

What Is So Healthy About Healthy Realism? The Representation of Female Madness in Bai Jingrui's *Lonely Seventeen* (1967)

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Introduction

After the KMT government's withdrawal to Taiwan in 1949, all the state-owned film companies had served as the propaganda machine for the KMT's anti-communist campaign and economic reforms. However, with the growing popularity of Hong Kong movies in Taiwan and in the respected Asian Pacific Film Festival, the KMT government was suddenly made aware of the power of cinema and was propelled to develop the local Mandarin-language film industry. As a result, the KMT party-owned Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) was reorganized in 1964 with the goal of becoming a company capable of making mainstream and art films.¹ To find a new direction for filmmaking, the company's manager, Gong Hong, proposed Healthy Realism (*jiankang xieshi dianying*), a movement that aimed to apply the Italian Neorealist approach to local Taiwanese stories. According to Gong Hong, the defeated KMT government in Taiwan was similar to post-World War II Italy; therefore, it was appropriate to draw inspiration from classic Italian

¹ For more detailed discussion on post-war Taiwan film industry, see Ru-shou Chen, *Historical and Cultural Experience of Taiwan New Cinema* [*taiwan xin dianying de lishi wenhua jingyan*], (Taipei: Wanxiang tushu, 1993), Fei Lu, *Taiwanese Cinema: Politics, Economics and Aesthetics(1949-1994)* [*taiwan dianying: zhengzhi, jingji, meixue (1949-1994)*], (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1998), and Guo-Juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Neorealist films, such as Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) and Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), and make films about ordinary people's real lives.² However, contrary to Neorealism, which often takes on dark and pessimistic themes such as poverty, injustice, and oppression, Healthy Realism emphasizes prosperity, ethics and harmony in social relationships. According to Gong Hong, Healthy Realism aims to "express virtues in human nature, such as compassion, sincere concerns, forgiveness, kindness, and self-sacrifice in order to improve the society and lead people to goodness, walking toward a bright future."³ With the support from the government, Healthy Realism quickly blossomed and helped Taiwan's Mandarin-language films "take off."⁴

As the name suggests, Healthy Realism gives prominence to the body, illness, and the notion of completeness. It also reflects the KMT's obsession with healthiness since the 1930s and the government's ultimate goal in creating a healthy national body. In this paper, I trace the cultural and historical construction of this discourse of healthiness, and its influence on the Taiwan film industry in the 1960s. Instead of directly addressing what is considered healthy, Healthy Realism often employs the tropes of illness and defect to elucidate the ideal of healthiness and the government-approved value system. Therefore, I explore the representation of illness, more specifically, mental disorder, in Taiwan cinema since the 1950s, and

² Gong Hong, *Shadow Dust Memoir [yingchen buyi lu]*, (Taipei: Crown, 2005), 99.

³ Ibid., 101. Translation mine.

⁴ "National cinema takes off" (*guopian qifei*) was a popular slogan used to promote CMPC films in 1964. Before the rise of Healthy Realism, the majority of the commercial films made in Taiwan were Taiwanese dialect films. It was not until the CMPC introduced Healthy Realism that the mandarin language film began to dominate the commercial film market.

how it reflected Taiwan's cultural policy and cold-war ideology. Unlike earlier Taiwanese dialect films made by private studios, Healthy Realist Films reveal not only the modern institutionalization of illness, but also the KMT government's tightened control of the ethical norm. Bai Jingrui's first feature film for the CMPC, *Lone Seventeen* (1967), is one such example that reflects the KMT's healthy discourse, which revolves around the elimination of an individual's illness and the creation of a docile body that can be easily integrated into the government's nation-building project. Through my analysis of the cinematic treatment of the sick body, I further argue that the trope of illness, mental illness in particular, is almost exclusively associated with woman in Healthy Realism, leaving the female body to be placed at the battlefield of the government's campaign for healthiness and discipline.

KMT's Healthy Discourse

The KMT government's obsession with healthiness can be dated back to its cultural policies in 1930s Shanghai, when the nation was threatened by Japan's impending invasion and the communists' revolts. In order to modernize China and strengthen national security, the KMT government began a series of social reforms in the 1930s, including the New Life Movement (1934-49), which aimed to lift the infamous reputation of being the "sick man of Asia" from Chinese people, and to encourage the nation to catch up with Japan and other powerful nations in the west. Involved is a complex web of discourses: individual body versus national health, and Chinese tradition versus western modernity. As Chiang Kai-Shek suggests in his speech, "With healthy and strong body, we will have healthy and strong mind. With healthy and strong mind, we can learn all the skills from other powerful nations. With skills from other powerful nations, we can effortlessly protect our country, add glory to our race,

and make our country and race live in the world forever.”⁵ To him, discipline leads to healthy life, and the very foundation of a powerful nation lies in its national subject’s good health and personal hygiene. Therefore, the principle of the movement is the four social bonds: propriety (*li*), rectitude (*yi*), honesty (*lian*), and a sense of shame (*chi*), and, according to Chiang Kai-shek, the nation’s survival depends on how the four social bonds are carried out in every aspect of people’s life.⁶ The KMT government’s pursuit of healthiness in the 1930s not only reflects a desire for a national subjectivity free of illness; it also plays an important role in the formation of modern Chinese national consciousness.

As implied in Chiang Kai-Shek’s speeches, the bitter memories of China’s sick national body and the unequal treaties with the western forces in the late 19th and early 20th century still haunted China in the 1930s. This anxiety about China’s backwardness and sick national body was further reinforced by foreign representations of China during that time. The image of the Chinese in Hollywood films, which dominated the local film market during the time, often appeared as weak and negative during the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, the Chinese censorship was forced to regulate the disagreeable portrayal of the Chinese in foreign films. For example, Asian

⁵ Chiang Kai-Shek, “Practicing New Life Movement [*lixing xinshenghuo yundong*].” In *Collected Speeches of Chiang Kai-Shek*, (N.p: Xinshenghuo yundong cujinzhonghui, 1937). Translation mine.

⁶ The idea of the four social bonds originated from *Guanzi*, a collection of philosophical materials edited by Liu Xiang in 26 BCE. In “Central Principle of New Life Movement,” a talk Chiang gave in Nancang on March 5th 1934, Chiang Kai-Shek described the four social bonds as the principles of the movement. The Four Social Bonds are seen as the foundation of the Eight Virtues: loyalty (*zhong*), filial piety (*xiao*), kindness (*ren*), love (*ai*), trust (*xin*), justice (*yi*), harmony (*he*), and fairness (*ping*). They are also closely related to the Six Arts or rites (*li*), music (*yu*), archery (*she*), charioteering (*yu*), calligraphy (*shu*), and mathematics (*shu*).

American actress Anna May Wong's exotic performance in Paramount's production *Shanghai Express* (1932) enraged Chinese people and the films' Orientalized representation of China consequently led to Paramount's banishment from China.⁷ However, the situation did not improve after the Paramount case, and foreign studios, including MGM, continued to portray Chinese people as weak and sexually promiscuous.

In a situation like this, the KMT government desperately hoped that the local film studios would follow the guidelines of the New Life Movement and create a healthy picture of the Chinese people; however, the two major film companies in Shanghai, Mingxing and Lianhua, responded to the government's policy very differently. Whereas the radical left-wing filmmakers and critics affiliated with Mingxing Studio refused to comply with the KMT government's film movement and only made a small number of films related to the New Life Movement under the KMT's political pressure, Lianhua Film Company's Studio One, which was led by Luo Mingyou and Li Mingwei, was one of the few studios that actively participated in the KMT's film movement.⁸ As the company's owner, screenwriter, and director, Luo Mingyou also served as the consultant for the government-owned studio and the China Education Film

⁷ See Yunxiang Gao (2010) "Sex, Sports, and China's National Crisis, 1931- 1945: The 'Athletic Movie Star' Li Lili (1915-2005)." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 22, no.1 (2010): 96-161.

⁸ Lianhua Film Company had a clear political agenda, as most of the company's shareholders were KMT officials. Although Lianhua Film Company also produced many left leaning films, these films differ from the leftist films made in Mingxin. Left leaning films by Lianhua promoted anti-imperialism and exposed the dark side of society, but they did not aim for any radical social changes. In fact, some of Lianhua's left leaning films did not completely conform to left-wing ideas. See Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

Association. Because of his connection to the KMT government, he produced many films in line with the New Life Movement, including *The Kindred Feelings* (1934), *National Customs* (1935), and *Song of China* (1935), to name a few, and all of them won great support from the central government.

However, the Chinese film industry went through drastic changes after China's total war with Japan and the seed of the New Life Movement did not come to a full blossom until the KMT's retreat to Taiwan after the Chinese civil war.⁹ After the KMT relocated to Taiwan, the government revisited some of the unresolved issues in the 1930s: how to maintain a healthy national body, how cinema carries social responsibilities in educating the masses and reinforcing national health, and how to present the healthy body and mind on screen. Unlike the political situation in the 1930s when the KMT government failed to regulate the whole film industry and had to collaborate or compete with left-wing filmmakers, the government had better control over the film industry in Taiwan after 1949, as it was the only political party in the country during the martial law period. Furthermore, whereas the KMT government had to deal with both the communist revolt and Japanese invasion in the 1930s, it directed all its energy to the anti-communist campaign and the goal of reclaiming the mainland in post-war Taiwan. In 1953, the Chinese Literature and Art Association followed Chiang Kai-Shek's guidance in "Three Principles of the

⁹ From 1937-1945, the Chinese film industry continued making films under Japanese imperialism, but it was divided into three centers: Manchuria, Shanghai and Chongqing. The Manchuria Cinema Association, or Manying, was completely controlled by the Japanese. Studios in Shanghai who were also under great pressure from the Japanese so most of the productions were commercial films without too much nationalistic sentiment. Finally, the KMT government collaborated with the Chinese Communist Party in Chongqing and their joint forces were devoted to the making of anti-Japanese films, with a focus on national unity.

People: Additional Remarks on Education and Leisure” to start the Cultural Cleansing Movement. The goal was to remove all the undesirable elements in arts and in the society, including red/communism, yellow/pornography, and black/corruption.¹⁰ With the adoption of the Film Investigation Law in 1955, the government strengthened its film censorship, and it was particularly sensitive to the communist theme. Then, in the 1960s, the government initiated Healthy Realism and Cultural Renaissance, movements that aimed to counter the communist’s Cultural Revolution by preserving Confucian values and Chinese cultural traditions. They were an extension of the Cultural Cleansing Movement to remove cultural impurity in order to highlight morality and the KMT government’s political legitimacy in Taiwan.

In a special program for “Forty Years of the CMPC,” Gong Hong explains his vision of Healthy Realism: “healthiness is cultivation/ education (*jiaobhua*); realism is countryside (*nongcun*).”¹¹ Gong Hong’s colleagues, like the music director Luo Mingdao, also recall that Gong’s first proposal was to shoot “realism of rural economic,” which led film historian Huang Ren to trace Healthy Realism to earlier agricultural policy films, a genre that was used to promote the KMT’s land reform in the 1950s.¹² In other words, realism, in Gong Hong’s definition, is *pastoral*, which not necessarily

¹⁰ Tian-Yi Li, *Taiwanese Cinema, Society and History* [*taiwan dianying, shehui yu lishi*], (Taipei: Yatai, 1997), 80-85.

¹¹ Gene-Fon Liao, “Moving toward the Definition of *Healthy Realist* Films: A Note on Taiwanese Film History [*maixiang jiankang xieshi dianying de dingyi: taiwan dianyingshi de yifen beiwang biji*],” *Film Appreciation Journal* 72 (1994): 47. Translation mine.

¹² Huang Ren, *Film and Political Propaganda: Studies of Policy Films* [*dianying yu zhengzhi xuanchuan: zhengce dianying yanjiu*], (Taipei: Wangxiang, 1994), 10.

resembles the Italian Neorealist aesthetics. In fact, almost all the Healthy Realist Films embody the melodramatic mode: strong emotionalism, exaggerated performance, and the polarization of good versus evil. As the movement shifted to an urban theme in the late 1960s, the *realist* or pastoral element also disappeared into the background, leaving the notion of healthiness to connect the group of films together until the early 1980s.

The notion of healthiness in Healthy Realism, on the other hand, is usually articulated through the film narrative that follows a protagonist, who is ill or flawed at the outset, but is made healthy or complete in the end. In a way, it echoes Gong Hong's explication that healthiness is a form of cultivation, to be exact, the cultivation and discipline of the body. In his study of Taiwan cinema during the 1960s and 1970s, Lee Yu-lin suggests that the incompleteness of the character's body and life can usually be completed with qualities desired by the society, which he calls the narrative of prosthesis. To put it in his own words, "the flawed body cannot be tolerated; therefore, it is necessary to replace or substitute the incompleteness with a certain thing to make it an ideal body."¹³ Li Xing's famous Healthy Realist Film, *Silent Wife* (1965) is one example that perfectly illustrates Lee Yu-lin's argument on the narrative of prosthesis and the imagination of a complete individual and social body. Although the protagonist Yiyi's muteness and deafness make her "a clay-made goddess sculpture," as her husband has sarcastically described it, her silence is supplemented by her virtue as the story progresses. Even her husband comes to recognize that her physical defects can be seen as a trait that exemplifies a woman's good tolerance, her moral integrity, and her obedience, and it is best illustrated in a couplet that he wrote, "It would be meddling if flowers speak; stone is the most charming because it is mute."

¹³ Yu-lin Lee, "Prosthetic Modernity: Narrative Prosthesis, Machinic Assemblage, and Prosthetic Image in Taiwan 'Healthy Realism' Cinema," *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2012): 11. Translation mine.

Unlike the narrative of prosthesis discussed by Lee Yu-lin, which suggests that the bodily defects can be easily complemented by other desired qualities, the depiction of mental illness in Healthy Realism takes a slightly different approach. It usually shows madness as a punishment for inappropriate desires and social transgression, and it can only be cured through social engineering. The representation of mental illness in early Taiwan cinema is often based on the model of hysteria; therefore, emotional excess and an uncontrollable body become the popular, yet limited, imagination for madness. In fact, hysteria has long been seen as a woman's illness in the west, and prior to the nineteenth century, it was a diagnostic category that refers to the unmanageable state of mind or sexual dysfunction particularly of women. Challenging their predecessors' research on hysteria, Freud and Breuer argue that symptoms of hysteria are the result of trauma, and they manifest the unconscious attempt to protect the patient from psychological stress. However, as later feminist scholar Elaine Showalter has argued, in Freud's case studies, he still holds a male-centered view on hysteria, as he often implies female patients, particularly young women, and female situations. In other words, the male scholarship on hysteria is problematic in that it is used to fortify gender binarism and safeguard patriarchal culture, which makes young women diagnosed with hysteria the scapegoat of misogyny.¹⁴ Similar to the western tradition observed by Elaine Showalter, hysteria, or *yibing* in Chinese, was often stigmatized, and its diagnosis and treatment were both gender-biased in post-war Taiwan.¹⁵ Compared to female madness, the trope of male insanity is

¹⁴ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

¹⁵ See Lin Xian, *Gifts from Cultural Psychiatry [wenhua jingshen yixue de zhenwu]*, (Taipei: Xinling gongfang, 2007), 14. For example, according to the record from the mental health department in Taiwan University Hospital, there were 304 women whereas there were only 150 men diagnosed as hysteric from 1961 to 1967. From 1968 to

less common in cultural representations in Taiwan; instead, it is often associated with the experience of war or colonialism, and discussed as an allegory in the grand historical narrative. One of the noted examples for male insanity before the 1960s is Taiwanese writer Wu Chuo-liu's novel *Orphan of Asia* (1946). The story follows the life of a Taiwanese man, Hu Taiming, who struggles to find his own identity during Japanese colonialism in Taiwan (1895-1945). After his failed attempt to identify with either Japan or China at the end of the story, Hu Taiming is overwhelmed by great despair, which leads his body to a hysteric state, and the final scene of Hu Taiming's psychological turbulence is often interpreted allegorically as the emergence of Taiwan's national consciousness and a response to both Japan's colonialism and China's betrayal since the First Sino-Japanese War.¹⁶ In contrast to the historical and allegorical reading of male insanity as in Wu Chuo-liu's *Orphan of Asia*, female madness, though explored widely in Taiwanese literature and film, is always associated with the private and domestic spheres.

Bai Ke's Taiwanese dialect film, *Mad Woman for Eighteen Years* (1957), is one of the earliest movies that explores the discrimination and treatment of female madness in 1950s Taiwan.¹⁷ In this movie,

1974, the gap became even greater when there were 419 female hysteric patients and 139 male patients. Although the data is often used to support the argument that hysteria is a woman's disease, it does not take other important factors into consideration, such as the fact that men with hysteric symptoms tend to be labelled with other mental disorders rather than hysteria.

¹⁶ Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 176.

¹⁷ Most of the 1950s dialect films are no longer extant, including Bai Ke's film discussed here. Therefore, my analysis of the film is mainly based on the film synopsis, reviews and still images in magazines and newspapers of the time. It is also important to note that similar to many other Taiwanese dialect films, *Mad Woman for Eighteen Years* is based on a true story.

Bai Ke presents the story in a sympathetic tone, condemning the patriarchal society for shaping the film's vulnerable protagonist, Ah-Lian, into a mad monster. The life of Ah-Lian is told by a compassionate female reporter, who investigates the story behind the mad woman's aggression, and finds out that the mad woman was raped by her foster father, sold as a prostitute, and bullied by her husband's concubines. Eventually, she is driven insane and locked up in a wooden cage for eighteen years. The second half of the film deals with many local superstitions surrounding female hysteria, such as fortune telling and a Taoist priest's practice of magic. Most importantly, after she becomes insane, Ah-Lian is depicted as a fierce and frightening monster, which men could do nothing to harm. She no longer follows the feminine norm that is required of her, and her hysteria serves as both a response to, and an attack on, the oppressive patriarchal order. At the end of the film, Ah-Lian is rescued by some youngsters, and her case arouses great public attention and sympathy. The film highlighted women's victimhood and suffering in the male-dominated world, and later inspired other remakes, some of which even show madness empowering women to confront the patriarchal world.¹⁸

A decade after *Mad Woman for Eighteen Years*, the depiction of female insanity in films gradually moves away from the trope of the frightening mad woman in many ways: on the one hand, it breaks away from the superstitions concerning female madness and tries to incorporate a western conception of hysteria; on the other, it no longer endows the mad woman with the power to resist the social norm. There are various factors behind the changes: the KMT

¹⁸ In 1979, director Xu Tianrong remade the film into *The Mad Woman's 18 Years*, and in this version, the female protagonist is forced to pretend that she is insane in order to save her own son. In other words, her faked insanity becomes a tool for revenge and rebellion. In 1988, the story was made into a television drama that showed in Chinese Television System.

government's fetishization of healthiness in the mid-1960s, the film industry's switch to Healthy Realism, and the society's changing conception of mental illness. In the following, I examine the shifting representation of female madness and ways in which Bai Jingrui's unhealthy theme and his heroin's sick body (and mind) are controlled and cured by institutional power in order to reinforce the government-approved social norm, and how the individual body is integrated into the social body through the elimination of illness.

Bai Jingrui's Psychological Realism

Unlike most of the young students in Taiwan who pursued their degrees in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, twenty-nine-year-old Bai Jingrui quit his job as a film critic for a newspaper in Taiwan to follow his passion for Neorealist film in Italy. He worked as a journalist and studied painting and stage design in Rome before he was accepted by the famous Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. At that time, he was the first Chinese student who enrolled in the academy, and his experience in working with some of the most respected Italian directors prepared him to change the film industry in 1960s Taiwan. When Bai Jingrui came back from Italy, he brought back with him the latest filmmaking and editing techniques, and he was quickly recruited by Gong Hong to join the CMPC. At that time, Bai Jingrui was eager to put what he learned in Italy into practice so he made a short documentary, *A Morning in Taipei* (1964), which illustrates the life of people in a realist style and showcases the culture in Taiwan. This ground-breaking attempt, however, was not well-received in the CMPC because the studio was devoted to Healthy Realism at the time. After this setback, Bai Jingrui modified his Neorealist style and helped two other CMPC directors, Li Xing and Li Jia, with their film, *Fire Bulls* (1966) before Gong Hong finally gave him the opportunity to direct a feature film in 1967.

Lonely Seventeen was Bai Jingrui's first major effort in the CMPC, and it turned out to be a great hit and the biggest winner in several

Asian film festivals. The story of *Lonely Seventeen* centers on Danmei (Tang Bao-Yun), a seventeen-year-old high school girl who comes from a wealthy family. The film begins with Danmei inviting her cousin, who is also her sister's fiancé, Feng Ze (Ke Jun-Xiong), to come over to her place on a rainy night. However, Feng Ze secretly visits his mistress first and gets seriously wounded after a fight with the woman. When he tries to make a second stop at Danmei's place, he loses control of his car and is killed in a car accident. After the death of Feng Ze, Danmei and the mistress start to behave strangely, and both of them are sent to the same mental health institute after their emotional breakdown.

Centering on the two women's mental disorder, the film reflects Bai Jingrui's fascination with the social construction of the illness. As film critic Jian Zhixin suggests in a Hong Kong-based film magazine, *Cinemart*, "What did Bai Jingrui bring back from Italy? A realist style? No. It is 'psychoanalysis' that Bai Jingrui clumsily introduced to China with his *Lonely Seventeen*."¹⁹ Originally, Bai Jingrui intended to direct a movie that illustrates young adults' experiences of growing-up in Taiwan and problematizes the education system in a realist fashion. He once contended,

Teenagers in our time are under a lot of stress— from the lack of parental care and rigid training in schools as well. They have to resort to fantasy to seek paradise. Hence all sorts of twisted psychology and weird behaviors. I was going to directly tackle this serious phenomenon, but CMPC was afraid that the communists would use it to attack our government. As an artist, I should have insisted on my original intention, but as a CMPC director, I also need

¹⁹ Zhixin Jian, "Bai Jingrui Has Finally Gone through the whole Ordeal [*Bai Jingrui chutou*]," *Cinemart 2* (1970): 51. Translation mine.

to understand my responsibility. So I changed the story quite a bit and turned it into a romantic film.²⁰

Also noted in Gong Hong's memoir, Bai Jingrui was interested in examining ways in which the modern lifestyle has shaped people's psyche; however, the censorship committee members were worried that the negative depiction of the young adults would give the communist enemy a chance to criticize the degradation of people in Taiwan. Therefore, Bai Jingrui was forced to modify his film in order to pass the censor and satisfy the KMT authority.²¹ In order to tone down his social critique, Bai Jingrui decided to add the romantic elements between Danmei and Feng Ze, and shifted the film's attention to the treatment of Danmei's hysteric attacks and the support given by her family and friends. As a result, the film's style also changes from *dangerous* realism to *nonthreatening* melodrama, or "emotional realism (*ganqing xieshi*)," as Gong Hong calls it.²² However, the modified plot only complicates Danmei's mental illness by showing that she suffers from both hysteria and melancholia, and it also implies female insanity as a result of patriarchal oppression.

Nevertheless, *Lonely Seventeen* can be seen as a scientific and modern case study of Danmei's madness, and her illness is

²⁰ Cited in Emily Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell Davis, *Taiwanese Film Directors: A Treasure Island*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 36.

²¹ Gong Hong, *Shadow Dust Memoir [yingchen huiyi lu]*, (Taipei: Crown, 2005), 137-138.

²² *Ibid.*, 137. Realist films used to be associated with leftist filmmaking in 1930s Shanghai; therefore, the KMT government tried to discourage the realist style in the 1960s' Taiwan film industry. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the controversy of realist aesthetics in 1960s Taiwan; for scholarship on this regard, see Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar, *China on Screen*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

demystified by invoking western psychology and psychoanalysis. Along with western modernism, psychoanalysis began to flourish in Taiwan during the post-war era, particularly from 1965 to 1975, when several major psychoanalytic texts were finally translated into Chinese. In 1966, Zhu Qian published his discussion of Freudian psychoanalysis in a book titled, *Abnormal Psychology*, which was followed by the translation of Freud's *Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis* (1920). Other works by Freud, including *Dora* (1901), *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) and *Totems and Taboos* (1913) were translated in 1968, and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) in 1971. Joyce C. H. Liu further notes that the discussion and research of psychoanalysis also spread to Taiwan's literary and art circles during this time. For example, *Modern Literature* (*xiandai wenxue*), a major literary journal in Taiwan, had a special issue on "Psychoanalysis and Arts" in 1972, and there were discussions on Freudian theories and surrealist art in magazines, such as *Writing Collection* (*bibui*) in 1960. Most importantly, modernist literary styles influenced by psychoanalysis, such as stream of consciousness, also attracted many writers during this time, including Pai Hsien-yung, Li Ang, Nieh Hualing, just to name a few.²³ Although an anti-psychoanalysis trend appeared in 1970s Taiwan, psychoanalysis was seen as a new and exciting discourse that generated vibrant discussion in elite circles and left a great impact on people's understanding of mental disorders in the 1960s.

Lonely Seventeen shows the influence of western psychoanalysis, and demonstrates an attempt to give a modern and scientific portrayal to the diagnosis and treatment of madness in 1960s Taiwan. Apparently drawn from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Bai Jingrui's use of a long dream and fantasy sequence in the film

²³ Joyce C.H. Liu, "Oppression and the Return: Connection between Psychoanalytical Discourse and Taiwanese Modernism." *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature in Chinese* 4, no. 2 (2001): 31-61.

gives a glimpse of Danmei's unconscious to the audience. In *Lonehy Seventeen*, Danmei is depicted as a naïve girl who often loses contact with reality because she is always alone and lost in her own daydreams. As the mise-en-scene of Danmei's room shows, her life is filled with books and the trophies she won, which echoes her classmates' view of her: a bookworm and a teacher's pet. When her classmates go to the movies and have fun at the parties, she prefers to study and watch TV at home. She was once inspired by a ballerina's passionate dance on TV and fell into a daydream where she dresses up like a princess, sitting on a throne. When Feng Ze showed up to court her in this fantasy, she danced gracefully with him in an ice cave. By juxtaposing the tedious reality with the fantastical dream, *Lonehy Seventeen* reveals Danmei's desire for romance and freedom, which could not be fulfilled in her oppressed life.

In addition to the long dream and fantasy sequence, the film also employs a subjective camera to look at the world from Danmei's point of view, but most of the time, it presents Danmei's view as twisted. In the scene of Danmei's first emotional breakdown, the camera shows Danmei running up the stairway after her father's confrontation with her, then, the camera shifts to the close-up of Danmei's painful facial expression. Following the close-up of her face, the camera cuts to a series of spinning images shot through Danmei's perspective, including the view of the chandelier and the dance with Feng Ze in her fantasy (Figure 1-6). The use of subjective camera here shows both Danmei's desire and fear, the two elements that lead to her collapse at the end of the scene. As mentioned earlier, the dance with Feng Ze in Danmei's fantasy symbolizes her repressed desire for the impossible lover; on the other hand, the spinning image of the chandelier and its heavy and oppressive presence above, which also appears earlier in the film when Danmei stays home alone, implies Danmei's anxiety about the suffocating space of home. More importantly, the subjective camera is also employed in the film to

illustrate Danmei's symptoms and her unstable psychology. The most interesting scene using subjective camera in *Lonely Seventeen* is when Danmei is visited by her father, her teacher, and her classmates after she is hospitalized. In this scene, Danmei cheerfully runs toward her friends, but once she notices that her teacher and her father are also present, she is petrified. She sees the twisted faces of her father and her teacher: her father's face is stretched whereas her teacher's face is magnified and turned (Figure 7-10). The twisted faces are accompanied by the dramatic sound effect in the background, which is often used in slapstick, to emphasize the distortion of Danmei's psychological condition. Subjective camera like this is used extensively in the film to depict Danmei's mental image and heighten her irrational being. On the other hand, male characters in the film are seldom subject to emotional inspection by the camera. In other words, a gender dichotomy between irrational woman and rational man is created through the use of camera.

Lonely Seventeen depicts Danmei's vision and psychology as twisted through subjective camera, and it also shows her as silenced through her loss of speech after Feng Ze's death. In Mary Ann Doane's words, "Within the encompassing masculine medical discourse, the woman's language is granted a limited validity—it is, precisely, a point of view, and often a distorted and unbalanced one."²⁴ Danmei's opinions and actions are deemed irrational because her point of view is twisted; furthermore, she loses the ability to communicate with others and to express herself. After Feng Ze's death, she always wears a perplexed expression on her face and does not seem to be interested in anything anymore; most importantly, she begins to withdraw into her thoughts and demonstrates symptoms of aphasia. When her teacher and her father question her about her

²⁴ Doane, Mary Ann, "The Woman's Film?: Possession and Address". In *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, (London: BFI, 1987), 291.

failing grades, she cannot defend herself or respond to them and is unable to utter a single word. Under such circumstances, Danmei's hysteric body and her emotional breakdown become the only way to show her desperate challenge to communication to the patriarchal order.

Whereas Danmei is silenced, other male characters in the film are endowed with the privilege to interpret her body and speak for her. As the movie shows, Danmei's father and her teacher are the male authorities: at home, Danmei's father is depicted as an authoritative figure whereas his wife cannot freely express her opinions. At school, which is a girl's high school with only male instructors, the teachers have the exclusive right to define and monitor a girl's behavior. In the scene when Danmei greets her visitors at the hospital, her classmates suggest that she looks happy and normal in the hospital; however, their teacher disagrees and explains that "being different from her usual condition is considered abnormal." Then, the camera shows Danmei's father, teacher, and doctor standing side by side, observing Danmei from afar and discussing what the normal behavior is for a young woman like her. For them, the female body demands a reading, and it is their job to interpret her symptoms. In fact, the twisted image Danmei sees in the scene and her subsequent emotional breakdown also reveal her anxiety and agitation toward the oppressive male authority, which confines her within the socially acceptable feminine norm.

Disciplining the Sick Body

Through Bai Jingrui's camera, Danmei is shaped into a hysteric woman and a vulnerable patient, who is faced with male prejudice in interpreting her madness. Although *Lonely Seventeen* shares with earlier Taiwanese dialect films the similar anxiety towards the oppressive patriarchy, it departs from the previous tradition to emphasize that madness is a form of punishment for women's deviant behaviors that need to be disciplined. *Lonely Seventeen* also reflects the myth that the

cause of illness is pure evil and a utopian belief that illness would completely disappear when a healthy society is built. Drawing on French-American microbiologist René Jules Dubos' idea of the "mirage of health," a naïve belief that the development of medicine can eventually free people from illness, Japanese literary critic Karatani Kojin questions modern medical discourses, which appear to be objective and benevolent on the surface. He asserts, "what Dubos calls the 'mirage of health,' is nothing but a secular form of theology, which sees the cause of illness as evil and seeks to eliminate that evil. Though it has eliminated various sorts of 'meaning' which revolve around illness, scientific medicine is itself controlled by a 'meaning' whose nature is even more pernicious."²⁵ In light of Dubos' and Karatani Kojin's argument, in the following, I investigate the diagnosis and cure of Danmei's illness, which expose the intertwined relationships between patriarchal state power and the modern institutionalization of madness in Taiwan.

Unlike the asylums and cages presented in earlier films like *Madwoman for Eighteen Years*, the mental health institute is a modern and westernized space in *Lonely Seventeen*. Under the appearance of a sanctuary, the hospital presented in the film is in fact a place of strict surveillance. Each patient has his or her own cell, but the building is separated from the outside world with various doors and security gates; furthermore, when the patient tries to run away, as Feng Ze's mistress once does, the medical staff would pursue them and bring them back to their cells. At the hospital, the doctor diagnoses and treats his patients in a seemingly scientific manner: he first treats Danmei with electrotherapy, which was considered a popular

²⁵ Karatani, Kojin, "Sickness as Meaning." *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Translated by Brett de Bary, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 108. In *Mirage of Health: Utopias, Progress, and Biological Change*, Dubos argues that disease and the cause of illness, such as germs, are actually part of human health; therefore, obliterating bacterial competition is neither desirable nor necessary.

treatment for anxieties in the 1960s and the 1970s, followed by group counseling for Danmei and the mistress to talk through their traumatic experience. While the mental health institute is a modern space, it still functions like a cage that aims to tame the sick so they could return to the outside world where their bodies can be utilized and controlled by the government once again.

Although Danmei is diagnosed and treated scientifically in *Lonely Seventeen*, the ultimate cure is *the moral correction* that is in line with the value system proposed by the government. In *Lonely Seventeen*, even electrotherapy fails to cure Danmei's hysteria; it is the doctor's final speech and moral lesson that wakes Danmei up from her delusional state. At the end of Danmei and the mistress' confrontation, the doctor forces the two women to recognize Feng Ze's true character and to move on with their own lives. He concludes, "The death of Feng Ze can only be accounted to *his own irresponsible attitude towards relationships*." In his speech, the doctor imposes his own moral judgment on Feng Ze, arguing that his romantic relationships deviate from the ethical norm; therefore, he deserves the punishment of death. Most importantly, as the doctor suggests, the cause of the two women's illness is more than their guilty conscience; their inappropriate sexual desire also leads to their illness. The doctor's didactic moral lesson is echoed by the final song, which goes, "Put aside *our private desires*. The epoch calls for us." As Zhu Qian observes in his *Abnormal Psychology*, sexual desire was generally considered unclean and therefore devalued by Taiwanese society during the 1960s.²⁶ In a way, the lyric resonates with the public belief observed by Zhu Qian, implying the danger of private sexual desires, and it also shows that the duty to be a good national subject should always come before the desire for a romantic

²⁶ Zhu, Qian, *Abnormal Psychology [biantai xinlixue]*, (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1966), 127.

relationship. In other words, inappropriate sexual desire is compared to a bad germ, and only by eliminating it can the two victims recover their health and the society become healthy again. When regarded this way, the mistress' obsessive love for Feng Ze, which is illicit and harmful, becomes the cause of her illness, which also leads to Feng Ze's death.

While Danmei's parents suspect that the pressure from school and Danmei's self-condemnation for Feng Ze's death could be the cause of her illness, the doctor later finds out that Danmei's infatuation and repressed desire for Feng Ze are the triggers of her illness. As the film suggests, Danmei's seemingly innocent and platonic love for Feng Ze is in fact destructive: it arouses the tension between the two sisters, which poses a threat to the harmonious family relationship, which plays a central role in Healthy Realism and the KMT government's cultural policies in the 1960s. From the beginning of the film, it is implied that there is a competition between Danmei and her sister, and their power dynamic is best illustrated through their repeated encounters at the stairway. Framed in a low-angle shot representing Danmei's perspective, Danmei's sister is always presented as an unbeatable foe standing on top of the staircase, reminding Danmei of her inferiority. In fact, Danmei's sister is situated in all kinds of superior situations; for instance, she is engaged to Feng Ze, and she is more favored by their parents. Danmei's desire to become her sister, who is popular among men, is best illustrated in the scene when she tries on her sister's stylish dresses and high heel shoes when her sister goes out to dinner with their parents and Feng Ze. When Danmei finally poses in front of the mirror and looks into the camera, she mimics the seductive facial expression of an actress in a poster on the wall, and instantly becomes an extremely erotic woman like her sister.

Ultimately, what cures Danmei is her recognition of Feng Ze's real character, which ends her insanity and the mourning of the lost love. Earlier in the film, Danmei bestows all her admiration and love

in a handcrafted charm amulet, which says “wishing you safe.” She had attempted to give it to Feng Ze several times but failed every time she tried. After the car accident, she continues to treasure the charm, and refuses to throw it away. After the doctor reveals Feng Ze’s unethical affair and suggests that Danmei’s desire is inappropriate, Danmei finally takes out the charm and throws it away, and it is exactly the shattering of Feng Ze’s delusional image that allows Danmei to regain her ego and to be reconciled with her family.

Along with Danmei’s schoolteacher and her father, the doctor at the psychiatric institute comes to the conclusion that the cause of Danmei’s illness is her inappropriate sexual desires and her challenge to the patriarchal family values. Under scientific treatment and modern medicine, *Lone Seven* sees ethical imperative as the ultimate cure for Danmei, and at the end of the film, Danmei’s quick recovery from her illness and return to school life demonstrate the success of male authority in reinforcing traditional family values and feminine social norms. As literary scholar Tang Xiaobing argues in his analysis of the representation of illness in modern Chinese literature, “while there is no sick body anymore, the human body is subjected to direct inscription of social meaning.”²⁷ Danmei, free of pain and illness, is once again integrated into a collective and optimistic social body, which is best illustrated in the film’s ending scene with Danmei joining the ski camp held by the KMT party’s China Youth Corps.

Discourse of Healthiness, Discourse of Woman

Finally, through the analysis of Healthy Realist Films, it is not difficult to see that the KMT government’s discourse of healthiness is often articulated through the female body. As in many 1930s films

²⁷ Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 160.

that echo the KMT's New Life Movement, such as Sun Yu's *Queen of Sports* (1934) and other popular sport films, the role of woman is to support the government's campaign of healthiness, including personal hygiene, public health, and proper behaviors, and to reiterate the feminine norm approved by the KMT government. Take *Queen of Sports* for example, following one of the inter-titles, which says "new life," all the young female students do gymnastics upon waking up, brushing their teeth and washing their faces in a rhythmic manner. The schoolgirls' identical and uniform movements are concluded with the close-up of the female protagonist Lin Ying's teeth and happy smile, which showcases the modern and healthy lifestyle that the government proposed. It is also through Lin Ying's return to the tough training for the national sports competition after her self-indulgence in the city that the healthy theme and proper feminine norm are presented in the film.²⁸ Similarly, the female has appeared as the most important body in the KMT government's healthy discourse in the 1960s and 1970s in a way that compared to the male body, the female body is prone to be sick and is often situated in a defenceless position to be disciplined in Healthy Realism.

Unlike the 1950s Taiwanese dialect films, which tend to hold an uncritical, if not more lenient, attitude towards the female image and behavior, *Lonely Seventeen* and other Healthy Realist Films show a tightened control of feminine norms through the discipline of the

²⁸ In addition to advocating personal hygiene through scenes of schoolgirls' morning cleaning routines, the body of the female protagonist in *Queen of Sports* reflects the new standard of beauty in 1930s Shanghai, which is an athletic, natural, and modern attribute. The film's didactic message is also conveyed through the schoolteacher's lecture, "First have healthy body, then have healthy mind! Have youthful rigor and then strive to have stability! Any nation's progress is built on its people's healthy body." These words resonate with Chiang Kai-Shek's New Life Movement Speech, which suggests that a healthy body is the foundation of a healthy nation.

female body and behavior. As mentioned earlier, before *Lonely Seventeen*, films with a prominent theme on illness, like Bai Ke's *Madwoman for Eighteen Years*, usually emphasize a woman's suffering and victimhood, calling attention to the exploitation of woman under traditional patriarchy. Another example is the female protagonist in Li Jia's *Leper Woman* (1957), who attempts to transfer her leprosy to her lover; instead of being punished for her selfishness, her illness is cured miraculously at the end of the film. In other words, their behaviour does not need to conform to the ideal social norm and in many cases, their illness also empowers them to challenge the patriarchal order. Turning to the 1960s and 1970s, the focus is placed on traditional feminine virtues: whether it is seen as a supplement for physical defects or an ideal that the sick women are forced to attain. For characters who are sick or flawed in Healthy Realism, such as Yiyi, who is deaf and mute in *Silent Wife* and Ah-Xiu, a mute woman in *The Story of a Small Town* (1969), their incompleteness is covered by their virtues and ideal femininity. For others, like Danmei in Bai Jingrui's *Lonely Seventeen*, the deviation from the socially acceptable feminine norm becomes the cause of their illness, and in this case, punishment is often manifested in the form of mental disorder, the torment of the mind. In the same manner, Chen Hung-Lieh's *Cloud of Romance* (1977) also presents madness as a form of punishment for the female protagonist Wanlu's indecisiveness in a triangle relationship, which sabotages the lives of her two lovers. Most importantly, the male privilege in interpreting and disciplining the sick women, as illustrated in *Lonely Seventeen*, can also be found in most of the Healthy Realist Films, such as Li Jia's 1966 movie, *Orchids and My Love* (1966). In the movie, the proud and spoiled protagonist, Ruolan, is diagnosed as having polio at an early age, and she goes through various therapies for her paralyzed legs. It is through the male doctor's and Ruolan's father's treatment and encouragement that Ruolan finally gives up her egotism and miraculously walks on her feet again. In addition to showcasing Taiwan's modern medical

development, *Orchids and My Love* also highlights submissiveness, the essence of ideal femininity as proposed by the government.

So why did the KMT government strengthen the feminine norm in the 1960s and 1970s? In fact, most of the Healthy Realist Films not only show the connection between women and illness, they also suggest a similarity between women and disease. In a way, women, like disease, pose a great danger to the very being of male authority and the social body that the KMT government has been keen to keep intact. Furthermore, the KMT government's healthy discourse was also used to cover a misogynist fear that the government would eventually lose control over woman's sexuality and her body, which is closely linked to the KMT government's anti-communist campaign. As women are seen as the symbolic bearers of national cultural tradition, female sexuality is often used as the marker of *the other and us*.²⁹ For instance, in the 1950s Taiwanese anti-communist films, the communist enemy is usually imagined as a sexually promiscuous female spy, who seduces and ruins proper Chinese and Taiwanese men; in other words, the female spy's sexuality is used to represent the dangerous and corrupted communist enemy.³⁰ In order to claim its cultural superiority over the communist party on the mainland and to avoid the contamination of the communist' dangerous sexuality, the KMT government reinforced the feminine social norm and the representation of woman in Healthy Realist Films.

²⁹ The association between woman and nationalism, whether woman is used as a metaphor for the national territory or as mother of the nation's future generation, is a topic often explored by feminist scholars. See for example, Mary Maynard and June Purvis, *New Frontiers In Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity and Nationalism*. (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

³⁰ Some of the examples that focus on the female spy's sexuality include *Bad Dreams* (1950), *Poppy Flower* (1954), *Damnably City* (1958), just to name a few.

As illustrated in Bai Jingrui's *Lonely Seventeen*, Healthy Realist Films followed the traditions in New Life Movement and the KMT government's healthy discourse since the 1930s, which aims to create a strong social body through the elimination of individual illness and social malice. While *Lonely Seventeen* tries to break away from earlier dialect films' popular narrative of female madness, which associates madness with superstitions, by incorporating concepts from modern psychology and psychoanalysis, the film's ending shows that the ultimate cure is the moral lesson proposed by the state authority. In other words, Danmei's recovery from insanity can also be interpreted as the restoration of the ethical values approved by the KMT authority. Despite the commercial appeal of Healthy Realism, the films of the time still serve as the KMT government's soft power to promote the cold-war ideology and to reinforce the social order. Most importantly, with all the emphasis placed on the discipline of the female body and the reinstatement of traditional feminine virtues, 1960s Healthy Realist Films like *Lonely Seventeen* reveal that the KMT's healthy discourse is a de facto patriarchal construction.

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Figures:



Figure 1

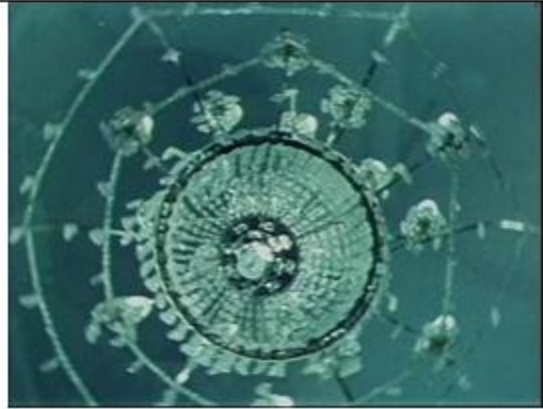


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10