool; the audience can see how difficult it is for Manuel and Dado to move the sofa and make a “home.” Source: *Pinoy Sunday*.

The movies condense these life journeys, including the trials and tribulations of moving to a new country, into this short road trip. Through the process of moving, these protagonists gradually find themselves. Mills argues, “People rely upon genre as a way to organize and understand identity, not just narrative. Not only in travels, but also in the travails of lived human interaction, we have come, in the postwar and postmodern periods, to think of gender, sexuality, nationality and race as genres, if you will—that is, as cognitive systems that frame experience, system can be rebelled against and remapped” (Mills 2006, 29). In *Pinoy Sunday*, Dado seems more worried than Manuel, but he still supports Manuel’s plan. At the end of film, he realizes that his true desire is to go home. To expand on this discussion of migrant desires, I next consider how migrant workers’ subjecthood is established through the process of visualization.

Visualization and Subjecthood

Although these two films highlight immigrant struggles as a major theme, we still must ask: are these migrant workers subjects, or do they only serve as objects of the narrative? Both films establish migrant workers as subjects through major processes of visualization. The texts represent the main characters as subjects, and the audience also perceives them as subjects. How do the films create this subjectivism interactively? In this section, I consider two techniques used in both films to create migrant workers' subjectivities through the process of visualization: through the dynamic of the gaze and through symbolism. When both techniques are deployed, audiences see the complexity and multiplicity of migrant workers' subjectivities.

In terms of the gaze, both *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* deploy a positive, nonstereotypical perspective of immigrant workers, which creates an affable sense that belies the serious matter of migration. Yet these films also reveal complex mechanisms of migrant control established by different powers that are at work on the bodies and identities of migrants. The image then stands as a complicated area where power dynamics can be challenged through the act of watching and being watched. This viewing process includes displaying the motivations and viewpoints of the filmmaker, the subjectivities of different characters and their roles in the film, and the identification of the viewers with these points. Because *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* were filmed and released in Taiwan, both anticipated a Taiwanese gaze as they were constructing the gaze of immigrants themselves within the films. Moreover, the power relationships both on and off screen are full of tension. Literature scholar Shu-mei Shih discusses the relationship between gaze and identity, noting that "the structure of the gaze [is] a positional relationship of power in the constitution one's identity" (Shih 2007, 17). I categorize three types of gaze that are present on the screen and constitute the complicated interrelationship between the main characters, local Taiwanese people, and other migrant workers.

The first type of gaze is from the perspective of Han Taiwanese looking at the migrant workers. For example, the position of Ye-zai as a bounty hunter represents the mainstream border control of the nation. The tension between Han Taiwanese and migrants is made obvious between people who assert the gaze and the people who are being gazed upon, because Ye-zai is constantly surveilling others in order to police them (and make money). This dynamic is articulated in the opening scene, when Ye-zai holds a DVD camcorder to film undocumented workers moving a piece of furniture (figures 8 and 9). The camcorder represents a view of surveillance that will be consumed by authorities. This film-within-a-film (and surveillance within surveillance) scene immediately marks the "otherness" of the foreigner worker. The philosopher Michel Foucault discussed the surveilling gaze as one of the means of discipline in modern society.¹⁶ Ye-zai's camera acts as a panoptic power by gathering evidence to oppress

¹⁶ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright summarize the relationship between power and the surveillance gaze: "In modernity, surveillance is one set of techniques used by institutions to

marginalized workers. Ye-zai's camera also can be seen as a metaphor or meta-position for both the director and the audience, who look at these films but are not participants in these communities. In *Pinoy Sunday*, there is a scene in which a television reporter tries to chase Dado and Manuel with a camera to figure out why they are moving this red sofa, and the footage is broadcast to a Taiwanese audience. This TV broadcast reveals that Han Taiwanese often misunderstand these migrant workers. It simultaneously articulates the fear that these migrant workers have of being in the public eye and fully participating in civic society.



Figure 8 (left). A camera technician operates the film-within-a-film shot in the opening scene.

Source: Ye-Zai.

Figure 9 (right). Ye-zai holds a DVD camcorder to monitor undocumented workers. Source: Ye-Zai.

The second type of gaze is the gaze of the migrant worker turned on his or her own people. In *Pinoy Sunday*, let's return to the chase sequence in which Dado witnesses his friend Carros pressed to the ground and arrested by the police. Carros had missed several curfews, so he ran away in order to continue working in Taiwan. In this sequence, Dado enthusiastically picks presents to compensate for his sorrow about being absent from his family. The sequence is jarring in part because of the arbitrary violence. In a shot-reverse-shot sequence, the camera, looking over Dado's shoulder, captures him witnessing his friend, Carros, being forced to the ground by police officers (figure 2). In a close shot, audiences can clearly see the shock and anxiety on Dado's face (figure 3). This arrest scene lets audiences see how limited employment can be for immigrant laborers, illustrating an everyday fear for those who may not be aware of it. Dado's gaze is a self-reflexive one in part because if he had become a runaway migrant worker, this might have happened to him (and he would no longer be able to support his family). His gaze is then an extension of the surveilling gaze. Dado internalizes the discipline of Han

discipline subject" (Sturken and Cartwright 2018, 109). A classic image from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is a panopticon, or central tower, from which guards can watch prisoners. The prisoners feel like they are being watched all the time, even no one stays in the tower. This design reduces the demands of human labor and establishes an automatic system for governing the institution. The disciplinary gaze can thus become internalized in people's consciousness (Sturken and Cartwright 2018, 109–111).

Taiwanese mainstream, which demands that he obey the rules in order to avoid punishment.

The third type of gaze is the migrant workers' gaze at the Han Taiwanese. In *Pinoy Sunday*, although both Dado and Manuel are situated in a marginalized group, they are able to observe their host society through this lens and provide critiques. In one scene, Manuel watches a betel-nut beauty¹⁷ crossing the street wearing a revealing blouse and mini skirt. Through two reverse shots, Manuel is articulated as the watching male subject attracted to this Taiwanese girl. The complexity of this scene makes explicit the relationships between sexuality, commoditization, and nationality. On the one hand, through the gaze, the film shows Manuel's masculine subjectivity, and his desire for this society. On the other hand, the film also problematizes its own gender dynamics in that Manuel's subjectivity is created by his masculinity in opposition to the femininity of a Taiwanese girl.

These three types of gaze shape both how migrant workers perceive themselves and how society perceives them. In the first type of surveillance experience, the migrant workers are excluded from the society. This process is internalized by these migrant workers and manifests itself as the second type of gaze. However, it is possible for migrant workers to look back as subjects, even though the film depicts that ability marked via gender dynamics—pointing to gaps between gender and ethnicity. This kind of directed visualization is then contrasted with the objects that the filmmakers use to show migrant workers' desires and emotions.

In addition to the dynamics of the gaze, the subjectivities of migrant workers are both personally perceived and culturally constructed via symbols. Different objects serve as symbols of various desires. In *Pinoy Sunday*, the most important symbolic object is the red sofa, which embodies their dreams, desires, and unfulfilled futures: it is beautiful but not easy to carry. Visually, the choice of red makes the sofa continually dominate the screen, popping out and catching the audience's attention. Verbally, Manuel constantly reiterates his fantasy that he can sit on it and drink a cool beer after a tiring day, creating a sense of belonging. Every time the film shows this imagined scene, the two men sit on the rooftop of the factory. Thus, the red sofa does not just appear in reality—it is also part of the structure of Manuel's fantasies. Before they even found the sofa on the street, it had already appeared in Manuel's dream with his love interest, Celia. This is how the sofa is first articulated as a signifier of home. In the sequence in which Dado and Manuel see a commercial advertisement with a red sofa, they project themselves into the picture and the narrative is interrupted with an insertion of their middle-class fantasies. In Manuel's fantasy, he wears a suit and reclines on Celia's legs (figure 10). In Dado's fantasy, he is in a white-collar shirt with a tie and is able to stay with his family. These fantasies underscore why Dado and Manuel insist on carrying the red sofa back to their dormitory. Because they cannot afford a truck, they have to move the sofa on their own, on foot, through the heavy traffic in the

¹⁷ Usually a young woman selling betel nuts and cigarettes from a brightly lit glass case while wearing revealing clothing.

Taipei street among unfriendly drivers, a scene that seems to epitomize their lives (figure 7).



Figure 10 (*left*). In Manuel's middle-class fantasy, he wears a suit and puts his head on Celia's lap. *Source: Pinoy Sunday.*

Figure 11 (*right*). In an imagined dream scene, Dado and Manuel are magically sitting on the drifting sofa and joyfully playing musical instruments, expressing nostalgia for their hometown. *Source: Pinoy Sunday.*

The difficulties the two men encounter all correspond to their everyday struggles, the chief problem being that they cannot afford to rent a truck. Sadly, they do not succeed in carrying the heavy sofa to their dormitory. They get lost and try to cross a river with it, but it is too dangerous to cross, so they have to retreat to the riverbank. Having run out of ideas, they can only sit on the sofa to rest. Here, the film inserts an imagined dream sequence in which they drift on the river with Dado drumming and Manuel playing a ukulele. At this moment, they appear to feel free and joyful (figure 11). However, when they wake up the next day, they realize that they missed the curfew and their dream can never be fulfilled. In next scene, they take the bus back to their dormitory in a bad mood. The audiences see the red sofa drifting on the river, indicating that the men had to abandon it. In this way, the sofa plays the role of the unfulfilled dream as a signifier of what cultural theorist Lauren Berlant calls "cruel optimism," a concept that conveys the "relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic" (Berlant, 2011, 24). The joy of everyday attachment motivates us to adopt a positive attitude, to attempt to strive for our dreams of a good life. But, according to the theory of cruel optimism, one restricts oneself in order to achieve or maintain attachment to an object that is either impossible to have or toxic to the self, thus resulting in the restriction of subjects.

The sofa is the symbol of Dado and Manuel's toxic, impossible desire: the ability of the migrants to relax, to be non-laboring bodies. Manuel keeps describing how it would be so relaxing if they could bring this sofa back to their dormitory, attempting to make the hardness of carrying the sofa bearable. When he has to abandon the sofa entirely,

all of the restrictions, trouble, and hardness are made unbearable, and his fantasies are shown to be impossible.

In *Ye-Zai*, the most important symbolic object is the coconut (figure 12). The title of the film literally means coconut, which is also the main character's name. Thematically, Ye-zai himself is a child with Taiwanese father and Thai mother, so his own identity stands for interconnectedness. The coconut itself symbolically refers to the transnational process of globalization. In an interview, the film's director noted that he used the coconut as a symbol, because coconuts can drift many thousand kilometers away in the sea until they land and take root (Wu 2013). The ending invites a rereading of the film as mutual cultural integration: Ye-zai starts a new business where he mixes two different types of coconuts from Taiwan and Thailand in a new beverage. In this way, the new drink symbolizes Ye-zai's own identity that combines the strength of two cultures. Comparing *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai*, whereas the former refers to migrant workers only, the latter refers to both migrant workers and the second generation, born out of the joining of migrant workers and local Taiwanese. In this way, the mixed coconut drink suggests the complexity of hybrid identity, an act of creolization.



Figure 12. Kanya holds a coconut, a symbol of the creolization of different cultures. *Source: Ye-Zai.*

These narratives show the transformation of subjects, which simultaneously transforms audience perceptions of immigrant workers. *Ye-Zai* begins with Taiwanese people set in opposition to Thai migrant workers, and Ye-zai is presented as a person driven only by money. Yet, the film ends with a twist, revealing Ye-zai's true identity as a mix of Taiwanese and Thai. In other words, the core of the story is driven by the search for Kanya's and Ye-zai's respective mothers. *Ye-Zai* primarily articulates Ye-zai as Taiwanese, and it is only in the reveal that the viewer understands that he is a second-

generation immigrant. By revealing Ye-zai's history, heritage, and identity, the film turns a conflict between employer and employee into a story that articulates kinship between Taiwan and Thailand. Unlike *Pinoy Sunday*, in which the migrant workers return to their origin, *Ye-Zai* uses kinship relations to suggest an inclusion that "they are part of us," and this cultural and ethnic hybridization (creolization) serves as another kind of strategy for recognition, something we find again and again in multicultural discourse. Because language also plays an important part in the process of identification, I next explore its use in both films.

The Language Act as a Means of Cultural Identification

In the context of Sinophone cinema, *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* challenge the homogeneous imagination of Taiwan society linguistically as well as spatially. The multilingualism on the screen is another way to construct the subjectivities of migrant workers. *Pinoy Sunday* especially challenges the concept of Sinophone cinema, because the major language used is not Sinitic; rather, the main language is Tagalog mixed with a little Mandarin and Taiwanese. The film stars, Bayani Agbayani and Epy Quizon, are both Filipino actors who have never acted in Taiwan. Although these actors are not well known in Taiwanese society, they facilitate identification with Filipinos by appearing in these films screened in Taiwan. Language is a significant part of the constitution of identities, and the film uses language transitions between the characters' mother tongue and Sinitic languages in interesting ways to show their identity in a different culture.

In the opening scene, Manuel and Dado first ride a bicycle—a kind of homage to *Employees Leaving the Lumiere's Factory* in 1895. The workers collectively leave the factory and show their joy after working the entire day. Manuel wears a red T-shirt with the slogan "Proud Pinoy" printed on it. Dado wears a blue T-shirt with the phrase "Independent." Both slogans are related to Filipino nationalism. "Proud" and "independent" also represent the men's respective psychological attitudes and the desires they will pursue. The film also presents a sophisticated notion of identity by illustrating how these migrant workers use different languages to interact with different populations in the city.

By examining how the films present language choice, the audience can see how the languages are related to these protagonists' identities. In *Pinoy Sunday*, the protagonists switch from Mandarin to Filipino to show different emotions. In one sequence, when Manuel arrives at the factory just a little late, the Taiwanese guard has closed the door. Manuel knocks on the window to call the security guard. First, he uses a very polite and humble tone in Mandarin to address the security bodyguard as "big boss." Immediately afterward, he switches to English to scold the guard, calling him stupid, a small act of rebellion because the guard cannot understand the language. This same kind of switching occurs when Manuel and Dado are deposed in the police office. Dado is worried they will be repatriated to the Philippines, but Manuel is only concerned about

getting his sofa back. Manuel naturally switches between languages based on the subject and emotional tone of the conversation:

Manuel: (*in Mandarin*) Excuse me, boss.... (*in Tagalog*) You can't have my couch, halfwit.

Dado: (*in Tagalog*) Be quiet!

Manuel: (*in Tagalog*) He's a bit slow.... (*in Mandarin*) Thank you.

Dado: (*in Tagalog*) Thank you!

The film uses different languages not only in a strategic way for comedic effect, but also to show different cultures existing in the same spaces for these immigrant workers. The two protagonists encounter a taxi driver and his wife, a Filipina, and Manuel speaks with her in a local Filipino dialect, Ilonggo, which Dado cannot understand at all. The scene shows how even though Manuel and Dado are both from the same place, there are exclusions and inclusions that are intra-lingual. Manuel rejects the woman's request for their sofa, and Dado does not even understand the situation until Manuel explains it to him. Dado gets angry because he wants to get back to the dormitory on time instead of carrying the heavy sofa. His choice is taken away by his fellow immigrant, even though they should both be sensitive to the troubles of language. This multilingualism helps the audience realize that even though these migrants come from the same place, they have different identities.

In *Ye-Zai*, multilingual articulation is a way to show not only two different cultures, but also the possibilities of intercultural dialogue and multilayered identities in Taiwanese society. Ye-zai is a multilingual person who can speak Taiwanese, Mandarin, and Thai. In the beginning of the film he constantly deploys his multilingual ability as a way to make a living. In the chase scene, Ye-zai speaks Thai to convince the immigrant worker, A-pan, to believe him. Ye-zai later hands him to two police officers. However, during the process of chasing Kanya, Ye-zai expresses his emotion through Thai as well. Ye-zai cruelly suggests that Kanya's mother doesn't love her, using as evidence the fact that the woman abandoned and left her in Thailand.

Ye-zai: (*in Mandarin*) You are just as selfish as your mom! How long has it been? Eight years? Ten years? She's already forgotten about you! She doesn't even care about you. (*in Thai*) You! Too innocent. You think she still misses you?

Kanya: (*in Thai*) Stop!

Ye-zai: (*in Thai*) Still love you?

Kanya: (*in Thai*) What are you talking about?

Ye-zai: (*in Thai*) If she really wanted to see you, she'd have contacted you long time ago.

Kanya: (*in Thai*) Please stop!

Ye-zai: (*in Thai*) She wouldn't have left you.

Kanya: (*in Thai*) Shut up! You know nothing.

Ye-zai: (*in Thai*) Can't you see?

Kanay: (*in Thai*) You know nothing.

Ye-zai: (*in Mandarin*) You want to find her? Okay. Go ahead! (*opens the door*) Go!

Kanya: (*in Thai*) Go away.

From this interchange, Kanya thinks Ye-zai has a heart of stone without any sympathy for her situation. However, when audiences understand Ye-zai's mother may have also left him in Taiwan, it creates a different interpretation of this speech. He may not just be referring to Kanya's situation, but also expressing his thoughts about his own mother's departure. Through the process of catching Kanya, Ye-zai speaks Thai not just to ensure Kanya's understanding, but also because he uses it for moments of emotional expression. When Ye-zai talks with Kanya's mother, he tells her in Thai that her daughter Kanya is trying to find her. In this scene, although Ye-zai is speaking for Kanya, those words also serve as Ye-zai's words to his mother. As a result, the transformations of language used in the film are part of the process through which the characters search for their own identities. In conjunction with the language acts, the soundscapes of these two films also constitute ethnoscaapes as the third space with their own voices.

Conclusion

Pinoy Sunday and *Ye-Zai* both focus on migrant workers who challenge the notion of a homogeneous, Han-centered society. However, as shown in this article, migrant workers are often excluded by this system for social, economic, and political reasons. Through cinematic representation, both films address this exclusion by presenting migrant workers to audiences and illustrating their lives in Taiwan. In order to show the interventions and fully illustrate the power dynamic at play in their interactions with Taiwan's broader society, I have employed three different paradigms that consider the establishment of the migrant-worker subject.

The first paradigm, because of state and social attempts to control these migrant workers, is the act of "running away," which makes border restrictions in Taiwan clear and creates a space to explore strategies of escape from routine lives. In order to consider how the films play with the format of the road movie, I deployed the concepts of third space and ethnoscape to consider the trajectory of these two movies. Second, by considering how different powers intersect, I explored the relationship between viewer and those being viewed, and how migrant workers can become the subjects, not just objects, in this paradigm. By employing two techniques of visualization, the gaze and symbolism, the films present migrant workers' emotions and desires, which are rarely shown in mainstream cinemas, and encourage viewers to recognize the perspectives of migrant workers. Finally, I suggested the use of language acts as a way showing different affiliations and identities in both films. In *Pinoy Sunday*, the protagonists use multiple languages to differentiate themselves from Taiwanese

mainstream society. In *Ye-Zai*, the film uses hybrid language to establish hybrid identities.

For each film, I suggested that the visibility of these migrant workers challenges their discrimination. Recently, progress has been made at the government level with the use of the more neutral phrase *shilianyigong*, or workers who cannot be contacted, to address migrant workers. Several groups, such as Taiwan International Workers' Association (TIWA) and Taiwan Association for Human Rights, promote the creation of a friendlier environment for migrant workers. Many researchers have noticed how migrant workers gather in specific locations, such as Taipei Railroad Station and Taoyuan Railroad Station, which form special ethnoscaapes and soundscapes. However, prejudice toward migrant workers still exists in Taiwan's society¹⁸, and their marginalization in Taiwan's unfair employment systems still puts them in inferior, even dangerous, situations.¹⁹ In this context, it is important not only for audiences but also for researchers to appreciate both films, which rethink the cultural connections between migrant workers and Taiwan as a host society. Breaking down the homogeneous imagination of Taiwan society, *Pinoy Sunday* and *Ye-Zai* present marginally positioned migrant workers who radically challenge those in mainstream society to open their eyes and notice the shifting world in Taiwan. Moreover, these different ethnoscaapes in Taiwan society allow us to better understand Taiwan as a nexus of different cultures, as a global island.

References

- Anderson, Ben. 2016. "Neoliberal Affects." *Progress in Human Geography* 40 (6): 734–753.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Archer, Neil. 2016. *The Road Movie—In Search of Meaning*. New York: Wallflower Press.
- Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Chen, Kuan-hsing. 2010. "Epilogue: The Imperial Order of Things, or Notes on Han Chinese Racism." In Kuan-hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, 257–268. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Chiu, Kei-fen, Dafydd Fell, and Lin Ping, eds. 2014. *Migration to and from Taiwan*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁸ For example, journalist Yu Hsiao-han from the Central News Agency (CNA) in Taiwan interviewed several migrant workers from different areas and reported that they still experience discrimination by Taiwanese people at their workplaces and in public spaces (such as stations), and domestic female workers experience sexual harassment (2018).

¹⁹ For example, on August 31, 2017, a Vietnamese migrant worker named Nguyen Quoc Phi refused to be arrested, and was shot by a Taiwanese policeman. Nguyen died, and the policeman was sentenced to only three months' imprisonment. For more on this incident, see Tseng Cih-yun (2018).

- Chou, Wan-yao. 2015. *A New Illustrated History of Taiwan*. Translated by Carole Plackitt and Tim Casey. Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1997. "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age." In her *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*, 11–39. Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge.
- Ho Wi Ding, dir. 2009 in Hong Kong (2010 in Taiwan) *Taipei Xingqitian* 台北星期天 [Pinoy Sunday]. DVD. Produced by NHK, Changhe Films.
- Huang, Tsung-yi Michelle, and Li Chi-she. 2012. "'Like a Family, but Not Quite'—Emotional Labor and Cinematic Politics of Intimacy." In *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*, edited by Victoria Rosner and Geraldine Pratt, 209–242. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kivisto, Peter, and Thomas Faist. 2010. *Beyond a Border: The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Immigration*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Ku, Yu-ling. 2019. "A Distorted 'Semi-liberal Market of Migrant Workers' in Taiwan." *Taiwan Human Rights Journal* 2 (2): 93–112.
- Lan, Pei-chia. 2006. "Legal Servitude and Free Illegality: Control and Exit of Migrant Workers." *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* 64 (December): 107–150.
- . 2007. "Legal Servitude and Free Illegality: Migrant 'Guest' Workers in Taiwan." In *Asian Diasporas: New Formations, New Conceptions*, edited by Rhacel S. Parreñas and Lok C. D. Siu, 253–277. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 2008. "Stratified Otherization: Recruitment, Training and Racialization of Migrant Domestic Workers." In *Transborder and Diaspora: Immigrants and Migrant Workers under Globalization*, edited by Hsia Hsiao-chuan, Chen Hsin-hsing, and Huang Te-pei, 87–132. Taipei: Taiwan shehuiyanjiuzazhishe 台灣社會研究雜誌社 [Taiwan: A radical social studies quarterly].
- Mills, Katie. 2006. *The Road Story and the Rebel: Moving through Film, Fiction, and Television*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Shih, Shu-mei. 2007. *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Soja, Edward W. 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. 2018. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taiwan Film Institute. 2011. *2011 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook*. Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute.
- Taylor, Charles. 1992. "The Politics of Recognition." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.
- Tseng Chih-yun. 2018. "Yixianganhunqu yuenan yigong Ruan Guofei" 異鄉安魂曲越南移工阮國非 [Requiem in a foreign land—Vietnamese migrant worker Nguyen Quoc Phi]. June 26. <https://www.mirrormedia.mg/story/20180125pol025/>.
- Tseng Ying-ting, dir. 2012. *Ye-Zai* 椰仔. <https://vimeo.com/165314234>.

- . 2013. “‘Ye-zai’ chuanguozhulinian yu zhizuo shuoming” 《椰仔》創作理念與製作說明 [Creative discourse of *Ye-Zai*.] MFA thesis, National Taiwan University.
- Tujan, Antonio Jr. 2008. “Globalization, Flexibilization and Labor Migration.” Translated by Huang Guo-chih. In *Transborder and Diaspora: Immigrants and Migrant Workers under Globalization*, edited by Hsia Hsiao-chuan, Chen Hsin-hsing, and Huang Te-pei, 3–14. Taipei: Taiwan shehuiyanjiuzazhishe 台灣社會研究雜誌社 [Taiwan: A radical social studies quarterly].
- Wise, Raul Delgado, and Marquez, Humberto. 2013. “Neoliberal Globalization and Migration.” In *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, edited by Immanuel Ness, 1–4. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wu Canary. 2013. “Pai dianying jiushi wo de shiguangji—Zhuanfang ‘Ye-Zai’ Tsieng Ying-ting daoyan” 拍電影就是我的時光機—專訪《椰仔》導演曾英庭 [Shooting films is my time machine—Interviewing Director Tseng Ying-ting]. July 31. http://canaryk.blogspot.com/2013/07/blog-post_31.html.
- Yu Hsiao-han. 2018. “Qishi wusuobuzai yigong yixiang xinsuanlei” 歧視無所不在 移工異鄉辛酸淚 [Discrimination is omnipresent: The melancholy of migrant workers in a foreign country]. *Central News Agency*, July 11. <https://www.cna.com.tw/topic/newsworld/114/201807110002.aspx>.

About the Author

Tzu-Chin Insky Chen is a PhD candidate in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles. The author would like to thank her advisor, Michael Berry, and her classmates and colleagues at UCLA for their advice and support. Earlier versions of this article were presented at “Global Island: Taiwan and the World” workshop at the University of Washington on October 18, 2018, and the “Sinophone Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Critical Reflections Conference” at UCLA on April 12, 2019.