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# Café Lumière as Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Own and as a Homage to Yasujiro Ozu

By Arthi Vasudevan

To honour iconic Japanese film-maker Yasujiro Ozu in the year 2003, the year of his birth centenary, critically acclaimed Taiwanese film-maker Hou Hsiao-Hsien co-wrote and directed *Café Lumière: An Homage to Yasujiro Ozu*<sup>1</sup>, his first film set completely in Japan. When Hou was invited to make this Japanese film he was widely regarded as the obvious choice for the job<sup>2</sup>. Although thematically Hou and Ozu portray similar themes (the comparative here is *Café Lumière* and specifically Ozu's post war films that focused on the life of the ordinary Japanese family<sup>3</sup>—where generational divides and everyday matters eventually disintegrated this bourgeois unit<sup>4</sup>) and *Café Lumière* is a faithful updation of Ozu's thematic concerns<sup>5</sup>, this essay seeks to examine the cultural complexities that Hou navigates through in making this transnational and transcultural film that belongs to not just Ozu but is also Hou's own. In this homage, his influences are not just from Ozu's oeuvre but primarily stem from his own difficult political and cultural Taiwanese background. *Café Lumière* is:

the story of Yōko, a young Japanese woman researching the life and work of a Taiwanese composer (Jiang Wen-ye). When not working she spends time with a friend, Hajime, who records the sounds of Japan's trains and railways and who runs a bookstore. Whilst visiting her parents Yōko tells her mother that she is pregnant by her Taiwanese boyfriend but that she intends to bring up her child by herself, which seems to displease the mother. Later, Yōko tells Hajime a frightening dream she has had and he procures for her a fairy tale that seems to resemble it; and as she conducts further research she feels the effects of her pregnancy. In addition, this matter continues to agonize her parents<sup>6</sup>

Browne writes that Hou's work is informed by autobiography, history and cultural critique<sup>7</sup>—and all three factors are significantly present and intermingle to an influential effect in *Café Lumière*. This being a production to honour Ozu's cinema, Hou includes his own important themes and visual styles that align with Ozu's concerns as well, to enable *Café Lumière* to become a film that truly represents Hou's and Ozu's thematic concerns and identities. How Hou accomplishes this is the focus of this essay. Berry says a transnational film always is encountering and negotiating with national spaces and cultures<sup>8</sup>—while Lim writes that the supranational flow is celebrated at the expense of cultural, historical and ideological context in which these exchanges take place<sup>9</sup>. These are pertinent to *Café Lumière* because Hou does not succumb to these

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factors. He highlights them by dealing with his own concerns thus avoiding superficiality in his detailing of the characters and spaces both physical and cultural.

In *Café Lumière*, like in *The Puppetmaster* (1994), Hou taps into the past to get a historical Taiwanese figure immersed in art and born during a time when Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule. *The Puppetmaster* presents the autobiography of legendary Taiwanese puppetmaster Li Tian-lu, born in 1910, the same year modernist music composer Jiang Wen-ye was born, who makes his presence felt in *Café Lumière* (long after his death in 1983, a good fifteen years earlier than Li). Although both went on to lead very different lives under colonial rule, this intertextual<sup>10</sup> evoking by Hou emphasizes his desire for due recognition of long forgotten legends of Taiwanese history. In Li's case it wasn't so much a need for recognition of his stature but the necessity that Hou and his screenwriter Chu T'ian-wen felt to document his life - a cinematic testimony - for they knew that he was old enough to die any moment<sup>11</sup>. This creation of an archive, for posterity of Taiwanese cultural identity has always been a necessity for Hou. In *Café Lumière* the continuation of this manifests in the introduction of Jiang Wen-ye. In *The Puppetmaster* Li was the protagonist and in this film of Hou, Jiang is the protagonist's (Yōko's) subject of research. Hou steps into Ozu's Tokyo not without a piece of historical Taiwan that influenced both Japanese and Taiwanese (and Mainland China as well as Jiang moved to Beijing eventually in the late nineteen-thirties) cultures of that time.

Higbee and Lim posit:

*Café Lumière* weaves the complex (post)colonial relationship between Japan and Taiwan into its narrative because of Jiang Wen-ye's presence demonstrating the complexities of the triangulated relations among China, Taiwan and Japan from the last two centuries until today are as complex as Jiang Wen-ye's multiple identities and transnational career<sup>12</sup>.

Hou brings to light these very complexities and Jiang's struggle for an identity in changing times does reflect in understanding the identity of Taiwan as it stands today. Yet Higbee's and Lim's inference that the unborn child of Yōko being the symbol of reconciliation between Japan and Taiwan<sup>13</sup> does not stand strong because the interview with Jiang's wife is conducted with his daughter as well who was born during a time when Taiwan was under Japan's rule. The daughter had to face paternal abandonment just as Yōko experienced maternal abandonment when she was young although in a different era. There is no reconciliation because like during Jiang's time when he does not return to his family in Japan, Yōko decides to not return to Taiwan to make a family with her Taiwanese boyfriend. Hou problematizes the historical relation between

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Japan and Taiwan not because the ending of *Café Lumière* is ambiguous and unresolved with Yōko and Hajime<sup>14</sup> but because the ending strongly indicates a content, happy future that Yōko creates for herself as she stands alongside Hajime who records different sounds at the train station. In the scene before this, when they meet, Yōko is fast asleep during a train ride. Hajime enters the train later, notices her, goes to her and stands silently, smiling, watching her sleep. The next and penultimate scene cuts to both of them at the station with each other and with no presence of Taiwan (represented by her estranged boyfriend), not in the now and nor in the future. For Hou, the present equation between Japan and Taiwan is as separated as it was in the past, during Jiang Wen-ye's time.

Hou's access to contemporary Japanese culture, portrayed primarily by his young protagonists Yōko and Hajime, is by keeping a foot in the cultural historical past that belonged to both Taiwan and Japan. He accomplishes this by introducing Jiang Wen-ye as Yōko's subject of research who is writing about his music and life. This bit of Taiwanese past represented by art (Jiang's music) is harmoniously brought forth to the Japanese present but the two cultures still do clash as Yōko is unable to live with her (overriding) Taiwanese boyfriend and decides to raise her unborn child on her own. Yōko's present is influenced by Jiang Wen-ye's past when his wife says that her relationship with her husband was seen to be controlling by the world. Yōko doesn't agree to this and seeing Jiang's family picture album says they seemed to have a perfect relationship. A relationship that insinuates that it is like hers now. The past and the present of two cultures (via the relationships of Yōko and the composer) have the same differences and this non-negotiability is one that creates tension for Hou. At the same time, Hou does portray local rituals and cultural practices, specifically when Yōko goes home to visit her parents. These are rooted in the native culture. Yōko's family rituals of eating together, visiting relatives and performing the rites of grave cleaning are reminiscent of Ozu's familial times and are shot similarly as well using long and low angle shots when seated, deliberately invoking Ozu's capturing of Japanese family times.

The tensions of the past and the present that Hou creates attests to the fact that transnational film does not make a smooth transition, as Berry warns it usually does<sup>15</sup> from one culture to another, being fraught with uneasiness by not foregoing their respective specificities. This is particularly significant in *Café Lumière* as Hou brings the turbulent past of Japanese colonization of Taiwan through the life of the composer Yōko is writing about. Making her personal life similar to that of his turbulent one, Hou does not fear to create discomfort through these cultural interactions.

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Hou also uses voice and language as “strategies of remembrance” to qualify the film’s exploration of historical memory<sup>16</sup>. In his films, he has always focused on giving native Taiwanese dialects and languages a voice (first in *Boys of Fenggui*, 1986) being clearly influenced by nativist literature and nativist writers Chu Tian-wen and Nu Wian-jen. Lupke states, Hou being aware of how Japanese language and culture is steeped within Taiwanese culture makes him focus on language in his films and this becomes the most striking Sinophonic<sup>17</sup> aspect of Hou<sup>18</sup>. Shih, Yue & Khoo concur as:

The notion of the voice is taken less literally and more figuratively to signify the conferring of representation to an oppressed group. This figurative notion of the voice is shared in Sinophone studies, whose agenda includes ‘[giving] space for minoritized and colonized voices within China (Shih, 2012, p. 5)<sup>19</sup>.

The spoken language in *Café Lumière* is Japanese, but the native voice is not forgotten by Hou. Jiang Wen-ye’s music is, when heard via the CD being played with Yōko and Hajime listening in, for the first time, diegetic. This piano piece is the introduction to Hou’s language and soon after pieces from Jiang’s work take over as the background score of the film. Hou is known to not use non-diegetic sounds<sup>20</sup> and here, in this Japanese film as the historical Taiwanese connection is as important and vital as his previous films, Hou incorporates the Sinophonic voice through the language of Jiang Wen-ye’s music and the motif of Sinophone sound is Jiang’s piano music pieces. The use of this music also enables Hou to make a smooth transcultural shift drawing attention to an aesthetic rather than politics thus creating space for both Japan and Taiwan to co-exist and coalesce<sup>21</sup> through the art of Jiang Wen-ye. The piano pieces composed by Jiang Wen-ye becoming the background score underlines the historical Taiwanese connection Hou wishes to highlight.

When the music is heard along with the visuals it styles the scenes with a mood that is just appropriate for the characters’ inner emotional states. Music implies traits, thoughts and identities of characters at their most intimate<sup>22</sup>. Intimate this is in *Café Lumière* as the music brings a harmony amongst the characters (Yōko and Hajime) and within the lead character (Yōko). In the hands of Hou music becomes a transcultural form understood as a collective experience, a complex communication transcending cultural boundaries and enriching existing aesthetic and cultural practices<sup>23</sup>. At the same time, Hou derives a cultural identity that bleeds into the national (or the lack of the unified national) in every film of his highlighting the issue of national identity. If the mix of Taiwanese, Mandarin and French in Hou’s *Flight of the Red Balloon* complicates the film’s national identity<sup>24</sup>, language is no less important in *Café Lumière*. The film’s spoken language is Japanese

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throughout but the recurring presence of the music score by Jiang on its soundtrack creates the same kind of uncertainty.

If Hou invokes the presence of strained historical links between Japan and Taiwan via the introduction of historic native icons and their arts, he also accesses the past, the history, through different media.

Intermediality in cinema can be understood as:

the theory of intermediality has brought the intricate interactions of different media manifest in the cinema into the spotlight, emphasizing the way in which the moving pictures can incorporate forms of all other media, and can initiate fusions and “dialogues” between the distinct arts<sup>25</sup>.

These dialogues and interactions that the filmmaker initiates serve a bigger cohesive purpose and Hou in *Café Lumière* uses them to expose both personal (characters’) and national histories. When Yōko meets up with Jiang’s wife for an interview, they peruse the pictures in her old photo album. The camera does not linger on the women instead drawing to a long, close-up shot (from Yōko’s point of view) of the photos in the album. The pictures of Jiang and his life, some snippets of them are made very clearly visible to the viewer. If the aim of intermedial analysis is the uncovering of the possible functions and meanings of these figurations in a film<sup>26</sup>, by the ongoing conversations of Yōko, the old wife and their (Jiang’s and wife’s) daughter and the display of photographic images, memories of a time gone by are brought forth. Hou here creates a visual path to understanding a historical time through personal memories evoked via spoken words and old images. This is also seen before in the film when Hajime and Yōko listen to Jiang’s music on his CD player and she describes to him Jiang’s past in Japan and Taiwan.

If Yōko opens the doors to an older time through her documenting of sounds of the past, Hajime records the sounds of the present. An anthropologist<sup>27</sup>, he records the sounds of trains and the sounds at train stations to later transcribe them into another medium – they become his computer generated art. Drawing elaborate and intricate images of rail networks and mapping them with the sounds that he records, he hopes that these recordings (each time he records at the station he says the sounds are distinctly different) will be of help in the future. In this way, he is ensuring in the preservation and archival of the ‘present history’ just like Hou is, in his own individual way. Hajime also tracks down the names of the stations (including the historically old names) and mentions to Yōko that some were in Chinese characters that made his work more difficult. At a personal level, his intermedial art also becomes a means of communication between him and Yōko because he shows his work to her for the first time, when he visits her home, the first time after learning

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about her pregnancy. Sometime before the film when Yōko tells Hajime that she is pregnant, Hou blocks his reaction (the scene is a medium long shot on a busy street and Hajime's face is obscured by a pillar and people walking about). The images of trains surround a baby in a womb in the piece of picture art that he shows Yōko. It seems to convey that even though he is not the biological father of the baby to whom she will give birth he is willing to be Yōko's supportive partner in her quest both to be a mother and to retain her mobility and independence<sup>28</sup>.

Yōko accesses her own past, via her dreams and memories that come vividly to her upon reading (the story of which Hajime finds very similar to that of her dream) a children's picture book, Maurice Sendak's 'Outside Over There' (1981) a book that has also has a strong maternal absence<sup>29</sup> (as well as paternal, an absent father that connects Hou to Ozu thematically in their films) as its thematic prime. This intermedial referencing by Hou is made pertinent because the author Maurice Sendak, influenced by his own childhood experiences, largely wrote and illustrated stories about the story is about a girl, Ida, who has to take care of her baby sister when the father is away but irresponsibly allows her to be kidnapped by goblins abandonment and the peril of children in an adult world. This strongly connects the subject of the story to Yōko's nightmare. Second, choosing a work of literature as an intermedial link brings back Yōko's childhood memory of being abandoned by her mother and resolves her childhood trauma<sup>30</sup>. It also connects Hajime to Yōko on a very simple and direct level. It is he who is able to interpret her dream. As someone who exists and works in the world of books and words he is able to bring Sendak's book to her to decipher her trauma.

Each medium that Hou introduces participates with its own cognitive specificities, shaping the messages conveyed by the cinematic flow of images<sup>31</sup>. This mode invites the viewer to get in touch with a world that is perceived in terms of music, painting, architecture forms [and words]<sup>32</sup>, a world that no longer exists but one that Hou is determined to document. This locates him at the centre of a temporal web where remembering coexists with the necessity to understand time and memory and their relation with the filmic image. Cinema thus becomes a technology of remembrance for Hou, making him 'hopelessly hopeful against the implacable march of time understanding the impossibility of accessing the past while obsessively attempting to do so, retrieving memories by means of all kinds of technology'<sup>33</sup>.

If cinema, music, photography, text - orally through conversations about the past and images like old maps that have both pictures and words and story books - and computer graphics (Hajime's art) are technological media that aid Hou in recreating the past, he also finds it important and imperative to search and document physical remnants of a past long

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gone. In *Café Lumière*, Hou, foremost, has to negotiate with how to represent the space of Tokyo, a representative place for Ozu. He navigates the city space by making his protagonists travel by trains, be obsessed by them (Hajime's hobby to record the sounds and graphically archive the intricate rail networks). Trains symbolize the passing of time as well as the physical displacement of characters in different spaces. Yōko conducts her research by visiting old bookstores and cafes that Jiang Wen-ye frequented more than sixty years ago. As she and Hajime walk around parts of Tokyo, using old maps to guide them, they find physical evidence of the past razed with new commercial complexes come up in the same space instead. This loss of evidence and thus the inability to completely record and archive the historical past seems very important for Hou and his Tokyo is the Tokyo of not today but one that has spaces (or the remnants of them) that had cultural significance in the historical past.

If Hou reveals a different Tokyo through historicity as a cityscape with important but lost connections to historical past and his main characters (Yōko and Hajime), are created and influenced by Taiwanese and Japanese cultures he does not forget that his film is meant to be a homage to Yasujiro Ozu, a Japanese filmmaker known for his detailed domestic stories derived solely from his own native Japanese culture<sup>34</sup>. He negotiates this cinematic space by keeping one foot in the cultural world of his own understanding, yet bringing forth Ozuesque themes to the forefront in *Café Lumière*.

Hou's protagonists in his films have changed from lonely youths and hot-blooded men to drifting and wandering young women. The young girl becomes Hou's main narrator and recorder of events. Women in Hou's films are survivors of disasters. She travels through the glass wall of the presence of sealed history. In films where women are the main protagonists, (*Daughters of the Nile; Good Men, Good Women* (1995); *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998); *Millennium Mambo* (2001); and *Coffee Jikou* (2004), female protagonists are alone in their struggles against the ghostly impact of history and memory in the metropolis<sup>35</sup>. If concerns for the young, single woman is of thematic significance in Hou's later films, concern for the young unmarried daughter has been an important topic for Ozu as well in his later post war domestic films. Yōko in *Café Lumière* clearly is a callback to the young women in Ozu's later films. This intertextual reference is not simply borrowed by Hou from Ozu's oeuvre. Hou, in the documentary *Métro Lumière\_Hou Hsiao-Hsien à la rencontre de Yasujirô Ozu* (2004) notes that post WWII Ozu's attitude changed and a certain worry for the future reflected in his family dramas. Today, a lot more has changed because of the ability of the woman to be independent and survive on her own terms. Yōko could very well be a contemporary, updated version of Setsuko from

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Ozu's *Equinox Flower* (1958), Akiko from *Tokyo Twilight* (1957) and Noriko of *Early Summer* (1951). All the women in these Ozu films (Hou mentions these films when he talks about Ozu in the documentary) make their own decisions about marriage and having a family and the family eventually comes around to accept their decisions. Just as Yōko makes her own choices in *Café Lumière* and her parents and Hajime, the closest to her, come around to accepting her decision.

Semblances in Hou's and Ozu's films are also reflected thematically in the relationships between Yōko and her parents. The inability to communicate between the father and Yōko represents the generational gaps, a reflection of Ozu's post-war family melodramas that had the father being less and less effective in terms of reigning over his children<sup>36</sup>. This is reflected in the silence of the father as an absence of the father figure in Taiwan New Cinema, from where Hou emerged, and was always in search for<sup>37</sup>. The absence of the father is also very prominent in contemporary Sino-French films by Hou, Cheng Yu-chieh and (Malaysian born) Tsai Ming-liang<sup>38</sup>. Hou takes this theme further in *Café Lumière* where the father although physically present, does not speak a word about Yōko's pregnancy to his wife nor Yōko even as the former gently goads him to advise. This presence and absence, at the same time, confuses, because one does not know if Yōko's father is acceptable of the situation or is simply too uncomfortable to talk about the problem. For Hou, this relationship breakdown between the father and daughter exists in the cultures of Taiwan and Japan belonging to both, belonging to none in exclusivity. Hou also ropes in acclaimed Japanese critic Shigehiko Hasumi for the role of owner / manager of Café Erica, a cozy, quiet café that Yōko frequents to sit at the far corner table, busy with work. Hasumi has written extensively on Ozu and one of his focuses is on the emotional expressiveness that marked their own way of resisting and opposing to conventions<sup>39</sup> of the women in Ozu's films. By bringing the critic in a cameo role in *Café Lumière*, Hou seems to draw attention to his and Ozu's similar thematic sensibilities.

All in all, as much as there is this chasm, Hou seems to emphasize the new world order in the urban space where the young live life first and foremost for themselves. Hajime and Yōko each have different lives, separate and connect and bond because of their mutual interests and an likeness in thinking. Each is first and foremost happy in his /her own space. They connect when they want to, respectful of this individual space of the other. As Hou notes (in the documentary) this is the time when a working woman lives life on her own terms. Her decision to create and have a family is hers alone and she respectfully disregards her elders' advices which draws attention to Ozu's young independent daughters as well, a definite updating of Ozu's themes<sup>40</sup>. This new configuration of relationships between men and women is the bright

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kernel of Hou's film states Thornbury<sup>41</sup>. Elaborating she adds that Hou underscores the need to reimagine what it means to be a fully functioning adult in Japan today where old structures (including conventional modes of employment and marriage, (Ozu's pet themes)) are crumbling or at least losing their former meaning. If 'corporate Japan built Tokyo's highly networked rail systems (Ozu's protagonists' generation), its children - women and men like Yōko and Hajime, who grew up in and on that system - are now constructing their own lives and their own gendered narratives in ways that their mothers and fathers likely could not have envisioned'<sup>42</sup>.

Stylistically, Hou adheres to Ozu's trademark low angle stationary shots<sup>43</sup> in the domestic scenes at Yōko's Tokyo home and her parents' home whom she goes visiting. Although he uses slight pans to horizontally reframe the shots, the enclosed onscreen space that was Ozu's area of dramatic action is evoked here as well by Hou. Yet Hou holds the off-screen space as important as onscreen<sup>44</sup> and when he does, he ensures that the off-screen action is later referred to the onscreen thus enclosing the space of action like Ozu always did in his films. As an example, when Yōko is in her apartment, her landlady visits and their conversation is held off-screen at the door. They can be heard but not seen as Yōko walks back and forth to the onscreen space during this. Later, when Yōko's mother visits the landlady, Hou captures this scene as a long take, from outside Yōko's house clearly showing the mother's exit from Yōko's home as she walks to the left (of the screen) to the landlady's house. This visual connection to the first scene gives a complete picture of Yōko's home and brings the off-screen space of then onscreen now and encloses it, like Ozu does.

Hou also introduces his trademark empty shots<sup>45</sup> like Ozu's pillow-shots<sup>46</sup> in *Café Lumière*. The static shot of the empty landscape as Yōko and family drive away (after performing the grave cleaning ritual) off-screen reminds one of the empty landscape shots of Ozu's films. Temporal ellipses are also used by both filmmakers to convey the occurrence of certain events at certain times without feeling the necessity to show them explicitly. If Ozu did not show the marriage of Noriko in *Early Summer* (1951) or the funeral rites in *Tokyo Story* (1953), Hou does not bother with showing. Yōko's visits to the doctor or her relationship details with her estranged boyfriend. This disappearance of certain events is important to both Hou and Ozu to focus on the more important dramatic events like, in *Café Lumière*, Yōko's dynamics with her parents and Hajime and for Ozu, the parent-child relationship tensions and familial drama that unfolds over time and over events.

Ozu and Hou both connect via the visual motif of the train. *Café Lumière* opens with a train at a diagonal long shot crossing the screen from the

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mid left to the mid right and ends with a multitude of them passing various bridges in a bustling Tokyo. For Ozu trains have always been a visual representative of Tokyo, the urban cityscape. The intertextual referencing of Ozu (which belongs to Hou as well) is an assertion that *Café Lumière* is a homage to Ozu but it is as much a Hou film offering a different perspective of Tokyo. More importantly, rather than adapting a specific Ozu film Hou seeks the spirit of Ozu's films in this homage that blurs the line between direct adaptation and intertextual referencing that could be called as an expanded intertextuality<sup>47</sup>. In the documentary *Metro Lumière*, Hou precisely says this, that it is his search for who Ozu is through his films that was his primary lead for *Café Lumière*.

Just as Hou's *Flight of the Red Balloon* (2007) is a hybrid, multicultural film<sup>48</sup>, *Café Lumière* can be considered to be hybrid as well as Hou does not shift from one (Taiwanese) culture to another (Japanese) in complete. This hybridity is what makes *Café Lumière* a very unique homage in that it does not blindly create a film of the one to whom the homage is paid to and neither does it completely appropriate the former's thematic and stylistic aesthetics into its own. A new language is created in finding an understanding, a meaning, or as Bloom says, a spirit of the original work (or oeuvre)<sup>49</sup>.

## Conclusion

If Hou, in making a Japanese film in Japan complicates the film's national label<sup>50</sup>, it has to be so because in a makeover, as defined by Horton<sup>51</sup>, especially an early twenty-first-century auteurist work, the source film [or oeuvre] is one intertext among many<sup>52</sup>. In *Café Lumière*, Ozu is but one of Hou's influences. He understands that it has to be his foremost as the film is designed to be a homage to Ozu and he reflects on this in a way that brings to the front his core mode of accessing the present - via history. This conveying of his own thematic concerns is as important to depict the urban space of and times of the young (and the family) in Tokyo in *Café Lumière*, as Ozu found it in his own way by accessing the changes occurring in the very present of his times for the past barely existed for Ozu<sup>53</sup>. This history that Hou focuses on expectedly has Taiwanese roots (both for Yōko and Hajime, his protagonists, and is introduced via their professions and likenesses). In *Café Lumière*, Hou makes a film that is a homage to a masterful filmmaker of a country that has had brutal historical ties with Taiwan. He chooses composer Jiang Wen-ye because he has a connection to both Japan and Taiwan and in the end was misunderstood and disowned by both (and Mainland China) as political changes took place in these countries after WWII. This disownment and abandonment is central to *Café Lumière* but is never alluded to directly. What stays in the present is his music, his art that Hou presents via his protagonist Yōko. The encounters between both his

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and Ozu's cultures that Hou creates through the mediums of art, history, technology and native cultural rituals makes *Café Lumière* his own film as much as it is a homage. This film is a homage to Ozu but it never allows one to forget the creator of the homage, Hou Hsiao-Hsien. His personal stamp and thus his national and ethnic identity<sup>54</sup> are as clearly seen and felt as Ozu's cinematic spirit in the film.

Sinophone directors like Hou Hsiao-Hsien do not simply shoot films in the diaspora. Non- Sinophone organizations invite them in order to meet the demands of an increasing global audience through transnational film productions<sup>55</sup>. *Café Lumière* was commissioned by Shochiku studio in Japan, the home base<sup>56</sup> of Yasujiro Ozu to commemorate the centenary birth of the Japanese filmmaker. This was not the first time that Shochiku had partnered with Hou (the studio was the main producer of Hou's *Flowers of Shanghai*, 1991<sup>57</sup>). Hou in the documentary mentions that his films are popular in Japan, much to his surprise. In this sense, he not stepping into an alien land and neither is he making this film for an unfamiliar audience. This apart, the fact that stylistically and thematically his films were compared favourably to Ozu's was the primary motivation to instate Hou as the director to make a homage film to Ozu. Second is his international repute that reflected his transnationality and market<sup>58</sup>. If transnational cinema focuses on cultural formations that sustain cinemas that exceed the borders of individual nation states<sup>59</sup>, *Café Lumière* encompasses the individual cultures of both Japan and Taiwan because the Tokyo that Hou depicts is the present with historical links to the past where there was a Taiwanese presence. The place is not rendered completely local as it did for Ozu.

Transnational films are not always made for profit maximization and do originate from other factors driven by mutual interests, aims, and desires<sup>60</sup>. Shochiku Studio's signing up with the iconic Taiwanese auteur to make a film as a homage to Yasujiro Ozu for his birth centenary falls into this category. The mutual interest and desire to honour Ozu by invoking his unique cinematic spirit through the work of a filmmaker from outside of Japan (unlike award-winning Japanese filmmaker Hirokazu Koreeda whose films critics note that are stylistically and thematically similar to Ozu<sup>61</sup>) and who belongs to the other end of the mainstream/auteur spectrum<sup>62</sup> simply proves that this homage was not intended as a commercially motivated project. In 2003, the National Film Center in Tokyo, for the centenary celebrations of Ozu, conducted a two-day symposium that was broadcast on national television and also included the world premiere of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Café Lumière*<sup>63</sup>. This television broadcast of a feature film was very much in line with the spirit of Ozu's cinema who made films for the masses. If transcultural cinema is defined as filmmaking strategies and tactics capable of transcending geographic and cultural boundaries<sup>64</sup>, *Café Lumière* stands foremost not

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just as another transnational production but as an authentic transcultural film that stays true to its source and its destination cultural references. *Café Lumière* is and will always be recognized as a Hou Hsiao-Hsien film made in the true essence of Yasujiro Ozu's cinema.

1 Stein and Di Paolo, *Ozu International*, 133.

2 Jinhua and Jingyuan, "Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Films," 240.

3 McDonald, *Reading a Japanese Film*, 94.

4 Stein and Di Paolo, *Ozu International*, 133.

5 Udden, *No man an island*, 173.

6 Bettinson, *Directory of World Cinema Volume 12, China*, 137.

7 Browne, "Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Puppetmaster," 1.

8 Berry, "What Is Transnational Cinema?," 112.

9 Ibid., 113. (cited in)

10 Lim, "Positioning Auteur Theory in Chinese Cinemas Studies," 226.

11 Berry, "Words and Images," 700.

12 Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema," 16.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Berry, "What Is Transnational Cinema?," 113.

16 Yeh and Hu, "Transcultural Sounds," 39.

17 Shu defines Sinophone studies 'the study of colonized peoples and their cultures now known as national minority people or minority nationalities within the nation-state of China' and one of its 'focus areas is the study of languages of the minority groups' (Shi, Bernards, and Tsai, *Sinophone Studies*, 3,6).

18 Lupke, *The Sinophone Cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien*, 1.

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19 Yue and Khoo, *Sinophone Cinemas*, 65.

20 Wang, *Chinese Women's Cinema*, 284. 21 Yeh and Hu, "Transcultural Sounds," 33. 22 Ibid., 34.

21 Yeh and Hu, "Transcultural Sounds," 33.

22 Ibid., 34.

23 Ibid.

24 Bloom, *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas*, 115.

25 Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, 1.

26 Ibid., 2.

27 Thornbury, "Tokyo, Gender and Mobility," 60.

28 Ibid.

29 the story is about a girl, Ida, who has to take care of her baby sister when the father is away but irresponsibly allows her to be kidnapped by goblins

30 Silverman, "Sendak's Legacy," 1.

31 Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, 4.

32 Ibid., 5.

33 Montero, "Film Also Ages," 108.

34 Richie, *Ozu*, 1.

35 Jinhua and Jingyuan, "Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Films," 247.

36 Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, 43.

37 Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*, 5-7.

38 Bloom, *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas*, 1.

39 Hasumi, "Ozu's Angry Women," 1.

41 Thornbury, "Tokyo, Gender and Mobility," 60-61.

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42 Ibid.

43 Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, 76.

44 Chen, "Cinema, Dream, Existence," 89

45 Ibid., 82.

46 Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, 60.

48 Ibid., 111.

50 Ibid., 115.

51 Ibid., 111.

52 Ibid., 112.

53 Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*, 31.

54 Bloom, *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas*, 116.

55 Ibid., 110.

56 Bordwell, "Watch Again! Look Well! Look! (For Ozu)," 1.

57 Udden, *No man an island*, 146.

58 Bloom, *Contemporary Sino-French Cinemas*, 113.

59 Berry, "What Is Transnational Cinema?," 113.

60 Ibid., 123.

### **Notes on Contributor**

I'm a Masters student at SOAS [School of Oriental and African Studies], London completing my MA in Global Cinemas and the Transcultural this year. Having worked for about a year in film festival programming (assistant) roles and in film research and archiving, I felt the need to get

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back to academics. Asian cinema is my area of interest and focus, hence SOAS was a natural choice to pursue my MA.

Before stepping into the world of films professionally, I did belong to the corporate world. Completing my under graduation in Engineering and later obtaining an MBA degree, I worked as a software programmer and then as a financial research analyst for a few years before finally taking the plunge to make a career in film (in writing, research, archiving and programming specifically) something that has always interested me.

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