

Accented Style: On Namewee's Sinophone Malaysian Film and Rap Songs

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Focusing on Namewee's rap songs and his film , this essay uses Sinophone theory and accented cinema theory to explore how sound and image are used to perform Sinophone identity through journeys of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This essay demonstrates that Namewee's works are neither a national allegory nor an exilic/diasporic allegory, and therefore that neither the perspective of national discourse nor diaspora discourse can adequately frame his works. Sinophone Malaysian accented cinema is an appropriate one from which to approach Namewee's films. In the theoretical framework of accented cinema, Namewee is a postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmaker; in the Malaysian context he is "not quite" equal to Malays, and neither is he accepted or trusted as a full citizen. The accented style of Namewee's works is intimately linked to localization, diaspora and against-diaspora experiences, and Chinese-Malay relations. He has successfully updated the understanding that accented style can only be produced from exile/diaspora experience, demonstrating that against-diaspora experience and localization can also create an accented style. This essay analyzes the re-presentation of Sino-Malay relations in Namewee's works and discovers that they refuse to rely on the standard ethnic framework. Rather, the accented style of these works gives play to the multiply mediated, multidirectional critical agency of Sinophone theory: the Sinification discourse of "authenticity" is criticized, while at the same time a performance of national identities is used to resist the presence of racism and expose the essentialized Malay mythologization of indigeneity.

Keywords: Accented style; Against-diaspora; Localization; Namewee; Rap Songs; Sinophone Malaysian Film;

Sinophone Malaysian Works: Accented Style and Localization

Scholars researching the Malaysian Chinese director and pop singer Namewee have until now tended to analyze his works from the perspective of diaspora Chinese discourse (Koh 2008), or in the context of a hybrid cosmopolitan Malaysia (Khoo 2014). In contrast, there is relatively little research on how his creations re-present sonic elements of Sinophone culture such as accent, language, and topolect. This essay will examine the accented style of his film and rap songs from the perspectives of the Sinophone and accented cinema, discussing how they perform Sinophone identity through sound and image in a Malaysian linguistic context as part of a journey of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

In the volume entitled *Sinophone Cinemas* edited by Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo, the authors frame Sinophone cinema as case studies of multilingual, multi-dialectal, and multi-accented cinemas produced in Chinese diasporic communities outside Mainland China and also within Mainland China (Yue and Khoo 2014, 6). This involved “a methodological shift from diaspora cinemas to Sinophone cinemas in order to re-engage new sites of localization, multilingualism and difference that have emerged in Chinese film studies but that are not easily contained by the notion of diaspora” (5). The multilingualism of Sinophone Malaysian film, born of experiences of localization, is a phenomenon that the notion of diaspora is unable to process. A marriage of multiple Chinese languages, other languages, and accents creates the creolized linguistic environment of Sinophone works. This phenomenon is known in linguistics and anthropology as a “linguistic mosaic”, part of the “cultural mosaic” created with the progress of globalization. The term “linguistic mosaic” refers to small amounts of guest-language vocabulary and phrases mixed in with the vocabulary and phrases of the host language, forming a special mixed vernacular in which multiple languages are used at once (Chen Yuan 2003, 63). Sinophone Malaysian works embody the linguistic mosaic of Malaysian society: multilingual elements are evident in Sinophone Malaysian works, from multilingual texts to multilingual directors.

Namewee’s works feature accented Malaysian Mandarin and Chinese topolects as their primary languages, interspersed with English, Malay, and other languages. These multiple accents re-present the Mandarin and Chinese topolects spoken in Malaysia, forming the special accented characteristics of Sinophone Malaysian works. Accent has been defined as both “the cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regionally or socially” and “the emphasis which makes a particular word or syllable stand out in a stream of speech” (Crystal 2009, 3). There are a variety of societal reasons for differences in accent, including linguistic interference, societal background, religious background, level of education, and political grouping (Asher 1994, 9). While linguistically all accents are equal, this is not the case socially and politically. Accents can be used to determine the social standing of the speaker, rendering accent one of the “most intimate and powerful markers of group identity and solidarity, as well as of individual difference and personality” (Naficy 2001, 23).

People tend to learn an “official accent” from national media broadcasts. This is followed in dominant cinema, resulting in a “de-accented” dominant speech pattern. Meanwhile, films which do not respect the dominant accent are looked down upon as being accented. Accented

films, on the other hand, are “counterhegemonic insofar as many of them de-emphasize synchronous sound” (Naficy 2001, 22-4), Naficy’s theory of “accented cinema” opposes the homogeneity of dominant accents while foregrounding the multi-accented, the multilingual, and the multivocal. Accented cinema comes primarily from Third World directors working in artisanal production modes. They are generally low cost, imperfect, and amateurish: filmmakers are involved in all aspects of their film, both horizontally and vertically (45-6).

Naficy traces the evolution of accented style back to the Third Film aesthetics of the mid-twentieth century: both share an opposition to hegemony and oppression. Accented cinema, unlike Third Cinema, does not have to be tinged with Marxism or socialism; it is more focused on the deterritorialization of specific individuals, ethnicities, nationalities, and identities, and springs from a variety of specific displaced subjects and diasporized communities (30-1). Naficy’s accented cinema primarily covers a new transnational cinema that is at once global and local, produced by a fresh crop of exilic, émigré, diaspora, refugee, ethnic, and transnational filmmakers in the postcolonial and post-Soviet eras (Naficy 2012, 113). He observes that a majority of these filmmakers are from the global South, but relocated to northern cosmopolitan centres after the 1960s, where they exist in a “state of tension and dissension with both their original and their current homes” (2001, 10).

Can accented cinema only be created by such directors in exile/diaspora in the West? Many scholars would disagree. Suner Asuman argues that accented cinema does not have to be situated “within a narrowly defined exilic/diasporic condition” (2006, 377-8). Lim Song Hwee also believes that directors of accented cinema may take multiple migratory routes, using Ang Lee and Tsai Ming Liang to demonstrate that accented cinema must also take into account intra-Asian journeys (Lim 2012, 132-3). In fact, Naficy himself acknowledges that not all accented films are exilic or diasporic, but all exilic or diasporic films must be accented (Naficy 2001, 23). This highlights that exilic or diasporic features are not an inevitable part of accented cinema. Naficy actually uses the term “accented cinema” in a very loose manner, referring to all alternative film (23).

The biggest difference between accented cinema and dominant cinema lies in its accent. Accentless dominant cinema represents universality, neutrality, and being value free (Naficy 2012, 113). The concept of accented film has been criticized by Suner Asuman, who argues that it suggests that “the West represents the universal norm, whereas the ‘rest’ is defined on the basis of its difference” (2006, 378). Lim Song Hwee also questions the concept. Who can prove that dominant cinema is without accent? Why is it without accent? Furthermore, Naficy does not question the “masquerading neutrality” of dominant cinema, thus contributing to “a widespread but erroneous distinction between Hollywood and the rest”. With Hollywood cinema’s position as the norm left unquestioned, other cinemas are left to be measured against it, in what is “essentially a form of cultural imperialism” (Lim 2012, 140). These criticisms have highlighted the shortcomings of the concept as used by Naficy. This essay considers how Namewee’s “accented style” can revise or expand the very concept of accented cinema itself. Firstly, this type of accented style corrects Naficy’s tendency to focus on diasporic film makers who emigrated from the global South to the global North, thus ignoring the many translocal film makers who circulate around Asia, making accented cinema there. Secondly, this essay expands on Naficy’s overemphasis on the influence of diaspora discourse on accented style, which

ignores the way in which against-diaspora experiences and localization can also create an accented style.

The accented style of Sinophone Malaysian work is intimately linked to localization, diaspora and against-diaspora experience, and Chinese-Malay relations. Localization is understood in anthropology to mean “the process of becoming local, which involves cultural adjustment to a local geographical and social environment, and identifying with the locality” (Tan Chee Beng 2004, 23). Shih Shu-mei believes that Sinophone studies are against-diaspora localization practices: she suspects that global Chinese diaspora discourse is China-centric, and does not agree with the categorization of Malaysian Chinese people as diaspora Chinese (Shih 2007b: 16). I believe that diasporic and against-diasporic states coexisted in Malaysian Chinese literary culture across different spaces and times. Malaysian Chinese diaspora discourse is not completely a narrative of anti-localization; Malaysian Chinese against-diaspora discourse is not necessarily a nationalism (patriotism) filled with admiration and hope for the state. It is precisely this long-term tension between diaspora and against-diaspora discourses which gives Sinophone Malaysian literature and culture its unique accented style. It is generated in the process of Malaysian film workers orienting themselves simultaneously towards localization and globalization.

Naficy divides the directors of accented cinema into three types: exilic filmmakers, diasporic filmmakers, and postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmakers (2001, 11-7). Although in recent years Namewee has on multiple occasions been arrested and prosecuted by the Malaysian authorities for videos he has made, he remains steadfast in his determination to remain in Malaysia and develop his cinema and music careers. As a singer, he has toured the world, while on Youtube he also continues to highlight the injustices suffered by Chinese people and other ethnic minorities in Malaysia as second-class citizens. The music videos he makes in collaboration with singers from a range of countries make use of a variety of languages and topolects, initiating a deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the nation. Namewee, along with figures such as Ah Niu, falls into the “postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmakers” category. They are not completely accepted by the indigenous people of their adopted homeland, and do not enjoy complete equality or acceptance as full citizens (16). Khoo Gaik-cheng defines the independent Malaysian filmmaking movement as “underground, low-budget, non-profit oriented, guerrilla filmmaking, and made without consideration of being screened in the censor-ridden mainstream cinemas” (Khoo 2007, 228). This is identical to the production mode of accented cinema.

Sinophone Identity: Deterritorializing and Reterritorializing

Shih Shu-mei has stated that identity is intimately linked with representation: it occurs “in and throughout representation” (Shih 2007a, 16). Therefore, one issue that this essay wishes to confront is how Sinophone Malaysian film re-presents multiple identities. In other words, what appears to be a question of *ethnic* identity is transformed through the re-presentation mechanism of Sinophone Malaysian film into other issues of identity. The differing linguistic abilities and accents of Sinophone directors also complicate their identity: as Shih Shu-mei argues, identity is “the way in which we perceive ourselves, and others perceive us, and is constituted by a

dialectics of seeing and being seen” (16). Therefore, the construction of Malaysian Chinese identity is not simply a matter of how one defines a “Chinese” person oneself, but also involves the question of how Malays and people of other ethnicities perceive and define Chinese people. Sinophone directors are skilled at using diverse accents both inside and outside their films to perform their individual cultural identities.

As Suner argues, in order to realize the critical potential of accented cinema, the mutual entanglement between exilic/diasporic filmmaking and national cinema must be acknowledged (Suner 2006, 363). This essay will use case studies of Sinophone Malaysian accented film to explore the entanglements of Malaysian national cinema and diasporic cinema. *Ice Kacang Puppy Love*, directed by Ah Niu, was a groundbreaking film, the first Sinophone film to be recognized by the Malaysian government as a domestic Malaysian film (or national film). Originally, as with all other Sinophone Malaysian films prior to 2011, it was not acknowledged as such by the Malaysian National Film Development Corporation as the dialogue was less than 60 per cent Malay. Therefore, the 20 per cent entertainment tax payable on foreign films applied to it. Later, Ah Niu complained to Zhang Xiaoyan on the Taiwanese entertainment show *SS Xiaoyan Night* and called on the Malaysian government to alter the regulations governing domestically produced film (Zhang Xiaoyan, Ah Niu 2010). The Malaysian Sinophone community united to get Ah Niu’s demands debated in Parliament and Cabinet. Finally, the storm ended when the regulations were modified. Now, a film could be considered a Malaysian domestic film as long as over 50 per cent of the film was shot in Malaysia and 50 per cent of the film company shares were owned by a Malaysian. The language of the dialogue became irrelevant, as long as Malay subtitles were attached (Sinchew Daily 2011; Nanyang Siang Pau 2011). This change not only kick started the Malaysian Chinese film industry, but also marked a milestone on Sinophone Malaysian cinema’s road to localization.

Naficy believes that while accented films engage in many deterritorializing and reterritorializing journeys (of home-seeking, homelessness, or homecoming), they ultimately embody the process of the lead character’s search for their identity and how they perform this identity (2001, 5-6). Accented films are thus constantly in a multilateral dialogue between home and host societies, their respective national cinemas, and audiences (6). As Malaysian born and bred Chinese directors are scattered between their home and host societies, their identities as Malaysians also shift, rendering the term “accented cinema” perfectly apposite for their films.

Ice Kacang Puppy Love director Ah Niu and *Nasi Lemak 2.0* director Namewee both flit between the cultural spheres of Taiwan and Malaysia. While rooted in Malaysia, they are constantly on deterritorializing and reterritorializing journeys, embodying the fluid localness of Sinophone Malaysian film. Localness is no longer fixed to the earth and to traditional cultural feelings, but rather maintains an openness to the other, alongside a certain portability. In their works, accented voices are allowed to mix and reconcile a variety of domestic and foreign languages and topolects to form a fluid in-between state, and a vibrant accented style.

Namewee: Against Diaspora Identity

Shih Shu-mei has noted that in Southeast Asia, even though Chinese people have a strong and long-lasting desire for localization, “Chineseness” is something that will forever remain foreign (“diasporic”) (Shih 2010, 32-33). If the term “Sinophonicity” can replace “Chineseness”, and give Sinophone Malaysian artists a Sinophonic identity in which they do not need to sacrifice Chinese language and culture to achieve localization, then it is time to reflect upon and shift the frontiers of Chinese diaspora discourse, which is centered on ethnic “Chineseness”. This determination to bestow the Sinophone with the qualifications for localization is an “against diaspora” process. Does the against diaspora localization process have any frontiers? One such frontier is drawn by Tan Eng Keong (2013, 35):

The journey to ‘become local’ should not be practiced at the expense of assimilation but as acculturation—a process of negotiation. Because this localization process is a process of negotiation, it should not be conflated with the identification with local state authorities.

Nasi Lemak 2.0 can serve as a case study to explore how far this against diaspora identity can develop.

Scholars such as Lee (2014) have interpreted Sinophone Malaysian film in terms of “national allegory”; all desires, symbols, and actions in the film are unconscious political expressions, and all must be contextualized, and responded to in relation to national identity. Naficy, taking an opposing view, argues that the accented cinema of the Third World is not a national allegory, but an allegory of diaspora or exile. Every story is both private, about an individual, and public, about exile and diaspora (2001, 31). Are Sinophone Malaysian film national allegories or exilic/diasporic allegories? Such political interpretations can be dangerous: the overuse of allegory can easily tip into what Shih Shu-mei (2004, 21) has criticized as making non-western texts more amenable to western sensibilities or expectations. It is difficult to regard Sinophone Malaysian film as exilic/diasporic allegory, since no Sinophone Malaysian directors have ever been jailed, and Sinophone Malaysian films have been regarded as domestic films since 2011. Although Namewee was briefly detained for his Youtube videos, he continues to make Sinophone films in Malaysia. These films are mainly produced and distributed within Malaysia, and find their main audience in Malaysia. Therefore, the perspective of Sinophone Malaysian accented cinema suits his films far better than the simple framework of diasporic/national film. Rather than claiming that Malaysian Chinese directors desire a national identity, it is more accurate to say that they are *performing* a national identity. They fake submission to national allegory, “recognizing its power but responding to it with a sardonic twist” (Shih 2007a, 155).¹ Namewee is a master at this.

His film *Nasi Lemak 2.0*, which he wrote, directed, and starred in, performs national identity while representing Sinophone Malaysian film’s move towards localization. A comedy, it approaches Chinese-Malay relationships head-on, using the popular food coconut rice (*nasi lemak*) to bring the two ethnicities together. The conflict between Sinification and localization is also brought to a dramatic reconciliation. The film, made on a low budget, attracted audiences from a wide range of ethnicities, helping it set a new box office record for a Sinophone film in Malaysia.

Namewee is a creative singer and artist whose came to prominence on YouTube. The rap songs he creates are often strongly anti-elite, and show a mastery of the form. They include a bewildering variety of languages and topolects, including Malay, English, Thai, Tamil, Chinese language (*huayu*), *Putonghua* (common speech), Hainanese, Minnanese, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, and many others. Namewee is not thoroughly proficient in every language or topolect listed above. There is some tongue-in-cheek, comedic multilingualism here.² However, he mimics the accents of native speakers of these languages/topolects in humorous fashion, deconstructing the myth that such accents must originate from a native speaker. In the majority of these multilingual, multi-dialectal, and multi-accented Sinophone songs, the Chinese language is the host language, while other languages such as English, Malay, and *Putonghua* appear as guest languages interspersed throughout. The host and guest languages resonate with each other, creating a kind of tension. Most of the time, the Chinese language and *Putonghua* do not form a political opposition in his Sinophone songs, but instead form a “Sinophone governance” (Wang David 2015, 11). Namewee makes full use of the potential of Chinese language to link and govern fans all over the world. Most often, he uses the Chinese language as a cultural medium to govern various political relationships, instead of using the Chinese language as a political bargaining chip with which to resist *Putonghua* or other languages. This originates from his profound awareness that exclusion and discrimination are rife even within the various Chinese topolects and accents outside Mainland China.

His 2007 YouTube hit *Muar Mandarin* is an example. Namewee is of Hainanese extraction, and grew up in Muar, southern Malaysia. He often feels that his Muar accent is looked down on by Chinese people living in large cities such as Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. *Muar Mandarin* was written as a riposte to these people. While Ng Kim Chew (2008, 89) has criticized his songs as being too direct in their expression, too common, and unable to represent Malaysian Chinese people, from a Sinophone perspective the lyrics are a good example of the “creolization” that many Sinophone theorists advocate. For example, the lyrics “in language there are no standards, only different localities, I don’t believe that you really get this idea- otherwise why go to KL to learn from people speaking Cantonese?” connects multiple sounds and orthographies across different languages (Shih 2011, 716). Namewee uses *Muar Mandarin* to perform his identity as a speaker of Muar Chinese, enriching the Malaysian Chinese Sinophone ecosystem. Namewee does not reject Cantonese, but rather wrote this song to express his frustration at being excluded in Kuala Lumpur because he cannot speak the topolect fluently. In other words, Namewee’s life experiences have taught him that Mandarin does not necessarily oppress Chinese topolects, and the latter may in certain situations oppress the former. These life experiences revise the frequent tendency in Sinophone studies to see Mandarin as the inevitable oppressor. As David Wang (2015, 11) reminds us,

if we only discuss the Sinophone’s resistance to Mandarin, we may overlook its complex time-based and place-based motivations, which move with the times. Language is not a simple carrier of political ideology; it is a social and cultural resource of “agency”.

In his multilingual creations, Namewee is skilled at mobilizing the cultural agency of various languages in order to carry out his governance. The one constant is his steadfast retention of the accent of his hometown. In 2017, Namewee released *Muar Mandarin 10th Anniversary Edition*,

adding new words and music to the song. In one section, he sings, “Although I have left my hometown, I have kept my accent. Said loud, this is Muar Mandarin”. This accented style, with its proud retention of his local accent, does not conform to the standards of Mandarin, but this has not prevented Namewee’s works from attaining trans-national, globalized reach. Instead, it helped him establish an artistic brand rich in local culture.

Namewee’s rap songs have gone international, winning popularity in the global Chinese music scene. In 2017, the rap song *Stranger in the North*, a duet with Wang Lee Hom with lyrics and music by Namewee, performed well in Chinese music charts across the world. It was also covered by singers of various ethnicities on the Internet. The song tells of someone wandering in Beijing, and features the Malaysian Namewee’s fast, driving rap alongside the Taiwanese American Wang Lee Hom’s soaring voice. It successfully penetrated the Mainland Chinese market. In the song, the “strangers in the North” refer to the scores of Chinese and foreign people who head to Beijing to pursue their dreams. Many of these are from the South, and bring their local accent with them: Malaysian Chinese, Africans, Latin Americans, Taiwanese, and Hong Kongers. Namewee’s rough Muar accent fuses seamlessly with Wang Lee Hom’s standard Taiwanese accent in this song, suggesting that the Chinese and foreign “strangers in the North” share the same excitement at China’s rise and misery at Beijing’s pollution despite having different accents, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Wang Lee Hom’s sonorous voice singing, “Like the dust, I’m drifting together with the wind. Who could bring me to fly high in the sky? I stood in Temple of Heaven and closed my eyes, praying for the peace of my family” is combined with Namewee’s litany of accusation and disappointment, implementing accent theory’s opposition to hegemony and oppression:

Standing here in Beijing, I was stomped with the pressures and almost breathless.
Walking on Qianmen Street, I still felt lost and not aligned with the public here.
Maybe I don’t belong here and have to leave. Enough with all this suffering,
please kill me heartlesslyIt’s the center of all dreams yet it is still out of
reach; It’s the holy land to reach your dream yet it’s so bewildering.

These two Chinese singers return to China, their ancestral home, only to sing of how they fundamentally do not belong there. This powerful feeling of incompatibility with one’s ancestral home is a criticism of the China-centrism of Chinese diaspora discourse. The song criticizes far more than the pollution of Beijing, referring also to a kind of transnational pollution created by the workings of globalized imperialist capitalism in the “workshop of the world”, built jointly by the Chinese Dream and the American Dream. *Strangers in the North*, just like Namewee’s other rap songs, is a profound expression of the home-seeking journeys, journeys of homelessness, or homecoming journeys suggested by accented theory, while also putting into practice the hope that a Sinophone work should not “succumb to nationalist and imperialist pressures, and allows for a multiply mediated and multidirectional critique” (Shih 2010, 47). Namewee’s songs create a unique accented style.

The rap song which made Namewee a controversial figure was *Negaraku*, meaning “I love my country”. This song borrows the melody and some Malay lyrics from the Malaysian national anthem and uses Malay lyrics interspersed with some crude Chinese. It satirizes the way that the *bumiputera* privileges accorded Malays have led to what Namewee perceives as Malay

hegemony and a lazy approach to life.³ This song successfully and vividly combines local Minnanese, Malay and Mandarin languages to embody a hybridized local colour, and thus does not fit with diaspora discourse. It was also accused of disrespecting the country, the Malay people, and Islam by the leader of the UMNO.

When Namewee uploaded *Negaraku* to YouTube, he was still studying in Taiwan. He decided to return to Malaysia to develop his career in 2008, and appealed on YouTube for sponsors to fund the budget of his documentary *I Want to Go Home*. He revealed that his marks when studying in Taiwan had not been good, and that it would take him six years to complete his bachelor's degree. He planned to take a month to return to Malaysia from Taiwan by sea and overland, passing through Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Kunming, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand and interviewing members of the Malaysian diaspora in each place. He would take their good wishes back to Merdeka Square in Kuala Lumpur in time for Malaysia's Independence Day celebrations. Both on and off screen, the film is a powerful manifestation of his against-diaspora journey home. The three major themes of accented cinema: home-seeking journeys, journeys of homelessness, and homecoming journeys are all found in Namewee's work.

Namewee's films are often themed around journeys and performances of identity, with *Nasi Lemak 2.0* being the most representative. The three major journeys of accented cinema all appear in this work. As Naficy argues,

these journeys are not just physical and territorial but are also deeply psychological and philosophical. Among the most important are journeys of identity...In the best of the accented films, identity is not a fixed essence but a process of becoming, even a performance of identity" (2001, 6).

Namewee's films often return to the topic of the protagonist's search for their identity, and the performance of various types of identity. *Nasi Lemak 2.0* is the most representative of these films.

In the film, Namewee plays the role of Huang Daxia (hereafter Huang). From a young age, he lives in fear, bullied by Malay hooligans. When he returns home after studying cookery in China, he opens a restaurant specializing in authentic Chinese cuisine. It does not do well and is soon facing bankruptcy. However, he is well-regarded by his neighbours because he has helped them fend off harassment from Malay hooligans and police officers. These episodes not only reflect the reality of government racism in Malaysia today, but also sketch out the lack of any sense of security among Chinese living on the peninsula.

To begin with, Huang looks down on the Malay woman Noor, who runs a coconut rice stand on the other side of the road; he claims that her food is unhygienic. One day, he gets into a conflict with Noor and discovers that she is proficient in Chinese martial arts. He also gets to know her Chinese adoptive niece Little K and is drawn into a business dispute involving a Chinese restaurant run by Little K's family. The owner of this restaurant, Gong Xifa, is betrayed by his sister Gong Xining, who ends up in control of the restaurant. His elderly mother Gong Laotai is in the United States, and returns to arrange a Chinese cookery contest to try and end the

dispute. Both sides must select one cook to take part in the contest, with the winner getting the restaurant. Little K asks Huang to cook for her father Gong Xifa; Gong Xining's cook is her Chinese lover Lanqiao. Lanqiao and Huang are both graduates of the same Chinese catering school in Mainland China, with Lanqiao graduating top of the class and Huang coming second. Meanwhile, Huang's own Chinese restaurant, in financial crisis, is taken over by Gong Xining and Lanqiao.

Already at his lowest ebb, Huang's Chinese diploma is not recognized by the Malaysian authorities, and he is left unable to find work. One day, he discovers that Noor's coconut rice is actually extremely delicious, and he secretly takes lessons from her. Noor hands him a map, and tells him to use it to find master chefs to study with. He visits Baba-Nyonya, Indian, and Malay masters in turn. With their instruction, Huang finally masters the secret of cooking coconut rice. On the day of the contest, Huang enters his coconut rice, but the judges all agree that it is not strictly Chinese food and disqualify him. Lanqiao thus wins the contest by default.

At that moment, Lanqiao's wife and daughter, who had been living in hiding in China, suddenly appear on the scene, revealing his adultery. His Malaysian lover Gong Xining is enraged and breaks up with him. Lanqiao eventually agrees to take his wife and daughter back to China. Huang's coconut rice wins unanimous praise after being tasted by the judges. Finally, he wins the heart of Little K.

The film is shot through with different foodstuffs acting as cultural symbols. Coconut rice, which Huang creates from the cooking of the three major ethnicities of Malaysia, serves as a symbol of Malaysian localization. Lanqiao's authentic Chinese food, meanwhile, symbolizes Sinification. The conflict between the two men thus appears as an opposition between these two tendencies, but it is more accurately seen as a conflict between "hybridity" and "authenticity". As Namewee explains in the DVD extras, coconut rice is not a purely Malay food. It combines ingredients from diverse local culinary traditions. The way it is cooked, like a curry, comes from Indians, while the sambal sauce comes from the Baba and Nyonya. This is why Huang must visit Baba-Nyonya and Indian masters; it also indicates that the localized coconut rice is born of a mixture of the raw ingredients of Chineseness, Indianness, and Malayness.

The film shows that Huang must abandon his original, "authentic" Sinified identity to be able to thrive in Malaysia and win the acceptance of people from all ethnicities. When Huang's restaurant folds, he goes to work at a fried noodle stand run by a local Chinese. The owner criticizes his food, saying that even a Bangladeshi could make better fried noodles than him: Huang does not understand how to stir-fry the noodles in dark soy sauce. Huang attempts to defend himself by saying that he was never taught how to do this in China, and that dark soy sauce is not available there. The owner, speaking Hakka, reprimands him by saying, "You say 'China, China' to everything. Now, I'm talking about localizing. You need to learn how to make things that local people like eating...". Later, during the contest, Huang claims that he has found his true self through making the coconut rice. After being disqualified, Huang's initial steps towards a localized identity seem to have led him nowhere. However, the film offers a dramatic solution by revealing Lanqiao's secret Chinese wife and daughter. Lanqiao's loyalty to his Malaysian lover is tested, and he finally chooses his original life. Lanqiao also dramatically takes off his chef's uniform to reveal a People's Liberation Army uniform underneath. This shows his

loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, and shows how loyalty in love is transferred to loyalty in politics. As a consequence, he can no longer take on the Gong restaurant in Malaysia. Significantly, it is Huang who does this, as a result of getting together with Little K. Huang's journey of localization is thus given fertile ground to develop.

The representation of the Malay characters also differs from previous Sinophone Malaysian films. There are three basic types of Malay characters. The first is those who represent the systemic racism of the Malaysian state, such as the police and the hooligans. They oppress the Chinese people in the film, and the director uses realist scenes to re-present the fear and harassment they cause to Chinese people. This type of Malay character is one often seen in contemporary Sinophone Malaysian film.

The second type represents normal Malay people. They have an understated way of dealing with the world, and are optimistic. They are also happy to get to know Chinese culture, as with Noor's knowledge of martial arts, and the Malay hero and his wife in the village who can recite Tang poetry in Chinese. Their Mandarin is so fluent that even Huang cannot keep up. The director uses symbols of Chineseness to highlight how certain Malay people understand Chinese culture far better than many Malaysian Chinese people, who only understand popular culture. Towards the end of the film, when Huang is learning how to make coconut rice, he takes part in Noor's martial arts class, further implying that localization is a bidirectional process. This type of Malay character is rarely seen in other Sinophone Malaysian films.

The third type of Malay character appears in Huang's dreams to symbolize Malay cultural heroes. For example, national hero Hang Tuah saves Huang from a Malay politician who calls for Chinese people to go back to China. The director uses montage and intertextual comic actions to dismantle Hang Tuah. First, he is played by an Indian actor, reminding us of doubts over whether Hang Tuah had purely Malay blood and mocking Malay attempts to "purify" his image. This is a veiled criticism of Malay infatuation with "indigeneity".⁴ This type of Malay character is even rarer in other Sinophone Malaysian films.

As Namewee first made his name in music, he is particularly skilled in using local voices and their rhythms to express various types of sound in order to strengthen the film's accented style. There are three types of sound in the cinema: speech, music, and sound effects (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 268). The characters in the film speak in a Malaysian Chinese topolect accent, intermixed with Malay. For example, "chile bao ni tiap tiap hari mau (Once you've eaten it, I guarantee you'll want it every day!)", and "diam la! (Shut up!)", a Fujianese phrase originating from Malay. In another subtle twist, the particle *le* 了 is also often read in a non-standard way as *liao*, a practice which serves to link utterances in a mixture of Hokkien and Mandarin. The director also makes liberal use of onomatopoeia to improve the rhythm of speech, along with the exclamation *walaowei* (Oh my god!), characteristic of Chinese people from the south of Malaysia. This highlights Namewee's background as a native of Muar.

The film has martial arts influences, and so sound design is crucial. At the start of the film, the young Huang is chased by Malay hooligans, and the Chinese residents of the street all slam their doors. The powerful sound of the slamming doors highlights Huang's predicament, while also revealing the fear and selfishness shown by Chinese people in the face of state failure.

He ducks on the ground, watching the hooligans charge towards him, when he hears a loud whooshing sound. The Malay hooligans escape, as the noise appears to be a sword. The source of the sound is actually a spatula used by a Chinese cook on the roadside. The mismatch between the soundtrack and the source of the sound highlights the power of cooking in the film. The cook, who speaks Teochew, then becomes Huang's master. He uses the spatula to teach Huang martial arts and cookery. When Huang grows up, he wields the spatula to fry rice inside the kitchen and to save his neighbours outside it. The whooshing sound becomes the audio theme of the film. This sound facilitates key turns in the plot, successfully taking over some narrative functions from the moving image. The director repeatedly plays with mismatches between the sound effect and the sound source for humorous effect.

The director also inserts rap songs into the film, which facilitate changes of scene or develop the plot. The theme song, *Rasa Sayang 2.0*, is a re-arrangement of a Malay folk song with new words in a mixture of Malaysian Chinese and Malay: "I love my country, you only have a home if you have a country ... don't wander around all over the place, go back to your hometown, one home, one dream, let's all sing together!". The first line of this song is identical to that of the song that landed him in legal trouble in 2007, *Negaraku*, creating an intertextual link. Similarly, the line "this country isn't as bad as you imagine- it's just that in the papers people talk nonsense", deconstructs the anti-patriotism of *Negaraku*. The song's call for everyone to return to Malaysia constitutes an against-diaspora declaration: a collage of mother language (*Huayu*) and national language (Malay) connects resonances between home and country, constructing a local sensibility in the listener. From the more contentious anti-nationalist sentiments of *Negaraku* to the against-diasporic mentality of one Malaysia discourse in *Rasa Sayang 2.0*, the titling of the latter song and of *Nasi Lemak 2.0* raise the issue of using a serialized or remade cultural identity. This demonstrates that cultural identity is a "production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1990, 222). Namewee does not fix Malaysian Chinese identity to Chineseness. Instead, he very openly remakes Malaysian Chinese identity, thus performing acculturation-a process of negotiation- with local national culture and the culture of other ethnicities.

In the DVD extras, Namewee states that *Nasi Lemak 2.0* is a Sinophone film designed to strengthen the national and communal identities of Malaysian Chinese people, while also being a film that can truly represent "one Malaysia".⁵ While this appears to be a reconciliation between Namewee and Malaysian nationalist ideology, it is actually part of his journey in finding a personal identity. The screening of *Nasi Lemak 2.0* saw pro-government Malay youths and NGOs demonstrate outside cinemas, publicly calling on the Malaysian government to ban the film. The leaders of the protest felt that Namewee should not criticize the government in a film. The yellow clothes that Huang wears throughout the film were taken to be a sign of support for the opposition *Bersih* movement;⁶ Namewee has publicly stated his support for *Bersih* on numerous occasions. *Nasi Lemak 2.0* repeatedly criticizes the governing party : a realist scene is used to attack unfair behaviour by government enforcement agents, and a psychological montage mocks an incident in which a Malay youth-group leader raised up a Malay *keris* dagger and shouted, "Long live the Malays!". The film was not banned in the end. The Malaysian prime minister even called a press conference in support of Namewee's efforts to reflect the "One Malaysia" ideal in his films, acknowledging the uniqueness of his approach (Najid 2011). The

implications of a film whose multilingual and creolized dialogue is less than 50 per cent Malay ultimately being given the rubber stamp of “One Malaysia” discourse represents a critical juncture in which Malaysian cinema is leading the way in refashioning Malaysia’s creative landscapes.⁷ Evidently, Namewee managed to successfully to adopt and perform the national discourse of “One Malaysia” in order to dissolve Malay racist discourse. He claimed that he redefined the term “One Malaysia” in the film, and that the true “One Malaysia” is one in which the culture of every ethnicity can interact and blend. Going beyond his Malaysian Chinese ethnic identity to approach the issue from his identity as a Malaysian citizen, he uses film and rap to express a citizen’s voice. This is also the voice of the local Sinophone. He agrees with the “acculturation” ideal of “One Malaysia”, but maintains a critical distance from its ultimate aim of ethnic assimilation. This is the frontier he has drawn in the localization of the against-diaspora.

Conclusion.

Accented film is global and local at the same time, existing “in chaotic semiautonomous pockets in symbiosis with the dominant and other alternative cinemas” (Naficy 2001, 19). The accented style of twenty-first-century Sinophone Malaysian culture is a product of the capital flows and cultural mosaic generated by globalized international capitalism, but is also rooted in the struggles and negotiations between local Sinophone culture and nationalism. Namewee has successfully updated the understanding that accented style can only be produced from exile/diaspora experience, demonstrating that against-diaspora experience and localization can also create an accented style. *Nasi Lemak 2.0*’s descriptive framework for Chinese-Malay relations is not limited to ethnic norms. It not only incorporates a localized discourse of “hybridity” in a criticism of the Sinification discourse of “authenticity”, but also skillfully appropriates nationalist discourse and the cultural resources of Chineseness to resist the presence of racism. Furthermore, it unmask the Malay myth of “indigeneity”. Borrowing from Malaysian Chinese accents and local musical creation, the film also constructs a Malaysian local sensibility, allowing fluid localness to transform into accented speech on screen, able to cross borders at will. Against-diaspora identity also contains the possibility of constant shifting and blending with the hybrid cultures of other ethnicities.

Namewee’s films and rap songs resist succumbing to nationalist ethos and engage in multidirectional critique. His works critique Malay nationalist *bumiputera* privileges, and also use accented style to deconstruct the Sinification discourse of “authenticity”. His successes demonstrate that Malaysian Chinese people can explore cultural fusion with other ethnicities without abandoning their own language and culture.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZXVhldk1fU>.

¹ Shih was describing the films of Hong Kong director Fruit Chan.

² Many thanks to the reviewer for this insight.

³ According to the Malaysian constitution, Malays have "bumiputera privileges", giving them a priority quota in state social welfare. After the 513 incident of ethnic violence, questioning of "ethnically sensitive" issues such as Malay special rights was prohibited, even within Parliament (Edmund and Jomo 1999, 22-23). For how the UMNO abused *bumiputera* privileges to gain business monopolies and enrich its upper ranks, see Edmund (1990, 9-179).

⁴ Many Malays believe that they are the original inhabitants of Malaysia. However, the Malays moved from Indochina to the Malaysian peninsula at some point in the Neolithic age (Husin 1981, 10). Many Malays currently living in Malaysia migrated from other parts of S.E. Asia, particularly Indonesia (Hwang 2003, 22). The true "indigenous people" of Malaysia are the *Orang Asli* in the Malay Peninsula, the Dayaks of Sarawak, and the various ethnic groups in Sabah. However, these groups have been marginalized by the Malay-led ideology of "bumiputeraism" (Zawawi 2013, 294-307).

⁵ "One Malaysia" is a slogan introduced by the prime minister Nazib Tun Razak in 2009 in support of ethnic unity. As the governing party lost its 2/3rds majority in the 2008 general election, it needed to appeal to minority ethnic voters. The slogan is based on the idea that no ethnicity should be marginalized.

⁶ Bersih supporters of all ethnicities wear yellow clothes on their marches. The movement demands reform of the Malaysian electoral system.

⁷ Many thanks to the reviewer for this insight.