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TAIWAN'S CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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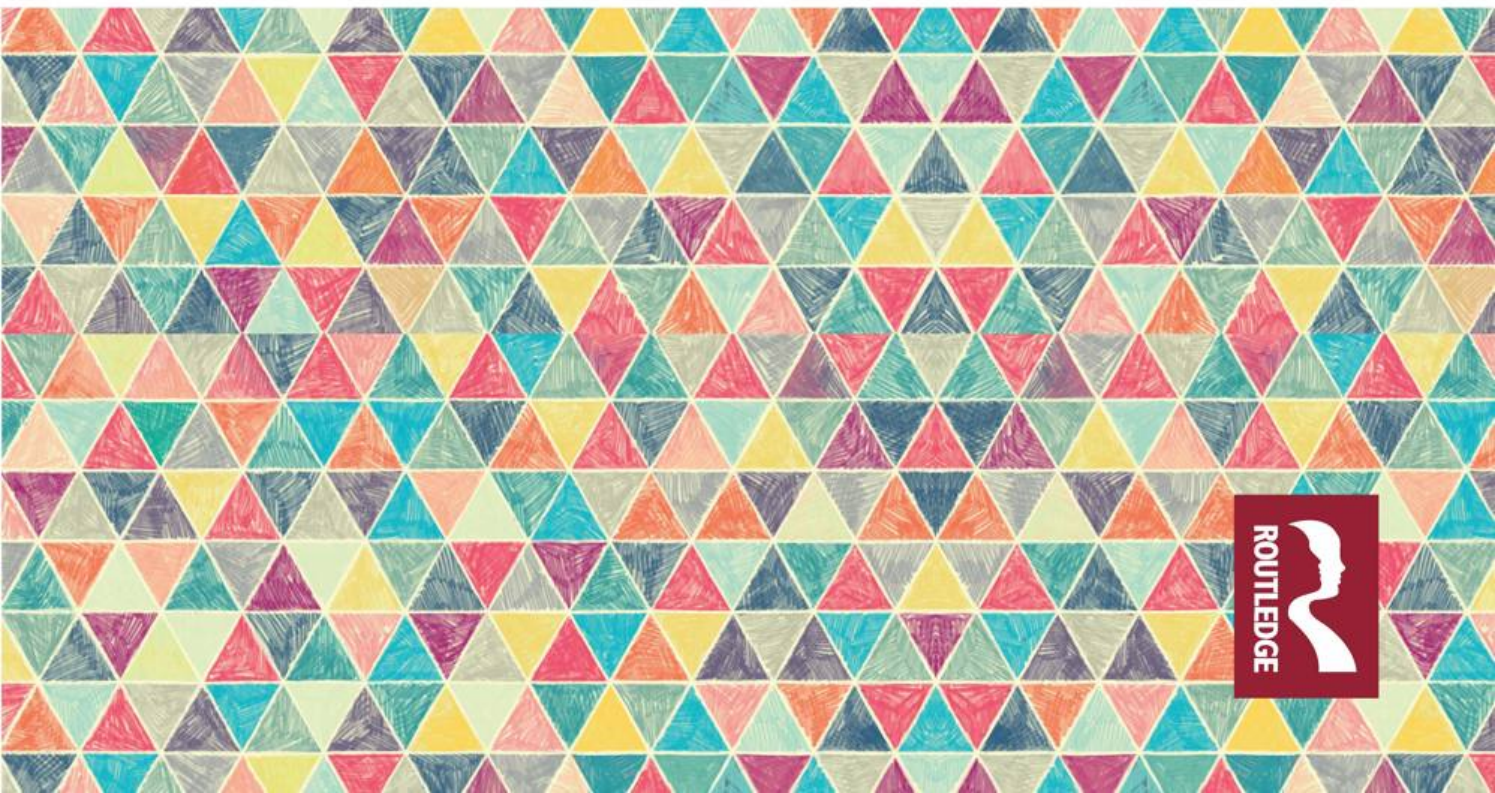

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Darryl Sterk

Introduction

Non-Indigenous directors in Taiwan have been making feature films about the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan since the 1920s. While their main purpose in making these films was entertainment and propaganda, not realism, nevertheless, non-Indigenous directors managed to show us something of Indigenous Taiwan's encounter with modernity.

The Indigenous encounter with modernity has tended to affect the rapid fragmentation of Indigenous communities. In Taiwan, the fragmentation of Indigenous communities began in the Japanese colonial period, especially during World War II, when young Indigenous men were encouraged to volunteer for the war effort. It proceeded apace after the war, especially in the 1970s, as a result of increased urbanisation. At the time, young Indigenous people extracted themselves from their traditional communities, which, depending on the culture, were constituted by age sets, clans or bands. They were incorporated into the body politic individually. Though they sometimes left their ancestral homes in groups en route to work at a construction site or on a fishing boat, they often went alone, as in this popular song from the 1970s:

> 我的爸爸媽媽叫我去流浪(*liulang*)
> 我一面走一面掉眼淚
> 流浪(*liulang*)到哪裡流浪(*liulang*)到台北
> 找不到我心上人
> 我的心裡很難過
>
> *My mum and dad, they told me, son, go wandering;*
> *I left them crying, and crying went my way.*
> *Where did I go wandering? I wandered to Taipei…*
> *Where is the girl who's on my mind?*
> *It's really weighing on my mind.*

When San Mao, a writer who is famous for her stories about her life in the Sahara, wrote the lyrics for another popular song called 'Wandering' (*liulang*), she made

it sound like freedom, but the Indigenous girl the singer was looking for in the song, transcribed and translated above, might be working in a brothel somewhere. And he might never find her.

While social fragmentation can be regarded as a consequence of modernisation, it is also the integral of thousands of individual Indigenous decisions, which is a reminder of Indigenous agency. Modernity happened to Indigenous people, but Indigenous people have responded to it, finding their own ways of being modern. In the late 1980s in Taiwan, the Indigenous response to the Kuomintang's version of modernity radicalised with two pan-Indigenous 'return our land' demonstrations in Taipei, in which Indigenous leaders demanded that the government give back the land that the Japanese government-general had confiscated from Indigenous communities and which the Kuomintang had taken over after the war.

The government has not returned the land, but Indigenous peoples have continued to act in their interests. One way they have done so is by returning to their ancestral villages, attempting to reverse fragmentation and reconstruct their communities. In the early 1990s, Indigenous writers like Auvinnie Kadresengane and Syaman Rapongan led a return-to-the-village movement. Indigenous people who came home could to some extent return to the self-sufficient horticulture and hunting their ancestors had practised, but they also engaged with the modern monetary economy to make a living. One way they did so was by marketing aspects of 'traditional' culture or hosting tourists nostalgic for a premodern lifestyle that they were born too late to know.

This 'boomerang' trajectory that several generations of Indigenous peoples have traced in Taiwan can be traced in a trilogy of Chinese-made Indigenous films in which the local A-list actor Sun Yueh (1930–2018) starred. The best dramatic feature at the 1984 Golden Horse Awards, the now unwatchable *The Second Spring of Mr. Mo* (directed by Lee You-ning), is the last film in which the Indigenous people, represented by old man Mo's Bunun wife, were incorporated into the Chinese national family through a national romance plot (Sterk 2009, 2010). Although Mr. Mo pays money for his bride, she comes to love him, and is transformed by her love into a productive Chinese citizen. She is productive both as an economic agent and as a mother. Of course, the son she will bear Mr. Mo will be Chinese.

The 1989 film *The Two Sign Painters* (directed by Yu Kan-ping), a loose adaptation of a story by the nativist writer Huang Chun-ming, is about a young Indigenous man from Hsiulin Township in Hualien County, where, inside the Taroko Gorge and on traditional Indigenous land, Asia Cement has strip-mined mountainsides for decades for materials for the manufacture of cement. He relocates to Taipei for work. In Taipei, he works with Sun Yueh's character, a fellow sign painter, under abusive conditions, for less than minimum wage, and without benefits (not to mention that his employer has confiscated his ID). He manages to share something of his experience coming to the big city with Sun Yueh's character by singing 'My mum and dad, they told me, son, go wandering'. *The Two Sign Painters* is obviously critical of the way in which Indigenous people had

been incorporated into the modern economy: it is a critique of the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories.

Finally, *Taipei Myth* (directed by Yu Kan-ping 1985) is an example of Indigenous tourism. Sun Yueh's character is a school bus driver fed up with life in the big city. One day he goes rogue, driving a class of school kids out into the countryside, where he stops for a rest in an Atayal village, where a local 'chief' is hosting tourists. In Wulai, perhaps, to the south of Taipei? It is not clear where, but it is clear that the village represents all that he has been missing living in the city.

What has happened to Taiwan's Indigenous peoples since the 1990s? I assume one way to find out would be to watch Indigenous-directed Indigenous films. In fact, this chapter is intended as a review of Taiwan's Indigenous-directed Indigenous-focused films. The review will reveal a strong concern with traditional education in this filmography, in contrast with the kind of nationalist education that Indigenous people are often represented as receiving in Chinese-directed Indigenous film. The goal of traditional education in Indigenous-directed Indigenous-focused film is to reverse the social fragmentation that urbanisation effected, thereby reconstructing Indigenous communities.

'Teach your children well', sang Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. That is what Indigenous elders do in recent Indigenous-directed Indigenous-focused film from Taiwan, so that their children might have a better experience of settler modernity than they did.

Context, state of the field, concepts and methods

In the scholarship on Indigenous film made by non-Indigenous people, the most obvious approach to take is realism. Not surprisingly, scholars have not been impressed by the realism of films made by non-Indigenous directors. Lee (1994) lambastes early films about Alishan for gross inaccuracies in the treatment of, and a complete lack of interest in, the Tsou people of Alishan as they actually live. Frangville (2011) is disappointed by the superficial treatment of customs in three films made by non-Indigenous directors. Chang (2009) is disappointed for the same reason, in addition to her antipathy to the primitivism in *Fishing Luck* (directed by Tseng Wen-chen 2005).

In addition to assessing the accuracy of these films, scholars have tried to interpret them politically, viewing them as spaces for the Chinese national imagination (Yang 2007), for the Taiwanese national imagination (Liu and Chang 2006; Sterk 2017) or for both (Sterk 2009, 2010, 2016; Berry 2019). Frangville (2011) is also disappointed that the three films she discusses are not political in the sense of attacking the status quo with a Brechtian hammer in order to remake the world anew.

When I graduated with my PhD in 2009, there were Indigenous novels, but no feature films by Indigenous directors. I knew of a made-for-TV movie scripted and directed by Umin Boya, who went on to script-direct a series of films about Indigenous communities, not to mention starring in *Seediq Bale* (directed by Wei

Te-sheng 2011) and directing *Kano* (2014). There was also a film, *The Sage Hunter* (directed by Cheung Tung-leung 2006), about the Paiwan writer Sakinu, starring Sakinu, with a lot of input from Sakinu, but directed by a Hongkonger. No feature films with Indigenous directors had been released in theatres. So, if when I was writing my dissertation I had defined 'Indigenous film' as an Indigenous-directed film about Indigenous people that was shown in a movie theatre, there would have been nothing to discuss at that time. Today, there are two and a half such films to discuss, two by Atayal director Laha Mebow and one half by Amis director Lekal Sumi, to which I will add seven made-for-TV movies, six by Umin Boya and one by Lekal Sumi (who often adds Cilangasan, a sacred mountain, to his name).

The state of the field of scholarship on these nine-and-a-half Indigenous-directed films is a quick review: in an article (Sterk 2014) on Taiwan's first 'native feature', I argued that Laha Mebow's *A Different Moonlight: Finding Sayun* (2011) makes a place for fantasies about tradition in contemporary social reality. Although director Laha Mebow is obviously critical of the Japanese use of the death of an Atayal girl named Sayun in 1937, which in *Bell of Sayon* (directed by Shimizu Hiroshi 1943) was portrayed as her self-sacrifice for the imperial cause, her film includes a couple of romantic or even primitivist fantasies about Atayal tradition. Such fantasies might be actionable aspirations for young Indigenous people.

In his article 'Reconciliation Otherwise: Intimacy, Indigeneity, and the Taiwan Difference', Leo Ching discusses *A Different Moonlight: Finding Sayun* in comparison to *Exceedingly Barbaric* by the Japanese novelist Tsushima Yuko, describing these two works as 'fictive articulations of intergenerational intimacy that displace historical colonialism as the central site where reconciliation can take place' (2018: 43). In the case of Laha Mebow's film, the reconciliation is between a grandfather and his family members, both living and dead, not with the historical Sayun (the girl whose story was appropriated for empire-building in *Bell of Sayon*) or with the first colonial regime, Japan, to which the Atayal were subjugated.

In a way, Chris Berry takes a similar approach to *Wawa No Cidal/Panay* (directed by Cheng Yu-chieh and Lekal Sumi 2016). At the end of his article on the ways in which filmmakers in Taiwan have related Indigenous peoples to national identity, Berry describes this co-directed film as the first 'to put the Indigenous experience centre screen and, perhaps for the first time, in a major Taiwanese feature film, not as a metaphor for Taiwanese identity as a whole' (2019: 239). In other words, the Indigenous community in the film is treated on its own terms, not in terms of colonialism or nationalism. Even so, Berry doubts that it can be considered Fourth Cinema according to Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay's (2003) definition.

Although many of the Indigenous-directed Indigenous-focused films I will discuss were made with amateur actors whose stories are dramatised in the films, and shown in the communities in which the films were set, I have not watched any I can confidently describe as part of Fourth Cinema: although the directors are Indigenous, the films were funded and marketed within the settler colonial

system. Still, these films do articulate Indigenous perspectives, the perspectives of people who are concerned not with the state's notion of nation but rather with the reconstruction of their own communities. In this chapter, I will focus on one way in which they are reconstructing their communities: *by taking back some control over the education of their children*.

Indeed, after watching all nine-and-a-half Indigenous movies and films, I am struck by the degree to which they focus on children. Most of these works are light-hearted, aimed partly or mostly at regular Indigenous kids. I am struck for several reasons, as a result of a couple of contrasts, with Indigenous films that have received international recognition and with Indigenous film from Taiwan.

Internationally, the four Indigenous films that have received the most international recognition, according to the monograph *Native Features* (Wood 2008), are *Atanarjuat* (directed by Zacharias Kunak 2001), *Smoke Signals* (directed by Chris Eyre 1998), *Once Were Warriors* (directed by Lee Tamahori 1994) and *Rabbit Proof Fence* (directed by Phillip Noyce 2002). Though *Rabbit Proof Fence* is about children, three girls trying to walk home from the Australian residential school to which they have been confined, it is not for children. Like the other three, it is serious, heavy-duty, aimed at adults, not children. The only major Indigenous film I can think of that is aimed at least partly at children is *Whale Rider* (directed by Niki Caro 1996). Although the director Niki Caro is a Pākehā, the film was based on a novel by a Māori, Witi Ihimaera. It tells the story of a 12-year-old Māori girl who discovers that she is to inherit a mythic leadership role, that of the whale rider. Like *Whale Rider*, the Indigenous-directed movies from Taiwan focus on children, but unlike *Whale Rider*, they are much less ambitious, much more about daily life.

Indigenous-directed Indigenous-focused films from Taiwan can also be contrasted with films about Taiwan's Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous directors who thematise education. There is indeed a sub-genre in the older filmography that could be called the 'Indigenous education film' (Table 5.1). Though most early films were intended as part of a project of civilisation through education, from *Bell of Sayon* to *Wu Feng* (directed by Pu Wan-tsang 1963), the first such film set in a school was *A Lily in the Valley* (directed by Sung Tsun-shou 1982). *A Lily in the Valley* is a moral melodrama, with a good guy and a bad guy. The bad guy is a shop owner who makes filthy lucre by installing arcade games for Indigenous kids and selling liquor to their parents. He also sells Indigenous girls into prostitution. Thank God there are some good guys, each of whom represents key institutions: the nun, the policeman, the doctor and the teacher. Of course, there has to be a love story: the teacher falls in love with the doctor. The teacher, the 'lily' in the title of the film, is the most important character in the film, and the school the most important place. Students march in front of a statue of Sun Yat-sen, and sing a song composed by the nun and taught by the teacher, a song designed to combat alcoholism. All of these good guys are Chinese. Chinese settlers in the community represent positive and negative forces that pull Indigenous communities one way or the other. Indigenous people themselves are grass in the wind.

Table 5.1 Taiwanese filmography

Title in romanisation	*Title in characters/Kanji*	*Director*	*Year*
A Lily in the Valley	老師，斯卡也答	Sung Tsun-shou	1982
A Ten Year Old Cina's Wish	十歲笛娜的願望	Umin Boya	2007
Alifu: The Prince/ss	阿莉芙	Wang Yu-lin	2017
Bell of Sayon	サヨンの鐘 (Japanese)	Shimizu, Hiroshi	1943
Children of Heaven (doc)	天堂的小孩	Mayaw Biho	1998
A Different Moonlight: Finding Sayun	不一樣的月光：尋找莎韻	Laha Mebow	2011
Fishing Luck	等待飛魚	Tseng Wen-chen	2005
Going Home (tv)	回家	Lin Ching-chen	2006
I'm Here Singing (tv)	我在這邊唱	Umin Boya	2009
Kano	嘉農	Umin Boya	2014
Lokah Laqi/Hang In There, Kids!	只要我長大	Laha Mebow	2016
Long Time No Sea	只有大海知道	Tsui Yung-hui	2018
Mermaid Whispering	海人魚	Yuan Hsu-hu	2017
Pakeriran (tv)	巴克力藍的夏天	Lekal Sumi	2016
Pongso No Tao / Island of the People	人之島	Wang Chin-kuei	2008
Seediq Bale	賽德克·巴萊	Wei Te-sheng	2011
Seeing Heaven (tv)	看見天堂	Umin Boya	2009
Song of the Spirits	心靈之歌	Wu Hung-hsiang	2006
Swaying Bamboo Grove (tv)	飄搖的竹林	Umin Boya	2011
Taipei Myth	台北神話	Yu Kan-ping	1985
The Sage Hunter	山豬·飛鼠·撒可努	Cheung Tung-leung	2006
The Second Spring of Mr Mo	老莫的第二個春天	Lee You-ning	1984
The Two Sign Painters	兩個油漆匠	Yu Kan-ping	1989
The Wish of the Ocean Rice (doc)	海稻米的願望	Lekal Sumi	2012
Wawa No Cidal/Panay	太陽的孩子	Lekal Sumi and Cheng Yu-chieh	2015
We Agreed Not to Cry (tv)	說好不準哭	Umin Boya	2008
Wu Feng	吳鳳	Pu Wan-tsang	1963
Young Man Abbas (tv)	少年阿霸士	Cheng Wen-tang	2001

Twenty-five years later, when another pair of Indigenous education films appeared, things had changed for the better, in the sense that both non-Indigenous directors were obviously more interested in Indigenous culture and confident in Indigenous people's capacity to solve their own problems. In *Song of the Spirits* (directed by Wu Hung-hsiang 2006), a sound engineer is sent to an Indigenous village to record materials for a radio programme about Bunun choral singing. There he meets and of course falls in love with an Indigenous music teacher, who has the ersatz Indigenous name Tsu-hui, meaning wisdom of the ancestors, and is played by a non-Indigenous actress, Janine Chang. The school is the main location in the film, but instead of a statue of Sun Yat-sen, as in *A Lily of the Valley*, all the artifacts are Bunun.

In *Pongso no Tao/Island of the People* (directed by Wang Chin-kuei 2008), a Taiwanese art teacher falls in love with a half-Tao, half-Chinese sound engineer on Orchid Island as she gets to know the local people and landscape by living with a local family. He, as a sound engineer, records the local soundscape; she, as an artist, records the appearances of the island with her Tao students. It is a charming film. But it is still a romance, and the romance deflects attention from the theme of education. The films by the Indigenous directors which I will turn to below, by contrast, eschew romance and focus on children's education.

In the light of this last contrast, I ask the following two research questions: *Why* have the Indigenous directors Umin Boya, Laha Mebow and Lekal Sumi focused on children, making 'Indigenous kid flicks'? *How*, besides avoiding romance, are their films different from the 'Indigenous educational film'? I explore these questions in the following discussion of the films of three directors, Umin Boya, Laha Mebow and Lekal Sumi, selected because they are worth discussing and because they are the only directors to discuss. I will attempt tentative answers to my questions in the conclusion.

Discussion

Umin Boya

Umin Boya went through the mass communications programme at Shih Hsin University in Taipei in the late 1990s. This programme has been important to the development of Indigenous film, because of a cohort, Laha Mebow, Umin Boya and Mayaw Biho – the documentary filmmaker, former director of Channel 16 (TITV, the Indigenous channel), activist and would-be politician – that entered university in the mid-1990s. Although not as politically active as Mayaw Biho, Laha Mebow and Umin Boya are part of the first generation of Indigenous filmmakers. They graduated at the time when digital camera technology and non-linear editing were bringing down the cost of 'film' production.

Umin Boya first established himself as an actor, in Indigenous films like *Young Man Abbas* (2001), directed by Cheng Wen-tang as part of his back-to-the-village trilogy for the local public broadcaster PTS. He also acted in 'idol' dramas, but he is not just another pretty face, and had always wanted to write and direct stories, not just act them out. He has been writing screenplays since college. He showed a couple of his screenplays to an established director, who agreed to produce them and guarantee the quality of the finished products to GTV, which provided the budget, NTD1,800,000 (about US$60,000) for each. Why GTV, a commercial television station founded in the 1990s after the liberalisation of the mass media? Umin Boya had served as assistant director on a GTV film in 2005. The woman overseeing the TV drama department planned to enter Umin Boya's two films into the Golden Bell Awards, Taiwan's Golden Globes. She also wanted to reorient the station towards wholesome quality programming that would generate positive social energy.

Umin Boya would star in the 2006 TV movie made from his first screenplay, *Going Home*, which another director, Lin Ching-chen, would helm. It is a 'bright

lights, big city' story about a small-town Indigenous boy who is initially enamoured with life in the big city but becomes disillusioned. A car accident convinces him to go home. That is all we know about it. Neither Umin Boya nor the director has a copy, and I was unable to locate it in any library or collection.

The first film Umin Boya directed was *A Ten Year Old Cina's Wish* (2007). This film is set in the south of Hualien County, where both Umin Boya and Mayaw Biho grew up. There are lots of shots of the local landscape of paths through paddy fields. The landscape is a space for elementary school students to play in on the way to or from school. But there is no attempt to be cute, as in *The Sage Hunter* (2006), Paiwan writer Sakinu's star vehicle. *A Ten Year Old Cina's Wish* is completely serious, and sad. Anxious apprehension is the main emotion expressed on the 10-year-old *cina*'s face. *Cina* means mother in Bunun, and the 10-year-old mother in the film is named Pei-lin. She is a mother because she has to take care of her baby brothers and sisters. She carries the youngest around, as if she is his mother.

In the first scene, state representatives visit the shack they live in to recommend that one of the children be put in foster care, because they do not think the father is able to take care of all his offspring. In the interview, the father reports that his occupation is '作家', which means 'author' but which could also be interpreted as 'make house'. He means he is in construction. This is a joke, and perhaps he intends it as such, but it might also be illustrative of his lack of facility in Mandarin. A scene at the construction site conveys how hard his work is, especially because he has a bad back. Most of the scenes, however, convey how hard life is for his daughter Pei-lin. When she is not at school or walking to or from school, she is making house.

From the first fade in, when Pei-lin whispers her wishes – a remote-controlled car for her brother, pink shoes for herself, milk, or maybe … – the film is about what the 10-year-old mother wants out of life. Naturally, we would like her wishes to come true, and so Umin Boya arranges for her to appear on a television show on GTV for Indigenous children where the presenter makes their wishes come true. At the climax of this episode, Pei-lin and her family win a set of electrical appliances they probably cannot afford to power, if her father can complete a silly task, bouncing a ping-pong ball so many times, which he does, when he is given a second chance. The first time she is asked what her wish is, she has a fantasy, presented as a cartoon of an Indigenous girl in a premodern setting, like a kitschy scene out of a Disney movie. In the background is a nursery rhyme her mother used to sing. But Pei-lin does not articulate a wish, the first time.

The second time she is asked she says she would like her mother, who has abandoned her and her father, to take them to an amusement park, just once, then Pei-lin will not bother her again. The host of the television show calls the mother, who immediately hangs up when she hears what the call is about. It sounds terribly manipulative, but it is extremely poignant. Clearly, Umin Boya has a sense of the role of television, a fantasyland he is helping to produce, in the lives of young Indigenous children, and just as clearly he knows what it is like to be poor.

Umin Boya made another film for GTV that is no longer available, *We Agreed Not to Cry* (2008). A boy and his half-brother go to Taipei to find their father so that they can get money to pay their school fees. They make it there, but cannot find their father, who has died in a construction accident. The elder brother gets separated from the younger, and ends up sitting under a bridge close to the train station, alone.

Umin Boya also made *I'm Here Singing* (2009) for PTS, about Suming, the Amis singer and actor, which I will not discuss because it is a rare example of a film by an Indigenous director about Indigenous people that is not about children and for children.

Since 2009, Umin Boya has made two films for Channel 16, the Indigenous channel, TITV. Both can be viewed on YouTube. *Seeing Heaven* (2009) is about the riverside squatters in Hsintien, a suburb of Taipei, who live in a village called Heaven. This is clearly a reference to Mayaw Biho's documentary *Children of Heaven* (1998). Like the documentary, the film features children, particularly the young boy living with his grandmother in Heaven, whom the protagonist, an Indigenous girl taking Mass Communications at what must be (given the location) Shih Hsin University, befriends. By befriending the young boy and his grandmother, she finds a topic for her final year film project: daily life in an Indigenous village, which she has apparently never experienced before. She sits in the open air, singing and eating with the Indigenous residents.

She also observes Indigenous politics, the only example thereof in Umin Boya's oeuvre, in that the grandmother organises protests against attempts by the state to get them to move. They like living there! In the climax of the film, there is a three-location cross-cutting sequence in which (1) the community is bulldozed (as was the community in Mayaw Biho's documentary, about the Sanying Village Community under the bridge from Sanhsia to Yingko), (2) a friend of the protagonist dances to the accompaniment of an Indigenous guitarist on a TV talent show, and (3) the protagonist takes the young boy to the park, buying balloons on the way. When one balloon escapes his grasp, he decides to let them all go.

In *Swaying Bamboo Grove*, Umin Boya explores the connection between past and present generations via an apparition of a boy hiking with his father in traditional attire to visit a bamboo grove. In the present, a half a century later, the bamboo grove is under the control of the local forestry bureau, which has 'rented' it out. A grandfather – actually, the boy in the apparition – takes his grandson for bamboo shoot hunting in the same bamboo grove but gets arrested, while in a subplot another son forces his bedridden father to sell a plot of ancestral land. The film is obviously about how poor Indigenous people become deterritorialised by the state, which brings their ancestral land into a modern capitalist regime of exploitation. The father's generation is caught in the middle, caught between his job (he works for the local forestry bureau) and his family, but perhaps the grandson will be able to find a resolution. That is the way I read the final scene, in which the grandson plants a stolen bamboo shoot in the garden behind the family's shack in the mountains, which they only visit on holidays, and sticks his action hero figurine in the soil beside the shoot.

Then there is *Kano* (2013), the baseball movie Umin Boya directed for Ars Films, Wei Te-sheng's production company. The difference in production values between the made-for-TV movies and *Kano* is stark. The made-for-TV movies are obviously quite limited in the kind of scene they can stage, in stunts and special effects and in the background music, while *Kano* is just as obviously the work of a well-funded and seasoned professional. One wonders what kind of Indigenous film Umin Boya would make if he had the budget for a feature. He is still writing screenplays and fund-raising. He may well be the first Indigenous director to film an Indigenous epic. But he will not be the first to make a feature. The first director of a local native feature was Laha Mebow.

Laha Mebow

Laha Mebow acted in *Watan's Bottle* (2002), the third of Cheng Wen-tang's homecoming trilogy, and has worked for a decade and a half as a documentary filmmaker, but has been writing screenplays all the while. She won an award for the screenplay that would become *A Different Moonlight: Finding Sayun* (2011) in 2007. The film is set in Nanfang'ao in Ilan.

Although she grew up in Taichung and went to school in Taipei, Laha Mebow is from the village of Ropwe in Nanfang'ao. This is the village to which Sayon's relatives were moved after the war. Sayon is the Japanese romaji spelling of Sayun, the girl about whom the Japanese-era propaganda film *Bell of Sayon* was made. Sayun was supposedly seeing off a teacher who was going off to fight when she tragically drowned. *Bell of Sayon* suggests she was in love with the departing teacher, using romance for a patriotic purpose: the purpose of the film was to drum up support for the war effort. But Sayun was probably hired as a porter. She carried the teacher's luggage down from Ryohen, several dozen kilometres into the hills above Nanfang'ao, at the southern edge of what is now Ilan County, and fell into the water at a river crossing. It is in Nanfang'ao that the descendants of her relatives live now. Of course, Laha Mebow's film is partly about the Sayun who drowned in the Japanese era, but the main point the director makes about the colonial Sayun is that she probably was not in love, and at any rate it is impossible know, and not that important to young people today.

The Sayun the subtitle makes reference to – the Sayun who is found in *Finding Sayun* – is one of these young people. Sayun is a common Atayal name. But Sayun is not the main character. The main character is Yugan. Yugan is in love with Sayun, but she is too busy preparing for the college entrance exam to have time for a romance, and Yugan is encouraged to focus on his studies. The search for Sayun mentioned in the title is by an assistant director who visits Nanfang'ao to do pre-production for a romance film about the colonial Sayun. When that idea falls through, the assistant director sticks around to make a documentary about life in Ropwe, which climaxes with a walk back into the hills to Ryohen by Yugan and his grandfather. In the old village, they find the slate house Yugan's grandpa grew up in, buried in the grass. The trip is a chance for the grandfather to pay his respects to his parents for the last time, and to spend time with his grandson,

teaching him the traditional attitude to the ancestors, as he had taught him to hunt when he was younger.

Laha Mebow contrasts the realities of life with the fantasies the characters indulge in: a childhood in Ropwe means playing in the waterfall, eating wild honey, hunting for flying squirrels at night, catching pigs and dreaming of a career as a soccer star; an adulthood there means 3D (dirty, degrading, dangerous) jobs – the film opens with the death of a labourer – and a longing for a better life. In what is for me the most memorable scene in the film, the labourers' widow stands in front of a mural of the colonial Sayun in an idyllic, even cartoonishly kitchy, premodern setting. It is obviously supposed to create a contrast between fantasy and reality, but one wonders if Sayun in the mural is the widow's fantasy or the director's. At any rate, she is part of their daily life, watching over them like a fairy godmother. And she is still there on the wall today.

The film was a production milestone for Indigenous cinema in Taiwan. It was made with money from Lin Ko-hsiao, an investment banker who fell in love with the colonial Sayun after he discovered that the tune to his favourite song, 'The Same Moonlight', was originally Sayon's dirge in *Bell of Sayon*. He started climbing the hills behind Nanfang'ao, meeting locals, including Laha Mebow, who was there on a root-seeking visit back to her home village. *A Different Moonlight: Finding Sayun* was also made with money from the Mitsubishi (Shun Yi) Motor Company, which has supported Indigenous causes with generous funding for the past three decades. Finally, it was distributed by Sky Films, 'a Taiwan-based Asian marketing company which integrates the resources of movies and television' and operates all through Asia. It specialises in light drama and comedy. The presence of mainland Chinese members on the film crew in the film suggests that the film was also made with mainland Chinese funding. I do not know how much the budget ended up being, but imagine not much more than Umin Boya had to shoot his first made-for-TV movie. According to the Wikipedia page, the film took in 2.2 million NTD at the box office, about US$70,000. This modest figure was evidently enough for donors or investors to have enough faith in Laha Mebow to fund her second feature, which would be released as *Lokah, Laqi!*, or *Hang In There, Kids!* (2016), and which would take in 7.0 million NTD at the box office, or US$233,000, partly thanks to its selection as Taiwan's official entry in the Best Foreign Language film at the 2016 Academy Awards, partly because it is a great film. It is currently the best performing feature by an Indigenous director. Once again Sky Films distributed it.

Lokah, Laqi! is about three elementary school boys, two years older than Pei-lin in Umin Boya's first film, in their final year of elementary. Like her first film, and like Umin Boya's first made-for-TV movie, *Lokah, Laqi!* is organised around the tensions between the realities of life in an Indigenous village – this one is set up in the central mountains on the road from Lishan to Ilan in the village of Sqoyaw – and the fantasies the characters harbour. Similarly, there is a 'can't get no satisfaction' message, or, as one of the three main characters puts it, '*c'est la vie*, better luck next time'.

The three main characters are three boys, each of whom represents a different family circumstance, socio-economic status and dream in life. The star of the show, the little kid with the most personality, Watan, is under the care of his grandmother, who lives off her pension and the cabbages she grows. The beginning of the film is reminiscent of the beginning of *A Ten Year Old Cina's Wish*, as the family is visited by someone from an NGO who is there to provide them with hand-me-down clothes and a second-hand computer. The house they live in is a shack made of scrap wood, paper and plastic. Watan's dream is just to stay in the village, to hunt and hang out, which is why he goes by the Atayal name Watan and not the Chinese name written on his birth certificate.

The second little boy, Chen-hao, lives in a proper shack with metal siding, a step up in socio-economic status, with his father, a peach farmer. Part of seasonal peach tree work is called '戴套子', a euphemism for 'to put a condom on', here a funny way of referring to putting Styrofoam mesh and plastic covers on the peaches to protect them from blight. This is the kind of linguistic detail that really makes the dialogue in Laha Mebow's films stand out. Chen-hao misses his mother, who has left his father for a better life, as in Umin Boya's *A Ten Year Old Cina's Wish*. His dream is the same as Pei-lin's.

The third little boy, Lin-shan, lives in a concrete house and has a mother at home and a father who drives a sportscar and wants to make it big as an entertainer in the city. The father is a member of a band modelled on the Indigenous band Boxing! Lin-shan wants to play in the NBA, despite the fact that he is short and fat, while his more immediate wish is that his father would quit getting drunk and beating his mother up.

In addition to scenes illustrating these family situations, there are scenes illustrating the possibilities of life for young Indigenous children, particularly the one in which the three kids follow one of the young women in the village up to a hilltop where she gets her wedding photos taken with her French fiancé.

Another couple of scenes focus on economic realities. Watan and Chen-hao visit a bar and illegally sell a muntjac that they have trapped. This scene is an acknowledgement of the continued illegal sale of wild meat, a practice the director obviously sympathises with as it is a traditional livelihood that supplements Indigenous incomes in the modern economy. In another scene, the three boys steal some of Chen-hao's father's peaches to sell in a tourist area. They sell them, but not before getting chewed out by a Taiwanese fruit seller who unlike them has a license. In the tourist area, Watan comes out with the most memorable line in Laha Mebow's two feature films. He says, 'Lady, you're the prettiest, won't you buy some peaches from us dark aboriginal children?' He shamelessly flatters her and elicits her pity by portraying himself as impoverished. He *is* impoverished, but nobody would pity him: he can obviously take care of himself.

Finally, Laha Mebow thematises education by setting a number of scenes in a church, where a former aspiring popular singer whose career was cut short by a traffic accident runs an after-school class for free for the village children. Watan hates his elementary school teacher, a Taiwanese man who is likely only living

in the village for a short term, but he is very fond of his volunteer teacher at the church. To Watan's motto '*c'est la* vie, better luck next time', the disabled teacher adds: 'if I don't teach these kids, who will?'

Lekal Sumi

Unlike Umin Boya and Laha Mebow, Lekal Sumi did not train as a director. He grew up in Tainan, and when his mother went back home to Shihtiping in southern Hualien County on the east coast, he went with her. She restarted terrace paddy farming by restoring a traditional irrigation channel, a project threatened by the sale of local land to rich people from the north hoping to develop the area for tourism. And her son Lekal Sumi made a documentary (under his Chinese name, Wang Ya-fan) about her efforts to bring the community together around this project. The documentary, *The Wish of the Ocean Rice*, was released in 2012 (and is viewable on YouTube). When contacted by a professional director, Cheng Yu-chieh, who had seen *The Wish of the Ocean Rice*, Lekal Sumi had his chance to make a feature film based on the same story. Cheng Yu-chieh had the experience and the industry cred that Lekal Sumi lacked.

From the opening credits of the feature film, when the 12-year-old female protagonist Cakaw rides a bike past tour buses and for sale signs, it is clear that the film is going to expand on the social problem broached by the documentary: tourism is leading to development that encroaches on the lives of the locals. The seeds of the story – scenes covered by the documentary previously, including the announcement by the irrigation project leader, the agreement of the villagers, the restoration of the irrigation system and the planting, tending, harvesting and sale of rice – have all been planted about in 41 minutes. But considerable drama has been injected into these scenes to turn the documentary into a feature film. In the scene where the project leader, played by a television reporter called Panay, announces the restoration of the old irrigation line and tries to get her fellow villagers to support it, for instance, there is initially considerable resistance to her proposal. There was no such resistance in the documentary. In the film, of course, she manages to persuade them in the end.

Another element that was added to the film is children. The cast of the documentary was middle-aged, without any characters analogous to Panay's daughter Cakaw or her little brother. While they are not the main characters, their presence in the film has to affect its interpretation, because everything the older generation does will affect them, and is actually for them. Hence, the title of the film in Amis, *Wawa No Cidal*, children (*wawa*) of the sun (*cidal*). Like rice, Amis children grow up in the sun.

In English the film was titled *Panay*, the name of the main character, who was modelled on Lekal Sumi's mother. *Panay* means 'rice' in Amis and implies humility, because a rice stalk bows its head like a humble person (thanks to Futuru Tsai for this information). Panay is a reporter. As such, her presence in the film thematises the representation of Indigenous peoples. At the beginning of the film, she is covering Indigenous political activism during the Sunflower Student

Movement. At her producer's decision to pull one of her stories in favour of flesh – the outspoken entertainer Cheng Chia-chun's cleavage – she gets fed up. She takes some time off and goes back home to the *buluo*, the village community. She decides to stay in the *buluo* for several reasons: her father's illness, her two children's upbringing and land politics.

Panay's former classmate, played by the Truku actor Bokeh Kosang, manages to prey upon Panay's daughter Cakaw's desire to leave the village by persuading her to sell her ancestral land as a site for a big hotel, to be built with central government and mainland Chinese money. The hotel is intended for mainland Chinese tourists. Little did the hotel's planners know that when Tsai Ing-wen would be elected president in 2016, the flow of tourism from China would slow to a trickle or even dry up.

The classmate manages to redeem himself in the end when another resident's field, planted with ripe rice, is assessed for development as a parking lot. The rice planters stand their ground when the backhoe arrives, and the classmate character stands shoulder to shoulder with them. They are subdued by riot police until Panay's daughter, Cakaw, stands like Tank Man from the Tiananmen Massacre in front of the backhoe. She is described on the television news as the girl who blocked the backhoe. Finally, the fourth estate plays its intended role, reporting social injustice instead of trying to keep ratings up. Cakaw's image had initially been used without her permission to attract investment for a hotel project; now it is again used without her permission to bring the project to a halt and to attract attention to the plight of the rice farmers. A group is formed on Facebook, and the rice sells out.

Land politics provides the drama, but the film is more fundamentally about the future of the *buluo*. In the hearing the Township Head holds for the hotel, a village representative declares that if a big hotel is built in the *buluo*, the *buluo* will not be like a *buluo* anymore, and the children will not have a place to come home to. At least now they do. Even though they cannot speak their mother tongues, even though they sometimes do not even know what their Indigenous names are, at least they still have a place to come home to. Even the Amis riot policeman who is asked 'Where is your *buluo*, *wawa* (child)?' by one of the protestors still has a place to come home to. Home means the houses the villagers live in, the roofs, the stars or the sun over their heads, the fields in which they conduct rituals to the ancestors who watch over them from Cilangasan and the public meeting area where they conduct their annual harvest ritual. Home in the film is a priceless quality that cannot be quantified like the economic benefits that the hotel might supposedly bring.

Of the two and a half Indigenous-directed Indigenous features, *Panay* is the slickest. Perhaps a bit too obvious, and not as clever as *Lokah, Laqi!*, it did not do quite as well financially. It took in 4.95 million NTD at the box office, or US$165,000. But it does not deserve to be dismissed as 'saccharine' (Lee 2015). Its heart is in the right place, and it had the courage to tackle the 'big issues'.

Lekal Sumi latest film is a more quotidian made-for-TV movie for TITV called *Pakeriran*. Pakeriran is an island just off the coast of Shihtiping where Ang Lee filmed a scene from *Life of Pi* (2012). At the beginning of the film, the

Amis protagonist Kating is about to embark on a graduation road trip around Taiwan with his classmates when he gets a call from his mother asking him to come home to see his injured grandfather. His grandfather is not actually injured. His mother's call is actually a plot to get him to spend time with his grandfather at his grandfather's house and take part in the traditional Amis coming-of-age ritual as part of his age set, as opposed to the informal coming-of-age ritual his non-Indigenous classmates will be engaging in as they tour Taiwan on scooters. To become a man, he has to pay his respects to the village elders at the men's lodge by drinking to their health, learn a few words of Amis, swim around Pakeriran and learn how to fish without getting arrested. He does get taken in to the station to explain why he is fishing without a permit or ID of any kind, a comment on official regulation of fishing activities, and a critique of non-Indigenous fishermen who are also fishing illegally and dumping their garbage into the ocean but get left alone by the police.

In a subplot, an Indigenous girl comes to work at a B&B that serves fresh Amis food in exchange for room and board. Affection not surprisingly develops between her and Kating, but the director does not let the film turn into a romance. The main theme is intergenerational cultural transmission of tradition, as important over and above what the Ministry of Education considers important.

Conclusion

The above summaries and analyses have demonstrated that there is a focus on children between the ages of 10 and 18 in Indigenous-directed Indigenous-focused movies, a focus that one does not find in films about Indigenous people made by non-Indigenous directors. In films by non-Indigenous directors about Indigenous education, romance remains a distraction from the issue of education, focusing the viewer's attention on the adult educators and what they are getting out of living in an Indigenous village instead of on the children who are being educated. In films made by Indigenous directors, by contrast, the focus is on the actualities of life for Indigenous children, and the aspirations they can only realise through education. For the Indigenous children in these movies, however, the school is *not* the main setting of their learning. The school, along with the police station, is viewed with some suspicion or even hostility as a site of state control. Indigenous children get educated not at school but rather at home or in places in and around the village where they feel at home, among loved ones. That is *how* Indigenous-directed education films are different.

As to the *why*, there are specific and general answers to any research question. The superficial answers would refer to the particularities, of the director's personality and experience, of the producer and distributor. Of course these particularities are relevant, and have explanatory power, but if we restrict ourselves to particularities, we cannot relate individual Taiwanese Indigenous-directed films to each other, let alone to internationally recognised Indigenous films. We cannot in other words generalise. I have attempted in this chapter to generalise in terms of community reconstruction. Indigenous people in movies made by Indigenous

directors try to put their communities back together. The films of Lekal Sumi are part of a larger Amis/Pangcah cultural revival of the traditional 'age sets'. The trend in films by Atayalic directors, both Umin Boya and Laha Mebow, is towards rebuilding broken families in a *buluo* context. Intergenerational familial relations are important in all the films, as are the aspirations of the individual, who will have to exercise self-discipline in his or her attempt to realise individual aspirations. In this respect, the Indigenous people in these films should not be too difficult for liberal viewers to understand, though Indigenous aspirations, more than the average liberal's, involve the reinterpretation of tradition.

Indigenous reinterpretations of tradition should have something to say to any liberal, especially concerning education. Maybe a liberal arts education that fails to cultivate respect for the land and the tradition of a self-sufficient livelihood in the local landscape is lacking. Maybe training in a specific discipline for life in a nuclear family in the city produces individuals who, disrespectful or oblivious of their natural surroundings, are only partly educated.

There is always more to say. Scholars might study Indigenous films in relation to other Indigenous media, not just music but also literature (*Swaying Bamboo Grove* is an adaptation of Walis Nokan's essay 'Eye of the Savage'), and about language endangerment as represented in Indigenous film. In a few years, there will be more to say about Indigenous-directed films yet to be made, big budget epics and experimental masterpieces, perhaps even films that would count as Fourth Cinema by Barry Barclay's definition. We can only wait and see.

Meanwhile, films keep getting made about Indigenous people by non-Indigenous directors, including one with a substantial budget and a high-profile director, Wang Yu-lin, entitled *Alifu: The Prince/ss* (2017). It is either an exploitation film or a serious attempt to discuss evolving notions of gender in an Indigenous community: the protagonist is a Paiwanese transvestite. At any rate, it was a box office bomb.

There are also two recent Indigenous education films set on Orchid Island! One is a silly romance entitled *Mermaid Whispering* (directed by Yuan Hsu-hu 2017), which I think can be dismissed as an exploitation film. *Long Time No Sea* (directed by Tsui Yung-hui 2018) is not to be dismissed: although romance remains a distraction from the issue of education, Tsui's film spends more time focused on the children, less on their Taiwanese teacher, than previous Indigenous education films did. Perhaps now certain non-Indigenous directors are taking the lead from their Indigenous counterparts, as, judging from plot motif borrowing in the films I discuss above, Indigenous directors have been learning from each other.

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