

Re-Examining Extreme Violence: Historical Reconstruction and Ethnic Consciousness in *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*

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Abstract: This article focuses on the ideological representation of extreme violence in Wei Te-sheng's *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* with an aim to explore the cultural and political dimensions of the Wushe Incident and to restore the voice of the oppressed and colonized. The first part of the article accounts for the historical setting of the film and the trope of beheading in traditional Seediq culture. The second part discusses how Wei's film sheds a new light on localized spectacles of decapitation and further addresses various forms of violence caused by inner and outer conflicts within the Seediq tribes in the face of aboriginal traditions and colonial hegemony. The final section brings into focus the issue of how the extremism of the film engages the global trend of violence in cinema and facilitates aboriginal glory and consciousness in defiance of continued symbolic oppression in twenty-first-century Taiwan.

Keywords Seediq Bale; Wei Te-sheng; extreme violence; decapitation; ethnic consciousness; anti-colonialism

Written and directed by Wei Te-sheng 魏德聖 [Wei Desheng], *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* 賽德克巴萊 [Saideke balai] (2011) has become the No.1 blockbuster in the film history of Taiwan. This film is a compelling action epic that has drawn both praise and controversy. The historical drama centers on the Wushe Incident 霧社事件, which is one of the most famous anti-Japanese revolts. It was also the bloodiest, characterized by excessive violence and decapitation. Led by tribal hero Mouna Rudo¹ 莫那魯道 [Mona Rudao], three hundred Seediq² warriors took part in the rebellion against the oppressive colonial rule on October 27th, 1930, and brutally killed more than 130 Japanese settlers, including women and children, at a sports event. The film begins with the early lives of the Seediq people in the late nineteenth century, then shifts to the subjugation of Taiwanese aborigines in the colonial period, and finally highlights the violent clash between primitive aboriginal warriors and modern Japanese soldiers. In the film, these headhunters stage an appalling bloodbath with direct visual impacts and profound ethnic complexities.

This article focuses on the ideological representation of extreme violence in Wei's *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* with an aim to explore the cultural and political dimensions of the Wushe Incident and to restore the voice of the oppressed and colonized. The first part of the article accounts for the historical setting of the film and the trope of beheading in traditional Seediq culture. The second part discusses how Wei's film sheds a new light on localized spectacles of decapitation and further addresses various forms of violence caused by inner and outer conflicts within the Seediq tribes in the face of aboriginal traditions and colonial hegemony. The final section brings into focus the issue of how the extremism of the film engages the global trend of violence in cinema and facilitates aborigi-

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Director Wei Te-sheng has become one of the most significant cultural icons in Taiwan since his hit movie *Cape No.7* 海角七號 [Haijiao qihao] was released in 2008. Three years later, Wei's *Seediq Bale* further leads audiences to look closely at the violent anti-Japanese uprisings in colonial Taiwan. Despite their differences in tone and scale, both films are connected with the intercultural relationship between Taiwan and Japan. Actually, Wei had the idea of filming *Seediq Bale* even before he produced *Cape No.7*. On several occasions, he has made clear to the public media that he was first inspired by *The Wushe Incident*, a comic book written by Chiu Row-Ling 邱若龍 [Qiu Ruolong] in the late 1990s. However, Wei did not have enough funding to make such a big-budget movie until the domestic success of *Cape No. 7*. Wei and Chiu later became close friends and shared the vision of producing a film about the Wushe Incident. Chiu even served as one of the costume designers of *Seediq Bale*. Before the popularity of *Seediq Bale*, representations of the history of aborigines in Taiwan had usually been shown on TV alone, and had relatively limited impacts on the Taiwanese psyche and market. It is *Seediq Bale* that helps to reunite Taiwanese aborigines as a whole by formulating a collective, national Taiwanese identity for both the Han and the indigenous peoples.

As the most expensive historical epic film ever produced in Taiwan, *Seediq Bale* runs for four and a half hours in the full, two-part version (Part 1: The Flag of Sun 太陽旗 [Taiyang qi] and Part 2: The Bridge of Rainbow 彩虹橋 [Caihong qiao]) and two and a half in its international cut. Given that its international cut leaves out some details regarding the lives of the Seediq people, the focus of this paper is on the full version. With a cast made up of indigenous, Hans, and Japanese actors, the film clearly shows Wei's ambition to display an authentic picture of Seediq lives in terms of language, costumes, and weaponry. The film starts with an action-packed sequence during a boar hunt and quickly shifts to more violent man- and headhunting between two aboriginal tribes, Seediqs and Bununs. Young Mouna Rudo (游大慶 Da-ching), son of the tribal chief Rudo Ruhei (曾秋勝 Pawan Nawi), is figured as a tall and muscular Seediq hero. In the opening scene, young Mouna Rudo beheads two Bunun hunters and escapes successfully with their heads as trophies, a victory for which he receives a facial tattoo as a spiritual mark. In the Seediq tradition, a young male can never become a true man "commemorated by a facial tattoo" unless he presents "a human head to the tribe" (Berry 2008, 100). The process of transformation from boy to man is also echoed by the film title *Seediq Bale*, which means "true man."

Seediq Bale then recounts the outcome of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895. The defeated Qing court signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki 馬關條約 [Maguan tiaoyue] and ceded Taiwan and Pescadores to Japan. Under colonial rule, the islanders, including the indigenous people, and the Hans, Chinese immigrants mainly from Fujian Province, experienced "assimilation [...] from 1895-1919" and "integration from 1919 to 1930" (Liao 2006, 2). During the "assimilation" period, the Japanese government's attempt to make Taiwan a colony was not as smooth and successful as expected due to constant riots organized by the Hans. The "assimilation" process actually sped up in the "integration" period through educational reform. After 1919, Japanese education was systematically implemented by the colonial government, and it radically changed the lives of both the Hans and the aborigines. In the name of modernization, the Japanese colonial education involved "formal schooling" and "[Japanese] language standardization" (Heylen 2004, 5). The devastating consequence is the decline of indigenous culture, as shown in *Seediq Bale*. Some critics have argued that Japan actually introduced modernity to Taiwan by developing its economy, education, and

transportation. Nevertheless, it is also important to take into account the negative aspects of colonialism, including high-handed control, violence, and exploitation.

Throughout the colonial period, Japanese settlers were eager to exploit the island's resources, such as lumber and mines. The so-called "assimilation" and "integration" process was simply a colonial means to complete the colonizers' exploitative mission. Although the Hans were generally subjugated and ill-treated as subhumans, they were still involved in society, albeit with class divisions. Aborigines, on the other hand, were directly linked to savagery and granted limited access to modernity. One major reason for this divide is that bridging the cultural gap between Japanese and Hans is much easier than doing the same thing between Japanese and aborigines. Back in 1895, the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan started banning hunting and ritual headhunting by the aborigines. In order to fully assimilate indigenous people into the Japanese colony, colonial officials even organized seven "tours to Japan proper" between 1897 and 1925. During these trips, selected aboriginal leaders, including Mouna Rudo, "were directed to and shown various industrial and military facilities, the imperial palace, and Shinto shrines [in Japan]" (Ching 2000, 795). The colonizers later asked these "savages" to reveal to their tribesmen a grand modern picture of the Japanese empire. Despite this and other colonial teachings on industrialization, indigenous people still practiced hunting and headhunting in some regions until the late 1920s, when the Japanese colonizers were finally determined to tighten up control over the indigenous people. The enforced banning of traditional indigenous practices had a huge impact on aborigines. Without their hunting rights and ground, aborigines gradually became lumberjacks, miners, and maids.

It is worth noting that *Seediq Bale* valorizes primitive violence in response to colonial atrocity by sharply delineating the contrast between courageous aborigines in the mountains and weak Chinese immigrants in the plains. While the unorganized Han rebels are easily conquered by the well-equipped Japanese army in the film, resilient aboriginal warriors set up a series of successful ambushes against their foreign enemies. Actually, the Hans' military rebellion against the Japanese did not end until 1915. This part of the history, of course, would not fit properly in this indigenous-centered film. In *Seediq Bale*, there are only two noticeable Han figures, the nameless owner of the trade center (馬如龍 Ju-Lung Ma) and Mr. Jin-Dun Wu (鄭志偉 Chi-Wei Cheng), a grocery store owner in the Wushe district. Unlike robust aboriginal hunters, both Han Chinese men merely engage in trading with aborigines. The passive tone expressed through these harmless Han characters is a stark contrast to both indigenous extremism and imperial enormity.

As a matter of fact, the violent scenes of *Seediq Bale* make it comparable to Mel Gibson's aboriginal epic—*Apocalypto* (2006). Some critics may argue that *Apocalypto* is produced to represent Mayan culture in an authentic and unvarnished way—that is, a strategy also used by Wei in filming *Seediq Bale*. However, *Apocalypto* and *Seediq Bale* differ in their perspectives and receptions in domestic communities. The former film aims to represent the cultural other, and it is perceived as such. The latter re-claims the right to represent the self, and it greatly raises Taiwan's indigenous consciousness to the level of national spirit. Moreover, the bloody massacres represented in *Seediq Bale* further correspond with the New Extremism in European cinema in which "brutal and visceral images [are] designed deliberately to shock or provoke the spectator" (Horeck and Kendall 2011, 1). Director Wei Te-sheng's handling of extreme violence has received a lot of negative feedback. For instance, Stephen Holden claims that this film is a "bloodbath that fetishizes the machete as the ultimate human slicing machine" (2012). Focusing on mechanical killing acts only, Holden misses the cultural essence of the Seediq people that the director wants to retrieve

through the repeated spectacles of violence.

To renarrate the bloody event from an aboriginal angle, the director carefully presents the heroic image of Mouna Rudo, along with other Seediq warriors, and instills spirituality into endless headhunting. By aestheticizing headhunting, the director successfully revives Asian Extreme cinema outside of the framework of brutal martial arts and horror. Since the 1960s, kung fu has emerged as one of the most popular genres in Chinese film production.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Shaw Brothers director Chang Cheh 張徹 [Zhang Che] produced dozens of kung fu flicks that exploit violence primarily for profit. Still, some of Chang's films have a close engagement with the historical and cultural background of China. The legendary cultural icon Bruce Lee 李小龍 [Li Xiaolong] further reversed the weak, feminized Asian male image in the west through kung fu classics like *Fist of Fury* 精武門 [Jing wu men] (1972) and *Enter the Dragon* 龍爭虎鬥 [Longzheng hudou] (1973). Bruce Lee's success was later repeated by Jackie Chan 成龍 [Cheng Long] and Jet Li 李連杰 [Li Lianjie] in the 1980s and 1990s.

In addition to these types of films, Chi-Yun Shih provides an intriguing analysis of the Asian Extreme films by Tartan Films, such as Japan's *Battle Royale* (2000) and South Korea's *Oldboy* (2003) in the essay "Art of Branding: Tartan 'Asian Extreme' Films." While Tartan Films employs "the visceral and hyper violent nature" of their films as a marketing strategy (Shih 2008), there is much less cultural and historical context covered in Tartan's Asian Extreme series. We need to keep in mind that *Seediq Bale* is different from Tartan's Asian Extremism in that the extreme violence in the film does not exist for its own sake, but rather as a means of regaining ethnic identity and cultural autonomy for Seediq people. In this light, we might consider the film to be closer to the kung fu genre, which celebrates extreme physicality, individual heroism, and sometimes national consciousness. By watching *Seediq Bale*, viewers are given close-ups and slow-motion shots of beheading acts, but what really matters lies behind severed and headless cadavers and beyond shocking effects and uncanny feelings. Here, the cinematic representation of decapitation is realigned with its original honor in tandem with the Seediqs' ancestral spirits and cultural roots.

Through the spectacles of violence, director Wei Te-sheng masterfully retells the epic story and explores a disintegrating ethnic culture of Taiwan. The exceptional vividness of combat engagement in *Seediq Bale* has garnered a lot of attention from the public. We can even say that the director celebrates primitive violence not just as a visual shock, but as a significant way for aboriginal men to complete their lives and souls. The aboriginal extremism in the film is justified in several aspects. Each aboriginal tribe has its own hunting ground, which represents natural resources, cultural basis, and spiritual home. According to Omi Wilang, "Land is the medium through which culture is passed from one generation to the next. When people's land rights are lost, their autonomy is also lost" (2011). In one scene, middle-aged Mouna Rudo (林慶台 Lin Ching-tai), now the tribal chief, is confronted by the son of a Japanese officer. The Japanese boy emphasizes that all the hunting grounds in Taiwan belong to imperial Japan. Without the rights to claim their hunting ground, the Seediq men lose their glory as hunters and are mistreated as lumbermen, while some Seediq women serve as maids in Japanese households and bar girls to entertain Japanese men. In order to fully understand the Wushe Incident, we need to go back to the historical fact that the Japanese government in the late 1920s coercively banned headhunting acts widely conducted by the indigenous people in Taiwan. As Michael Berry cleverly argues,

The Japanese prohibition against headhunting, which resulted in an entire genera-

tion of [Seediq] males who were relegated to a state of perpetual adolescence and psychological inferiority can be seen as an important factor that, combined with exploitation, mistreatment, and other abuses, contributed to the explosion of violence [in *the Wushe Incident*]. (2008, 100)

A critical concern or question here is as follows: if we take a closer look at the extreme violence of *Seediq Bale* vis-à-vis the ethnic rite of passage from adolescence to manhood, can such primitive extremism be perceived and embraced despite its challenge to the rules of civility in the (post)colonial period?

To the above question, director Wei Te-sheng's answer is yes. Despite some critiques on its extreme violence and poor CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) effects, *Seediq Bale* has been wellreceived in indigenous communities as an epic film bound up with ethnic consciousness. For general Taiwanese viewers, other than aborigines, the film can even be treated as a national calling and a collective endeavor for resistance against the traumatic colonial past. Some critics may question how the film creates a collective vision against Japanese colonizers and formulates a shared national identity while focusing on aborigines and marginalizing the Han Chinese, the dominant ethnic group in Taiwan. At this point, it is essential to take into account the enormous influence of aboriginal cultural icons, even in modern Taiwan. In the field of sports, spectacular examples are Olympic medalists Chuan-kuang Yang 楊傳廣 [Yang Chuanguang] and Chi Cheng 紀政 [Ji Zheng]. While Yang is wholly aboriginal by birth, Chi is partially so. As for show business, it is impossible to ignore the success of the queen of Chinese pop music A-Mei 張惠妹 [Zhang Huimei], and pop idol Show Luo 羅志祥 [Luo Zhixiang]. Not to mention that the local professional league of baseball, the national sport of Taiwan, is dominated by indigenous players. Given his brilliant record against Japan in international baseball games, the most-loved local hero Chin-Feng Chen 陳金鋒 [Chen Jinfeng] is a perfect case in point. Whenever an international baseball tournament comes up, the majority of Taiwanese people, baseball fans or not, are obsessed with the performance of Taiwan's team. Thus, Taiwanese people's passion for baseball in international competition is lifted to the level of national consciousness, which is shared by all residents in Taiwan. Following the successful model of aboriginal heroism described above, *Seediq Bale* showcases a revolutionary narrative of extreme violence on a national level.

In presenting the primitive violence of the Seediqs, Wei Te-sheng implicitly criticizes the ideological suppression and physical torture from which the Seediqs suffer. Therefore, the film idealizes aboriginal uprising and celebrates the aesthetic of primitive violence. The director uses "words" and "lyrical voiceovers set to battle scenes" to "enhance" the primitive "violence" and "justify" aborigines' "brutality" (Nordine 2012). It is Wei's belief that the violent custom of headhunting has to be reenacted and represented from the Seediq perspective: "Ultimately, I decided to keep those [violent] scenes because they reflected the truth and I felt it was important to face such things head on, but rather encourage the audience to consider how such brutality should be dealt with" (Wei 2011). In the film, Mouna Rudo witnesses the declining morale and norms of the Seediq people. Once their hunting grounds are taken away, their identity and culture gradually erode. After the law against headhunting was put into practice, the life of the Seediq people "changed dramatically" and many of them "quickly adapted to Japanese ways" (Balcom 2005, XVII). In this sense, the Wushe Incident emerges as Seediq warriors' last revolt against the cruelty and corruption of Japanese colonists. In defiance of Japanese desecration of the Seediq society, such violent performances are required and highlighted.

To a great extent, the director follows the conventional revolutionary narrative between the colonizers and the colonized. Still, some twists exist and are worthy of discussion. Besides antagonism against Japanese intruders, aborigines encounter domestic conflicts and high tensions that result from headhunting among various tribes. The Seediq tribe of Mehebo 馬赫坡 [Mahebo] led by Mouna Rudo, the Seediq tribe of Toda 道澤 [Daoze], and the Bununs are cases in point. In the film, Mouna Rudo's major opponents are the Japanese Major General Yahiko Kamada (Sabu Kawahara) and the tribal leader of Toda, Temu Walis (馬志翔 Umin Boya). If the 300 Seediqs' uprising against the Japanese is a wrenching experience of resistance for film audiences, the internecine violence among the Seediq communities is no less unnerving. After the Japanese settlers in the Wushe area are slain and decapitated by the Seediqs, the colonists soon strike back with force and gas bombs. The colonists even incite the tribe of Toda to hunt the 300 Seediq warriors' heads. In this case, Mouna Rudo, Temu Walis, and Yahiko Kamada are cast as the ethnic hero, the tribal traitor, and foreign villain, respectively.

More importantly, *Seediq Bale* stages varied forms of extreme violence in the colonial context. In addition to the visual and visceral shock of decapitation, the film portrays some upsetting scenes about excessive violence performed by the Seediq adolescents and imposed on innocent women and children. In order not to become tribal warriors' burdens, a number of the starving Seediq women decide to commit suicide by hanging themselves in the forest after the rebellion begins. They die in peace, knowing that they will be waiting on the other end of the rainbow bridge—that is, the final destination and spiritual haven of the Seediqs. However, this tragic scene is overshadowed by the “simplified” relationship between the passive aboriginal women and their aggressive counterparts, as if aboriginal women can act only as obedient daughters, faithful wives, and dutiful mothers in Wei Tesheng's male-dominated narrative, or kill themselves. As Ian Inkster points out,

[I]t should at least be noted that there is much evidence of independence and the high status of women in Atayal—whom the [Seediq] had previously been classified as—and related Aboriginal cultures, and early evidence of women engaged in fighting to the death, and at times using firearms. (2012)

The Seediq women, including Mouna Rudo's daughter Mahung Rudo (溫嵐 Landy Wen), who survive the incident, cannot but suffer psychological traumas. Undoubtedly, the director's “simplified” version of the male-female relationship successfully projects a riveting performance of aboriginal masculinity. However, the gender dynamic poses a serious question to this allegedly authentic historical drama. Unlike the passive Seediq women, the Seediq boys stand as merciless warriors and are thus given opportunities of reaching manhood through headhunting. That said, viewers witness how the Seediq adolescents led by Pawan Nawi (林源傑 Umin Walis) participate in fierce battles and kill their Japanese enemies, including unarmed women and children. The bloody violence conducted by Pawan Nawi and his friends stirs up viewers' feelings of distress in that the brutality of/on children has gone beyond the limit of common audiences' comprehension and sympathy. Through these cases of Seediq women and children, the director creates some gray space within the framework of the male-centered, anti-colonial narrative.

Furthermore, *Seediq Bale* also reexamines two ambiguous figures: Hanaoka Ichiro (徐詣帆 Hsu Yi-Fan [Xu Yifan]) and Hanaoka Jiro (蘇達 Soda Voyu), whose original Seediq names are Dakkis Nobin and Dakkis Nawi. Both Ichiro and Jiro receive Japanese education and later serve as policemen in the Wushe district. In the film, they straddle the line between Seediq traditions and Japanese teachings. Though unwillingly, in the film they help

their tribal fellows gain firearms from the Japanese. However, they never join the physical combats against the Japanese during the incident. Instead, they commit suicide along with their families. It is worth considering that both Ichiro and Jiro choose to wear traditional Japanese costumes before committing suicide. Ichiro takes the Japanese way and commits seppuku, or stomachcutting, whereas Jiro adheres to the tribal custom and hangs himself from a tree. In the film, Ichiro even slits the throat of his wife and suffocates his newborn son before committing suicide. In real life, their deaths have drawn much attention in historical research and literary studies. As Michael Berry claims,

[Hanaoka Ichiro and Hanaoka Jiro's] chosen methods of ending their lives—*seppuku* and hanging—seem to hint at a cultural schizophrenia: even in death they were haunted by the tensions between loyalty to their [Seediq] tribe and loyalty to the colonial empire that reared them. (2008, 56)

While the 300 Seediq warriors' anticolonialism mission is clear and straightforward, the two Hanaoka cases are ambiguous due to their cross-cultural identity.

As mentioned earlier, this indigenous revolt is embraced by Taiwanese audiences as a nationalist epic. Therefore, the 300 Seediqs' "drive to kill" can further be expanded into "the entitlement called narcissism in an individual but nationalism in a country" (Dutton 2007, x). Such double-edged symbolic violence proves too overwhelming for Ichiro and Jiro to handle. Thus, suicide serves as the only relief from their symptoms of "cultural schizophrenia" and identity crisis. In this sense, Ichiro and Jiro's inner problem of intercultural positioning complicates the heroic act and singular wish of guarding the hunting grounds shared by Mouna Rudo and his followers. While Ichiro and Jiro die in anguish and bewilderment, the 300 Seediq warriors fight until the end. Most of them are either slain/beheaded or hang themselves from the tree as many of their tribespeople did before them. Mouna Rudo disappears, and his dead body is found in the deep forest four years later. As for the few Seediq survivors, their destiny is summarized in the following lines from the film: "After the incident, Kojima Genji instigated the Seediqs from Toda to revenge the death of their chief Temu Walis by killing all the remaining defenseless tribesmen staying in the shelter during the night" (Wei 2012). The film concludes with the 300 Seediq hunters crossing the rainbow bridge. Because they have guarded their land, these true Seediqs finally reach heaven and join their ancestors there.

Through its multiple standpoints and perspectives, *Seediq Bale* challenges the conventional paradigm between good and evil, and between colonizers and colonized. Without any doubt, the Japanese rule shatters the peace of aboriginal villages, and there are indeed many high-handed and unsympathetic Japanese characters in the film. Still, viewers get to examine the relatively friendly police officer Kojima Genji, who befriends Temu Walis and successfully persuades the tribesmen of Toda to be Japanese colonists' loyal allies. *Seediq Bale* is also loaded with tribe-to-tribe conflicts as well as Hanaoka Ichiro and Hanaoka Jiro's dilemma. These multiple facets make the film more complicated than other contemporary Chinese anti-Japanese epics, such as *City of Life and Death* 南京! 南京! [Nanjing Nanjing] (2009) and *The Flowers of War* 金陵十三釵 [Jinling shisan chai] (2011).

To viewers not on Taiwanese soil, *Seediq Bale* may seem merely sensational with its exotic settings and violent spectacles. If we take a closer look, however, we see that the appeal of the film actually springs from the dynamic mix of valor, fear, love, and hatred in response to cultural contacts and conflicts within human civilization on a universal level. While the colonial history and postcolonial experience have become significant topics in the global network, *Seediq Bale* not only engages the assertion of local identity, but echoes

collective remarks against oppressive colonial rule. Unfortunately, the film did not achieve great success outside Taiwan, given that the mixture of minority discourse and extreme violence is difficult for global audiences to grasp. The lack of a starry cast and poor CGI also make it harder to hit foreign markets. Moreover, the truncated version of the film screened in foreign countries leaves out a lot of historical and cultural context that make it understandable. It is indeed a pity that *Seediq Bale*, as the highest grossing film in Taiwanese history, could not spread its influence across the sea to neighboring countries like South Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia. Still, the film has reached a milestone of the local film industry in the form of national cinema.

Since the 1980s, Taiwan has gone through various aboriginal movements towards localization, including a series of political claims to preserve the land and promote the tribal languages of indigenous people. Yet, the declining indigenous cultures often end up as “nothing more than an exotic cultural commodity to be sold to the tourists” (Balcom 2005, XXI). That said, it is extremely challenging for local ethnic minorities to resist the impacts of the Han-Chinese culture in the process of urbanization and modernization. There is still a long way to go for aborigines to raise their self-awareness and to be understood and respected by other ethnic groups. In a public meeting with indigenous people in 2007, President Ma Ying-jeou 馬英九 [Ma Yingjiu] made an indiscreet and much criticized remark: “I see you [aborigines] as people and educate you properly.” No matter how hard Ma tried to justify himself afterwards, his statement clearly shows the strong sense of superiority the Han Chinese feel over the aborigines. In terms of the revival of indigenous awareness, *Seediq Bale* can be taken as a successful cultural product, if not commodity, targeting the local audience. Through the film, the fading history and customs of the Seediqs are once again renarrated and projected in celebration of the collective spirit and pride of ethnic minorities.

To conclude, the graphic bloody scenes of *Seediq Bale* deliver messages of ethnic consciousness and exercise the insights of the director into historical trauma. The film has been officially recognized by the Taiwan Intellectual Property Office (IPO) as “an important agent for ethnic identification and a call for historical awareness” (*Taipei Times* 2010). As the director expresses his attempt “to promote Taiwan in the international community” and “bring peace and harmony to all the ethnic groups in the country” (*Taipei Times* 2011), the beautifully crafted film provides the audience with a new angle to look into the complex Wushe Incident through varied forms of extreme violence. This film indeed achieves a sense of sincerity and vividness in covering the glorious past of aboriginal culture. Although the extremity of the film sweeps Taiwanese viewers up in its excessive exposure to violent spectacles, watching this film is like going through a profoundly cathartic and healing process. The film achieves this affect by reconstructing the collective memories of historical trauma and producing a localized vision of ethnic consciousness in the postcolonial context of Taiwan.

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NOTES

1. This article uses Chinese pinyin, but follows the translations of specific names provided in the English subtitles of the movie DVD released by CMC Movie Corporation in April, 2012.
2. Seediq is originally part of the Atayal tribe and has been officially recognized as one of the fourteen aboriginal tribes of Taiwan since 2007.