



A City of Sadness: Historical Narrative and Modern Understanding of History

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Abstract

The paper deals with Hou Hsiao-Hsien's film, *A City of Sadness*, the milestone of bringing the 228 Incident to public discussion. Based on the point that the inspiration of audience's emotion is the narrative strategy of Hou to re-present a political taboo, the discussion includes how this film is defined as a historiographical one; how the film devoted to screen the forgotten history; what the modern sense of history is embodied by the discussion of the film and the incident; and how public and private domains intertwine and interact. The incident, the telling about the incident and the discussing about the film all contributes to the renewal of our knowledge of modernity and Taiwanese identity. Three major roles of the film, Wen-ching, Hiromi and Wen-heung as well as some sequences of scenes are also discussed in the paper. Through these analyses, the paper intended to deepen the understanding of Hou's narrative characters; advance the understanding of history; and exemplify the formation of historical discourse. A brief comment on the memorial museum and the monument in Taipei also appears at the end of the paper, so that the retelling of the incident can be observed in a wider manner.

Keywords: The 228 Incident, *A City of sadness*, Historical narrative, Private and public domains

1. Introduction

Historical events, however chronologically close to our age or clearly revealed to the public, will never get rid of controversy and re-interpretation. The way to re-present the history and figure out from which the incidents derive is not only related to the details of the past but also to the ideology and methodology of the present. Because of the rise of narrative theory, contemporary research focuses on historical discourses and unwrapping the hybridity of past reality and contemporary understanding other than conventional notions of offering fixed eternal image of the past. June Yip's definition of Benjaminian historiography as based on "a constructive, interactive principle that recognizes a dialectical relationship between past and present" (Yip 2004: 85-86) is a good example of characters of current history theory (Note 1). Since the contemporary viewpoints toward past reality have dramatically changed, we are supposed to pay much more attention to the gradual advancements in re-creating and re-presenting forgotten incidents to the public. Under such circumstances, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's film, *A City of Sadness*, one of his Taiwan Trilogy, deserves great attention because the 228 Incident was first being brought into public media through this film and gave birth to the endless disputes around it.

Actually, the 228 Incident – not only the incident itself but also the representation of it through all kinds of media – reflects and witnesses the progression of Taiwan democracy, pursuit of national identity and complexity of cultural hybridity. The erection of the monument in Taipei, the debate of the inscription and the interpretation of the history are all significant examples of drastic Taiwan political change since the 1940s. Therefore, it will be of great value and interest to take a close look at the incident with the help of *A City*, especially how it contributes to the Taiwanese identity and history and it is interpreted from all angles, from a mainlander's standpoint.

2. Basic factors of historical background

Regardless of abundant documentaries, memoirs, essays and archives dealing with this topic, the 228 Incident is not yet revealed to the public as it actually took place in 1947. However, we have reached an agreement to a sketchy description of the incident. (Note 2)

Taiwan "suffered" (Note 3) a long history of occupation of Japanese colonists since the cession to Japan after the Qing Dynasty's defeat of Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 to the end of World War II. For the Nationalist government in China

who took charge of Taiwan after the painstaking war, they are still facing a challenge which they did not overcome eventually from Chinese Communists. The Nationalist government also messed up the economy and legislation since they replaced most of the Taiwanese in government by mainlanders, most of them relatives or acquaintances of senior officers, and the smuggling and the inflation initiated by it. Tensions between Kuomintang government and the Taiwanese populace reached a fever pitch and finally “exploded on February 28, 1947, in the violent confrontation that has come to be known as the Two-two-eight Incident.” (Yip 2004: 105) Lin Jiang Mai, a Taiwanese widow with two young children to support happened to be the blasting fuse of the incident. She usually set up a stand in a park selling legal cigarettes. In order to supplement her income, she also carried contraband tobacco, most of it smuggled by businessmen closely related to KMT officers. All in a sudden, the agents of the Tobacco and Alcohol Monopoly Bureau appeared with a dozen policemen and proceeded directly to confiscate the vendor’s goods, both legal and illegal, along with her small amount of cash. The agents’ brutality and refusal to Lin Jiang Mai’s begging for keeping her legal income has lit the anger of a crowd of bystanders. Followed by the indignant crowd, the sneaking agents and police fired wildly and aimlessly into the crowd to clear a path for their escape. Tragically, “the confrontation left a bystander named Ch’en Wen-hsi dead and the vendor gravely injured.” (Yip 2004:106) On the very next day, February 28th, two thousand or more protesting people with bared hand marched from the park where yesterday’s incident took place to the Monopoly Bureau headquarters appealing for just punishment to the agents and democratic reform of the KMT government. Out of their expectation, Chen Yi welcomed them with fired machine guns and the accurate number of death and injury was left to ambiguity ever since. The violent suppression of KMT did not stop then. Chen Yi declared the martial law in the name of protecting legal residents and cooperated with the troops clandestinely sent from mainland to put down the so-called rebellion and uprising by wanton slaughter, arresting and penalty and finally ushered in the White Terror (Note 4).

In the following years, discussion of the 228 Incident is forbidden in the public media and daily conversation until the breakthrough, *A City of Sadness* was first screened in 1989. After that, the discussion about it erupted, however, people, government and intellectuals never reached an agreement of recounting the incident. Though the peace park in Taipei is renamed, the monument is erected and the memorial museum is built up, these sites themselves became symbols of the endless controversy (Note 5).

3. How to remember what one did not know

Hou Hsiao-Hsien, a Hakka, was born in Mei County, Guangdong province of mainland China in 1947, exactly the same year as the 228 Incident took place across the strait in Taiwan. Therefore, there is no possibility that he had witnessed the tragedy. If we are trying to talk about *A City*, obviously we are telling about the telling about the incident given by Hou and his screenwriters, Chu Tien-Wen and Wu Nien-jen who wove threads of complexity, either provided by the KMT government or existing research (Note 6). Controversy has started. Explanation has been given. Documents have been revealed. It is the voices from the government and the civil society have enrich Hou’s understanding of the concealed past.

Hou’s contradictory remarks about the major topic of the film (Note 7) have laid some shadow on defining how important a role re-presenting the 228 Incident in the film has played. People argue about whether it is a political film or not. As I see it, Hou has been influenced by or coincidentally agree to the explanations made by the KMT government.

On one hand, Hou intended to make the recounting of the 228 Incident an opportunity of encouraging the public united to move forward just as the KMT initially seeks when they finally have to face the atrocity created by them. As June Yip cited from Hayden White, “every narrative, however seemingly ‘full’, is constructed on the basis of a set of events which *might have been included but were left out.*” Forgetting, in their point of view, is regarded as the key element of founding a nation. Generally speaking, people will be scared as the history study advances because the atrocity of early age will be revealed and the national identity will be challenged. Only by forgetting the past errors will people reach forgiveness and agreement and help to establish the foundation of a nation. Lee Teng-hui agreed with this as he claimed that “Society must have tranquility, and that incident should be treated with sincere understanding.” (Liao 1993,5: 287) So with Hou who said: “I hope that a renewed understanding of ‘Two-two-eight’ will help everyone to finally cast away its dark shadow and to go on living with energy and vitality ... toward the future.” (Yip 2004:111) Some critics cast many queries on *A City* because of the film’s failure to properly represent history. If we examine the film according to Hou’s motto above, we will understand why he chose to re-create the images of the hard history in a less intense way. He conceded that he did not think the realistic representation of what happened is crucial here and the film was his “imitation of that time”. (Note 8) (Reynaud 2004: 24)

On the other hand, Hou’s film has shown some coherence to the ideas of Lai Tse-Han and his collaborators. In the book, *A Tragic Beginning*, the authors attribute the occurrence of the uprising to the chronological priority of Japanese colonist government to the KMT. Liao Ping-hui wrote with passion in his essay that “the resentment toward the Nationalists had, according to the three authors, much to do with the internalization of the Japanese value by the Taiwanese elite.” (Liao 1993,5: 288) Without the Japanese implantation of the conceptions of democracy and propriety

of economy, the public repugnance might not have been ignited (Note 9). It is not a satisfying explanation but might have some influence on Hou Hsiao-Hsien as the eulogy to Japanese culture and civilization seems to be too excessive. "Poetry, flowers, the lure of death, the hope of a magnificent, heroic, radiant Asian modernity: Hou shows the fascination exerted by Japanese culture over young Chinese intellectuals." (Note 10) (Reynaud 2004: 17) The two most impressive shots are Shizuko parting with her friend, Hinomi by leaving her a suit of Kimono and her brother's sword and poem and the folklore of the young Japanese girl committed suicide to preserve the youth and beauty as the Sakura (Cherry Blossom). Even Japanese will be diffident because the film over-praised the charm of the Japanese culture.

As well as the attitude toward Japanese culture, Hou also showed some similarity with Lai Tse-Han and his co-authors in terms of how significantly the national economy and employment problems have affected in this incident. Lai et al. thought that "understaffing and the loss of governmental positions for Taiwanese generated anger in the Taiwanese elite and eventually led to the uprising" (Liao 1993,5: 289) which is also expressed in Hou's film in the shot of the private discussion among several intellectuals when they are gathering together at Wen-ching's home. These intellectuals are talking about the accident that took place on February 27. They mentioned several malpractices and social problems such as inflation, smuggling and unemployment. The discussion was cut by the director when they reached the warm debate about the unemployment and began to show Hiromi and Wen-ching's exchanging notes.

In order to remember what he did not know at all, Hou had to adopt and adapt the existing material which finally trapped him in the mesh of politics, economy and ideology and incurred massive criticism, though he has paid great attention to techniques and narrative strategies to avoid them.

4. History as a web of accidents

In my point of view, the idea suggested in *A Tragic Beginning* is a typical embodiment of such a sense of history that history is pushed forward by unconscious individual activities irresistibly converging together and the random and aimless sequence of the accidents finally determines the historical certainty (Note 11). "History is no longer conceived as a univocal, seamless narrative. Instead, it emerges from a complex and intricately textured web of multiple, heterogeneous and fragmentary stories that by chance touch, intersect, overlap, and sometimes contradict each other." (Yip 2004: 92) The intrinsic logic of historical advancement is no longer a linear deduction which the passage of time guarantees the progression as the sequence of causes and results are monogenetic, but a complicated field interweaving those seemingly independent incidents together.

Consider the character of Wen-ching, for example. By no means should he be implicated in the historical alteration as he is deaf-mute, even though it is implied at the beginning that he is quite interested in the Marxist theories and he went to Taipei on February 28 with Teacher Lin. He is set as a recorder of the history, impotent. His capture is mostly attributed to his close relation to Teacher Lin whose friendship with him is not based on political consensus at all. Wen-ching acted as a friend while the KMT treats him as an accomplice.

In order to meet his understanding of history, Hou utilized flashbacks and swift changes of scenes without and direct sequential correlation to embody the chaos of history events and fluidity of narratives. June Yip made a good summary of it in her book: "significantly, these personal stories are told in neither a chronological nor a carefully emplotted manner but are gradually revealed in wisps: snippets of conversation, fragments of diaries and letters, and seemingly unrelated images and sequences of action that a viewer must attempt to piece together." (Yip 2004: 95) There is a very complicated setting of characters in the film (Note 12). The director had to switch from the anecdotes and stories of one person to another and flashbacks within flashbacks in order to make the plot consistent and reasonable (Note 13). The scenery of Wen-ching telling Hiromi all the stories of his brother and Teacher Lin hiding in the mountainous region is displayed in such a rush that in a quick glance the fate of the characters are made clear. Meanwhile Hou also added value judgments and political ideals such as the poem written by Wen-ching's cellmate expressing his deep belonging to the motherland. Though it might have lowered the value of art, it gave a proper simulation of the modern situation.

5. Bring dead history to revival in front of the audience

Whether Hou intended to portrait the family in the wind of history or re-create the 228 Incident, the film will not be able to stand as a result of pure art (Note 14), not only resulted from the theme he was dealing with but also resorted to the unique political circumstances of 1989, a time of transformation and conflicts (Note 15). With no doubt, the film *A City of Sadness* is a version of narrative about the 228 Incident. Furthermore, the film also contributed to as well as was influenced by the formation of narrating and representing the atrocity taking place since the discussion of the 228 Incident was no longer confidential.

Except for the lack of reliable and authentic evidence of the past event, the contemporary political situations also made the telling of 228 Incident a big puzzlement. "The KMT is involved in enabling and disabling writings of the Incident – for example, making available some but not all documents, producing official versions, or commissioning some other unofficial ones." (Liao 1993, 5:287) There is more serious a problem here that the discussing 228 Incident turned into a ceremonial action in politics to flaunt the liberty of politics and sympathy towards victims so that the government will

receive the plotted understanding of the public and consolidate their domination (Note 16). The authoritative mask of the memorial activities of the incident made people apathetic to it. These factors inhibit the efficiency of these traditional methods of categorizing documents, clarifying facts and giving explanations. Based on this notion and the belief that Hou Hsiao-Hsien was trying to get the attention and the sense of sympathy of the audience, it is natural that he chose another way to carry out the re-creating the history which laid emphasis on arousing people's feeling and sentiment. At the same time, Hou attempted to display the history to us as history actually is felt by most of the ordinary masses.

Research experienced an obvious progression of the understanding of the way how atrocity is present on screen by Hou as generations of scholars are talking about this problem. I would like to choose Liao Ping-hui, June Yip and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin as examples to observe the process and try to push it forward a little bit (Note 17).

Liao Ping-hui has complained that "whenever issues of politics are about to appear, the camera quickly turns away from real political oppression and violent event to mountains, oceans and fishing boats, which is an attempt to *displace* and *misplace* the actual problems with the beauty of mountains and rivers and static scenery." (Liao 1994: 330-331) He was discontented with Hou's treatment of such occasions since he hoped that a more realistic view is presented instead of a subtle and vague symbolic picture. A conversion is expressed in June Yip's work when she defined Hou's film as a historiographical film (Note 18) instead of a historical one and this definition eliminated the unfair requirement over the film to give an accurate recounting of the concealed history. Though she did not praise this treatment, Yip did begin to make it acceptable to researchers that the film should not be degraded because of shortage of the exquisite and credible descriptions. Lin examined the roles of two storytellers – the deaf-mute photographer, Wen-ching and the weak wife of his, Hiromi – as well as the intertitles, diary and letters. She believed that these intentional arrangements promised privileges of the director to tell about the atrocity as he understood. She highly praised Hou's use of silence to imply the omnipresent danger by illustrating two scenes. (Note 19) If we take a closer look at Yip and Lin's analysis, we will agree that the transformation of attitudes toward Hou's avoidance of "dramatizing violence without flinching from confronting the government's suppression" (Lin 2007: 140) such as the shots of natural scenery relies on a notion that it is a better and more moving way of telling it under specific circumstances and telling a forgotten taboo by conveying the strong sentiment is an appropriate way.

As far as I am concerned, the key word of the film is *sadness* so that we should concentrate on the efficiency of the emotional conveying and expression, since we already began to see the whole film as a narrative subject having its own characters. As Hou's "cinematic constructions of the personal and collective past illuminate the dialectic of past and present, attempting to find a sense of the past that might be usable in comprehending and coping with the crises of the present moment in Taiwanese history," (Yip 2004: 86) Hou has to find a conjoint element which is able to communicate the past with the present or survives disregarding the passage of time. It could be nothing else but emotion which is shared with people born anywhere and lived anytime. By contrast, the description of history will be restricted with the limitation of archives as well as witnesses and the explanation of the causes will be re-interpreted according to fluid ideology. Only emotions, fear, happiness, sadness, anxiety, etc. serve as the ideal intermediary to connect the past with the present based on the universal humanity. (Note 20) Take a quick look at a tiny example. Hiromi paid a visit to Wen-ching's family and was told by Axue the reason why they shut down the restaurant business and that her father's friend, a Mr. Xu was also arrested. At the very moment, her aunt stopped her by simply saying, "Axue!" The dreadful atmosphere and meticulous attitude are sufficiently portrayed. The simple work says much more than a sequence of shots showing the scene of arresting and killing.

There are several major points critics cast upon the film: *A City* failed to properly re-present history; the film did not manage to give explanations of the 228 Incident. As to the first point, I would like to make a defense against it since I was satisfied with the effect of the truth. Irony is used in the film to bring the audience into the experience expected by Hou Hsiao-Hsien that the Nationalist government deceived the civilians. In the film, the radio announcing that the government would be lenient to those involved in the incident and Chen Yi was trying to protect the citizens was shown consecutively, which indicated the severity of the current political situation. Shortly after that, with the intertitle, the reality that a large number of people had been killed in Taipei was exposed to the audience, shocked and saddened. However, it is possible that the effect will be affected since the audience might have known the tragic fact of the incident. There is another series of shots composing a shorter scene and therefore it is more intense and powerful. In the jail, soldiers came to bring the prisoners to trial. Even before the shout of the prisoner's name was ceased into tranquility, the sound of the wild gunshot has been heard. It is a lie ironically displayed straight in front of us. It definitely increased the strength of critics and symbolized the brutality of the government. Through such rhetoric methods, the emotions of audience are uplifted and the purposes of the screenwriters are fulfilled.

Meanwhile, it is of great necessity to point out that emotion can be divided into two dimensions, general and specific. In the general dimension, we will observe the consistency and similarity throughout the human race when they are facing similar crucial events. In the specific dimension, however, diversity to some extent is inevitable as people hold different convictions and bare distinct education. Therefore, the next step of penetrating the film will be analyzing how the director counted on several ordinary people to display the picture of history.

6. Individual lyric other than grand narrative

The general impression of *A City of Sadness* laid on me after my first watching is that the film is really a tricky one. The director and the screenwriters mix all the impulses, paradoxes and conflicts in ambiguity. The director is trying to expose some things and at the same time attempting to conceal them. When efforts are made to renew people's knowledge, even to bring forward brand new understandings, people will be too cautious to provide their thinking elaborately if the issue used to be a taboo.

Therefore, it will be safer for Hou to represent the 228 Incident as a lyric other than a documentary film. The film is also far from objective and authentic. Two major characters, Wen-ching and Hirome the storytellers and the romance of them are carefully maintained in the process of narrative and are used as a neutralizer to reduce the anxiety of audience to a comparatively mitigated level so that people will keep a calm heart and sharp feeling of the sadness conveyed and emphasized to them. In the film, Wen-ching and Hiromi are of greatest importance because they not only tell the story according to their personal experience but also serve as the representative of Hou's lyrical standpoint. (Note 21)

As observed in the masterpieces, western and eastern, such as *War and Peace*, *Gone with the Wind* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the focus on the private moments of everyday life in certain historical moments is not revolutionary since such tradition of intertwining family saga and historical epic are well-established throughout the world. But "what is most striking, is that the events of public history that impinge on the lives of the Lin Family do not even briefly take center stage." (Note 22) (Yip 2004:98)

The scene that Wen-ching went to pick up Hiromi and lead her to the hospital is first shown just after the appearance of the title. It was a bright autumn day they first met and, on the way up the hill, Wen-ching collected some beautiful blossom to give her and both of them were delighted. Since then, whenever the scenery of ocean and mountain is shown, either to form a contradiction or to set off the atmosphere, it substitutes descriptions of history with sentimental ones. The deep emotion is poured into and stored in the romance of them.

It is a little bit weird to see Tony Leung Chiu-wei, a movie star in Hong Kong, to play the part of the deaf-mute photographer. (Note 23) However, the importance of the role matches the fame of the actor. With the rapid development of images preserving techniques, from painting to photographing and to shooting, the motto "seeing is believing" is now accepted by most people. Visual sense has now become the dominant one of all the means to know out of all the other faculties, audition, gestation, olfaction and tactition. Especially in cinema and TV, the preference of seeing forms the ideology of visibility. Since Wen-ching totally depended on vision to discover the outer world, there are a lot of difficulties in describing what he saw and a lot of obstacles to obtaining information thoroughly. The director successfully took advantage of that and made it a filter to leave those he disliked omitted. Through this method, Hou managed to purify the emotion conveyed.

The weak female, Hiromi, has the same function, first of all. Women are more sensitive and the picture of their emotional expression is always moving. Meanwhile, the diary together with the intertitle presenting her talk with Wen-ching is a metaphor in the film. Any time the audience got to know about the truth and story of the 228 Incident, it is written on a piece of paper or a diary book. *History is written*. I would like to interpret the metaphor as a symbol of narrative of any history events. Hou went even farther than defining history as outcomes of narrative such as archives, official announcements and private documents to reveal the uncertainty and deceit of historical description however fair it claimed to be. For instance, in Chen Yi's radio speech, he cheated all the Taiwanese listeners by claiming that the vendor was only slightly injured and the criminals are under punishment and the martial law was aimed at protecting them. Even though individual lyrics are in short of justice and comprehensiveness, they avoid being hypocritical and self-conceited as the grand narrative may boost itself of authenticity and equity.

To some extent, all of Hou's efforts are bringing audience to focus on the private level. As Lyotard sees the problem, he stresses that "the people do not exist as a subject but as a mass themselves be collected together to constitute big stories and sometimes disperse into digressive elements." (Excerpted from Yip 2004: 92) His remarks are effective if we see the problem from the entire historical narrative. If we see the problem based on personal experience, however, it will be exactly the reverse. People are unconscious of their real role in the formation of history and they therefore are self-conceited and treat themselves as the key point from which the whole grand narrative derives. Though a knot is woven with several threads, it seems that it is the knot links all the threads together. So, in my point of view, *A City of Sadness* is a modern film as the way it imagines space is just like the latter manner. Albeit the 228 Incident swept across the whole Taiwan Island which destroyed tens and thousands of families, the space in the film is almost thoroughly restricted in the range of Kim-Kuei-Chiu, a mountainous village. Taipei, Kaohsiung and Keelung were brought into view only when the Lin family and other citizens living in the village referred to them. The cities were never placed with the village in a parallel way as we generally observed on a map. They were never really shown and existed only in the narratives. The little village enjoyed the isolation and segregation as a traditional self-sufficient countryside.

7. Private domain versus public domain

In general, the film is trying to bring several pairs of contradicting factors to harmony (Note 24) perhaps because the theme is so controversial. The dynamic display between these opposite strengths deciphers the actual cause of most incidents as we Chinese believe. The most important of the pairs of domains Hou dealt with in the film has to be the private domain and public domain because it also implies the way history background gets to influence the private lives.

There is an obvious distinction in the film between history backgrounds and individual lives as Hou transmit all the messages of the current political situation through such audio material as radio speech, music, and Hiromi's voice-over narration of her diary entries (Note 25) while most part of the private space is directly screened. Actually, in real life, historical events are introduced to most of the citizens through public media, though they are deceitful, such as radio announcements, TV news and newspapers instead of direct experience, involving witness. In most cases, the two domains are comparatively separated subtly connected by transmitting media. They both act in their own manner according to what they learned from each other through media, fragmentary and incorrect. They will not seek the thorough awareness of what is exactly taking place in the other domain. They depend on the imaginary narration of the opposite domain to adjust their own frequency of conducting. The tension between them is crucial therefore, otherwise, the balance will be upset and chaos will start until all these can be categorized into half again. Meanwhile, each domain has the intrinsic tension as well which decided what to believe and what to omit while facing the information conveyed through media. The intrinsic tension helps to resist the frequent and aimless change when the other domain is piling stress on it.

In Hou's film, Big Brother Wen-Heung is a symbol of resistance to the public domain permeating into the private domain. He is the oldest son of the Lin family and the manager of the family business as well as the leader of the family. The actor, Chen Sown-yung was a known professional actor. "Chen is the living representative of the popular, traditional aspects of Taiwan that stubbornly refuse to die. Usually cast 'in character' for his stout, powerful physique, his loud, throaty voice and his impressive body language," (Reynaud 2002:36) Chen is perfect for the role of Big Brother. (Note 26) He drinks directly from the tea pot; he is always speaking some swearing in conversation; and he treats his brothers in a gangster-like behavior.

At the very beginning, he is controlling everything. Since Wen-ching was to be absent of the opening ceremony of Little Shanghai, the Grandpa was curious about the choice of photographer. Wen-heung was kind of impatient to answer him that he was taking charge of all the details. The brutality and the confidence are pictured accurately and amply. Here the private and public domains are all running in their own orbits.

Then Wen-heung found out that his younger brother was involved in the smuggling business with Shanghai gangsters and he had to escape from the tracking down and arresting of KMT government for the sake of his brother's being accused as a spy. Since the tension between two domains are destroyed and politics began to intervene the private lives, the private domain's mechanics of intrinsic intension is activated to prevent it from being re-arranged by the extrinsic power, for example, in Wen-heung's blaming and fleeing.

However, the flood of history is irresistible. There was a shot in the film of Wen-heung was sitting alone in the living room, silent and powerless. His sudden shooting by the Shanghai gangster and his transient convulsion on the ground is shocking as the disordered public domain finally razed the private domain and required re-construction with accordance to the new obligations.

8. The memorial museum and the peace park

"The narrative strategy of *A City of Sadness* is not out of date." As I was visiting the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum, I could not help thinking of that. The museum and the monument on the square of the peace park are another narrative of ambiguity about the 228 Incident.

The initial purpose of the museum is supposed to be memorializing the tragic moment of history. But the museum appears more like an established official version of it though the reason of the tragedy and the detailed archives are not available at all. Through all these buildings, the government is trying to persuade the people that they have confessed their mistake and now it is the right time to move forward.

Yet as an exhibiting device, both the museum and the monument are supposed to be more accessible to the meaning of them for visitors from all over the world and of any culture. The unfriendly Chinese version alone will fail to be accepted by visitors from USA or to other non-Chinese readers. Seemingly, the government is trying to confine the discussion of it within the range of native residents. As to the monument, the meaning of it is even more subtle. Even with the help of the pamphlet explaining the design, it is still difficult to reach total understanding.

9. Epilogue

As a milestone in the progression of discussing the 228 Incident, *A City of Sadness* is worth scrutiny for its unique way of re-presenting history, assembling contradicting domains, and meticulously setting of roles and casting in spite of the

director's ambiguous attitude and ignorance of explaining reasons of the incident. Just as Hou Hsiao-Hsien suggests, the film as a telling of telling of atrocity has an crucial function in forming the narrative about the past history and will re-vitalize the public to find out better ways of explaining and re-presenting it.

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Notes

Note 1. June Yip features the contemporary reconsideration of historical writing as studying the linkage between present motivations and recovering past history and employs Benjaminian and Bakhtin's theories to interpret the intrinsic complexity of *A City of Sadness* as a historiographical film.

Note 2. Sylvia Li-Chun Lin wrote the following in her book, *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan*: "Because the government suppressed information about the incident, our knowledge of it will probably always remain incomplete. For instance, the number of deaths will never be determined; the exact causes of the conflict are difficult to pinpoint; and its impact on Taiwan over the subsequent four decades remains disputable." Her remarks strongly illustrated the difficulty of taking all aspects of the incident into account.

Note 3. It will be kind of controversial to use the word *suffer* here as it might be seen as a one-sided opinion from mainlanders. Though recent research is discussing the colonial modernity, the colonists did draft the local Taiwanese to war and levy the agriculture products to support the domestic Japanese.

Note 4. The basic historical fact is based on the following three sources: June Yip's *Envisioning Taiwan* from pp.105-107; Sylvia Li-Chun Lin's *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan* in the prologue; and the collected records displayed in the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum.

Note 5. Sylvia Li-Chun Lin suggested a good example to illustrate the struggle around the inscription of the monument. "Four hours after its installation, the cenotaph commemorating the 1947 228 Incident in Taiwan was destroyed, and the copper plaque bearing the inscription describing the incident was pried off its base and thrown into a nearby fountain in the Memorial Peace Park in Taipei." (Lin 2007:1)

Note 6. According to Ping-hui Liao's essay "Rewriting Taiwanese National History: the February 28 Incident as Spectacle" published on *Public Culture*, he mentioned some books published before the screening of *A City*. "On February 28, 1988...President Lee gave reporters his view of the February 28 uprising. ...Even earlier, however, especially after 1986, many articles and books about the uprising had begun to appear."(Liao 1993,5:287) The most important publication in English before the film is *A Tragic Beginning*, written by Lai Tse-han, Ramon Myers and Wei Wou.

Note 7. Many people believe that Hou was able to win the prestigious prize from the Venice Film Festival because of the political event he dealt with in the film and he also acknowledged that the incident was his major consideration in the film as Liao suggested. However, after the festival he denied the significance of the historical event in the film.

Note 8. Hou's attitude toward history reminded us of the important problem that we are supposed to deal with the film as knowledge about the past whose objectivity remains disputing and suggested that the analysis of the literature will be of value in order to realize his thoughts.

Note 9. To be honest, I anticipated this position even before I have read it and I believe that it still will be quite attractive and persuasive to some left wingers and Nationalists. However, the opinion neglects the content of a historical event itself and overlooks the relation between several events.

Note 10. It is not weird at all that Hou took some time to feature the Japanese colonists, but it is kind of surprising to Chinese that he presented them in such a perfect way, admiration of beauty, pursuit of eternity, courtesy of behavior, especially when they are colonists.

Note 11. The definition of history is so offered by French critic Jean-François Lyotard. He thinks that history is made up of wisps of narratives, stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out. This idea of history is reasonable and

applicable specifically in modern societies.

Note 12. There are too many characters in the film and their relations with Lin family are also puzzling. Berenice Reynaud even made a diagrammatic sketch which is helpful to audience confused or those not familiar with Chinese family system.

Note 13. In a Chinese essay written by Liao Ping-hui, "Historical Sublation?—On *A City of Sadness*", he pointed out that "in the beginning of the film, the people found difficulty to identify the real roles and their functions because of the redundancy of the roles. It was usual that when one story was about to extend, another began right away." (Liao 1994: 331)

Note 14. Also in Liao's "Historical Sublation?—On *A City of Sadness*", he mentioned that he had been invited to symposiums on the film for three times and made him convinced that this film was an outcome of specific society and culture.

Note 15. The year 1989, or more accurately the period of time around 1989, is a time of drastic political movements for Chinese people. In Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui, the first local Taiwanese president assumed power in 1987.

Note 16. The point is inspired by Liao's remarks: "all these activities pull the public farther away from the 228 Incident. Just like ordinary high school students or even university students have a dimmer and dimmer vision of the incident, sometimes even indifferent about the issue." (Liao 1994: 304) It is an excerpt from another Chinese version of "Rewriting Taiwanese National History: the February 28 Incident as Spectacle" and it has an extra beginning part which is included in a collection of papers entitled as *Reviewing Modernity: Post-modern and Post-colonial Papers*.

Note 17. Liao, in most cases, criticized the narrative strategies of Hou and he can represent a wide range of critics in Taiwan; Yip's work is essential in the research of *A City* and she began to treat it with a positive attitude; Lin's work is the latest treatise on this topic and she herself thought that she had taken Yip's idea further on concentrating on "how *Sadness* comments on writing (albeit in filmic language) about atrocity."

Note 18. Historiography studies the processes by which historical knowledge is obtained and transmitted. Broadly speaking, historiography examines the writing of history and the use of historical methods, drawing upon such elements such as authorship, sourcing, interpretation, style, bias, and audience.

Note 19. The two exemplified scenes are: "a night scene in which the news of Hiroe's arrest is relayed to Hiromi and Wenqing" (Lin 2007: 140) without any conversation between the messenger and Wen-ching; a sequence of scenes to show that Wen-ching, Hiromi and their infant son were still in plain view after the train left.

Note 20 This conclusion also relies on the view that pursuit of freedom, liberty and human rights is accepted and welcomed throughout the globe, regardless of the race, nation or culture so that people will react similarly to governmental violence and malpractices.

Note 21. Chu Tien-Wen confessed in a book that the film is only trying to portray the human activities under natural rules. Liao Ping-hui thinks that it manifests that the film is "only an emotional reaction other than a tragedy and personal lyric other than telling and recounting history." (Liao 1994: 335)

Note 22. This has shown the significance of the director's understanding of history and the function of film. He did not follow the traditional way which indicates that he has some experience different about history and daily life to express.

Note 23. Hou had avoided using professional actors, dissatisfied by the kind of acting that was available in the Taiwanese film industry. In *A City*, most of the casts are non-professional and some of them are even local residents of Jiu Fen, the shooting place. But the production company, Era International, insisted on casting Tony Leung. Maybe because he cannot speak the dialect, he took the part of a deaf-mute as Liao presumes.

Note 24. Maybe Hou's attitude towards contradictories is inherited from the classical Chinese culture, the harmony of Yin (lunar power) and Yang (solar power). "The essence of being is the movement that connects one to the other. "In Hou's aesthetics, light is born out of darkness and silence out of noise – and also, because of the limpid, sensuous space – time continuum he creates, *light out of silence as well as darkness out of noise.*" (Reynaud 2002: 44-45)

Note 25. June Yip also discussed this problem in her book. But she simply pointed out the feature and left the significant meaning of this treatment untouched.

Note 26. Hou enjoys the recurrence of the same performers throughout Hou's cinema, as well as the overlapping between their roles and their off-screen life.