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Capturing the Place:
Location Shooting, Medium and Politics
in Shaw Brothers' *Moonlight Serenade* (1967)

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In memory of Sir Run Run Shaw (1907-2014)
and Yen Chun (1917-1980)

For the Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited 邵氏兄弟(香港)有限公司,¹ the 1960s marks as a decade of the exploration of location shooting overseas. Location shooting refers the practice of filming on an existing locale. Unlike filming in studio in which soundstages or back lots are used, such a filming practice takes place in a less controllable environment in exchange for a physically and environmentally more genuine setting. Some scholars have noted how Shaw Brothers had invested much money to construct the Movietown in the 1960s, where film sets such as historic towns and villages were built for the shooting of film categories such as *huangmeidiao* 黃梅調 (opera drama) and *wuxia pian* 武俠片 (martial art).² A relatively less discussed practice is the studio's active exploration of different locations abroad for shooting in the late 1950s and the 1960s.³

In this paper, I would like to investigate Shaw Brothers' practice of location shooting in Taiwan in the mid-1960s by focusing on one of its films called *Moonlight*

¹ For the industrial history and relevant discussions of the studio, see Wong Ain-ling ed., *Shao shi dianying chutan* 邵氏電影初探 (The Shaw screen: a preliminary study; Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003), available in both English and Chinese; Liao Jinfeng et al. eds., *Shao shi yingshi diguo – wenhua Zhongguo de xianxiang* 邵氏影視帝國——文化中國的想像 (The film empire of Shaw Brothers – imagining the cultural China; Taipei: Maitian chubanshen, 2003); and Liu Hui and Fu Poshek eds., *Xianggang de “Zhongguo” Shao shi dianying* 香港的“中國”邵氏電影 (The “Chinese” films in Shaw, Hong Kong; Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2011).

² Located in Clear Water Bay, Hong Kong, the Shaw Brothers' Movietown was constructed in two different phases: from 1957 to 1961, and from 1964 to 1967. It had provided altogether twelve film studios, enabling simultaneous shooting of several films. See Chung Po-yin, “Xiongdi qiye de gongye zhuanbian – Shao shi xiongdi he Shao shi jigou” 兄弟企業的工業轉變——邵氏兄弟和邵氏機構 (The industrial transformation of the brotherly enterprise – the Shaw Brothers and Shaw organization), in Wong Ain-ling ed., 7; Chen Meiling, “Shao shi xiongdi zai Xingjiapo - er ling niandai zhi qishi niandai” 邵氏兄弟在新加坡——二零年代至七十年代 (Shaw Brothers in Singapore – the 1920s to the 1970s), in Liao Jinfeng et al. ed., 59; and Chung Po-yin, “Da pianchang xiao gushi: Daoyang He Menghua shuo Shao shi dianying de xingshuai” 大片廠小故事: 導演何夢華說邵氏電影的興衰 (Large studio, small story: director He Menghua telling the rise and fall of Shaw films), in Liu Hui and Fu Poshek eds., 108-9.

³ Liu Xiancheng is a one of the few scholars who has discussed Shaw Brother films shot on location in Taiwan. See his article, “Shao shi dianying zai Taiwan” 邵氏電影在台灣 (Shaw films in Taiwan), in Liao Jinfeng ed., 134-5. Another scholar is Law Kar, who has briefly discussed Shaw Brothers's practice of shooting overseas in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, in the 1950s and the 1960s, in his article, “Shao shi xiongdi de kua jie fazhan” 邵氏兄弟的跨界發展 (Transnational development of the Shaw Brothers), in Liao Jinfeng ed., 151-160.

Serenade 菁菁, directed by Yen Chun 嚴俊 (1917-1980) from 1965 to 1966, and released in Hong Kong in 1967. With a significant portion of the scenes captured on a hilly lawn located in the Kenting Park 墾丁公園 (renamed as the Kenting National Park 墾丁國家公園 in 1982) of Hengchun 恆春 in Taiwan, this film demonstrates a strategic use of a variety of cinematic techniques to capture the environmental and topographic features of the location as cinematic languages. Through interpreting the cinematic articulation of the place along with the film narrative, I examine how the practice of shooting overseas in this film has succeeded in renewing the filmic language of an old story. By further interpreting how the industrial practice of location shooting crossed with the politics of place on various levels within the decade, I argue how shooting overseas could mediate people's conception of place and nation, and could thus function as a political medium in the triangulated geopolitical context of Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China in the 1960s.

A. Short Overview of Shooting Overseas

Admittedly, shooting overseas has been a familiar practice in film industries around the world by the time when *Moonlight Serenade* was produced. Although a more extensive and in-depth research is needed, as for Hong Kong, filmography indicates that such a practice began as early as in the 1930s, when some of film studios registered in the city sought to produce films with locations shot in mainland China.⁴ Oftentimes, the abilities of shooting abroad reveals the business connections of a studio to film industries

⁴ A good example includes *The Lady from West Lake* 西湖女 (1937, the Grandview Film Company Limited 大觀聲片有限公司), which consists scenes shot at the West Lake in Hangzhou, China. See *Hong Kong Filmography*, v.1 1913-1941 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 1997), 149.

or markets across those regions.⁵ Some of the good examples include Shaw Brothers and its business rival, Motion Pictures & General Investment Company Limited (known as MP&GI) 國際電影懋業有限公司. With the headquarter located in Singapore in the 1950s, these two studios had produced several films with the story based and shot in southeast Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, in the late 1950s.⁶

As a film director, Yen Chun has also shot many of his films on location outside of the colonial city of Hong Kong. For instance, his film *Squadron 77* 七七敢死隊 (1965) has part of the battle scenes filmed in Taiwan.⁷ Another example from the same period is *That Man In Chang-an* 幪面大俠 (1967), which was partially shot on location in South Korea.⁸ Among these, *Moonlight Serenade* deserves a detailed study as it demonstrates a specific use of a variety of cinematic techniques to characterize the sense of place of the location along with the narrative. The function of and the extent to which this technique was employed is revealed if we compare it with a black-and-white Mandarin film called *Golden Phoenix* 金鳳 (1956), also directed by the director when he worked for Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studio 永華電影製片廠有限公司 a decade ago, as both films basically narrate the same story.

B. Remaking a Film by Relocating the Film Setting

Moonlight Serenade is a remake of *Golden Phoenix* in the mid-1960s. Produced by the same director, both films narrate the story of a young shepherdess whose love with

⁵ See Law Kar (2003), 151-170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 151-2.

⁷ *Xianggang yingpian daquan* 香港影片大全 (Hong Kong Filmography), v. 6 1965-1969 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2007), 59.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

a young man meets with difficulty. Part of the problem comes from the young man who is unable to forget his ex-lover, while the shepherdess is forced to marry a local wealth middle-aged man. Knowing that the elder brother of her “imposed fiancé” has raped a widow, the shepherdess uses it as a scandal to force the elder brother to cancel the engagement on the behalf of his younger brother. To safeguard one’s interest, the elder brother sends another man to menace the shepherdess to return him the evidence that can testify his crime. After a fierce running and fighting on the hill top, the brotherly-friend of the shepherdess loses his life in his attempt to save her.

While both films share the same story, the sequence of some plots and the setting in the remake are significantly altered. Among various modifications, one of the remarkable changes is the *tour de force* of putting together several previously separated chunks of dialogs into one single scene. As a result, in the remake, we come to learn about the family background of the shepherd girl, Jingjing 菁菁, as well as her meeting and dialogs with her beloved man, Weisheng 惠生, all in one scene.

Accompanying these changes is the revision of the setting of the film. The remake has significantly relocated some of these scenes from a manmade environment, such as the liquor house and streets, to a nature setting. As a result, a significant portion of the regulated building structures and spaces (figs. 1-2), which had characterized some settings in *Golden Phoenix*, was eliminated in the remake version. The senses of structural regularity and order no longer characterize the visual languages of the setting in the remake. Replacing them are the senses of natural spontaneity and wilderness of the hilly lawn, the green grasses and tree, the blue sky, captured in vibrant color and on the

wide screen rendered by the state-of-the-art technique known as Shawscope in the 1960s.⁹

Relocating the film setting from the studio to an outdoor environment may not be a casual decision. It could indeed involve a new range of technical, logistic and financial issues. One of the critical factors is the availability of and accessibility to an acceptable, if not an ideal, location. Admittedly, from 1963 to 1966, Shaw Brothers had established technical supporting teams in Taiwan to assist in handling issues related to location shooting there.¹⁰ Technically, location shooting demands the technical competency in mastering the lighting and sound reception outdoor as opposed to those used in a controlled environment in studio. Things can become more complicated when the shooting locations are situated far beyond the city border as it demands an additional budget to transport the whole production team from the studio to there, as well as providing the actors and the camera crew with accommodation and travel insurance. Considering the necessity of these factors when the decision of relocating a plot from the studio setting to a real locale was made, location shooting, particularly those that are crossing geographical borders like *Moonlight Serenade*, can become a financial and political problem in film production. In this context, one comes to question what such an overseas location may offer in reshaping the languages and meanings of the film.

⁹ See the technological advances adopted by Shaw Brothers in the late 1950s and the 1960s in Poshek Fu, "Cold War Politics and Hong Kong Mandarin Cinema," in *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, ed. Carlos Rojas and Eileen Cheng-yin Chow (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 121.

¹⁰ Liang Hai-chiang, "Hong Kong Cinema's 'Taiwan Factor'," in *Hong Kong Cinema Retrospective: Fifty Years of Electric Shadows*, ed. Law Kar (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1997), 153 and 159.

C. Cinematic Articulation of Location as Place

The hilly lawn in the Kenting Park in Taiwan functions more than an empty platform for human activities in *Moonlight Serenade*. Captured by a variety of cinematic techniques, including cinematography, staging action, editing and sound effect, it is represented as a natural site that bears the fullest sense of place on screen.

i. Cinematography

In terms of camera distance and angle, this film features the use of extreme long shot to shoot Jingjing's action on the green field (fig. 3). As the camera is placed far away from the figure, it shrinks her size in relation to the surrounding space within the frame. What is highlighted here is not the facial expression of the actress, but the graphic effect composed by her posture and the setting of the surrounding space. This shooting approach marks its difference from the use of relatively closer shots for the shepherdess called Jinfeng 金鳳 in *Golden Phoenix*, in which her facial expressions and gestures are usually captured in a greater detail (fig. 4). As the camera shrinks Jingjing's size in relationship to the green field in the remake, it creates a sense of natural wilderness and freedom at times rendered by a more flexible and liberated way of using body on site.

Obviously, *Moonlight Serenade* places more emphasis a more extreme way of using camera to capture the natural setting of the pasture compared to the 1950s version. Additionally, it frequently adopts a lower level and angle to redefine the spatial relations between the shepherdess and the site (fig. 3). These camera position and angle lower the ground level within the frame, and raise a greater portion of the actress's body to the sky. Consequently, the actress's body is directly juxtaposed with the blue sky. The tendency to highlight the sky in the remake contrasts sharply with *Golden Phoenix*, in which the

sky is not significantly featured due to a constant use of straight-on angle for shooting (fig. 4). With a more dynamical way of using camera, the remake turns the green lawn and the blue sky into significant visual components of the setting, and thus the mise-en-scène of the film.

ii. Staging action

Apart from a more dynamic use of cinematographic work, the technique of staging action on site also contributes to highlighting the notion of place on screen. Among the scenes that take place on the hill top, human actions are often staged around the patches of land that are visually accessible to a huge igneous rock erecting on site. This monolith is rocky in texture, and has a characteristic undulating profile on top. The camera further frames its spatial relationship with the actress and the actors, turning it into a recurrent topographic motif in four different scenes: in a beginning scene of Jingjing anxiously waiting for her Weisheng while grazing her sheep on the hill; the scene of her fearlessly confronting two local villains for their unscrupulous act of scaring her sheep with their rifles; the scene of Jingjing lonely grazing around the lawn; the final fighting scene between Weisheng, the Big Head 大頭 (Jingjing's brotherly friend), and Zhang Third 張三 (the villain sent by the wealthy man).

One may not immediately notice the excessive appearance of this piece of rock on screen. However, if we analyze the spatial choreography of the figures carefully, we will see that the rock was overly, if not arbitrarily, captured for multiple times on screen. For instance, in the scene of Jingjing waiting for Weisheng while grazing on the hill top, the rock is shot as sitting right behind the hill where the sheep stands. This suggests that the rock, the sheep (thus Jingjing's position), and the camera were aligned on the same axis.

Yet, upon hearing the echo of a whistle, which Jingjing suspects as signaling the arrival of her man, she runs to the other side of the hill. Paradoxically, she is confronted by the same piece of rock as she arrives at the other side of the hill (fig. 5a). The paradox of the spatial disorientation continues in the following series of shots, when the rock is presented again as the background of Jingjing when she returns to the original spot, and that of Weisheng when he appears on site. Clearly, the spatial orientation of and relationship between the rock and the patches of lawn where Jingjing grazes are not coherently presented. The idea of constructing a sense of spatial continuity through carefully positioning the actors and the camera, and editing, as characterized in many classical Hollywood films,¹¹ was not dogmatically pursued in the shooting of these scenes.

Paradoxically, the monolith enjoys high visibility no matter where the actress stands and moves to. It is frequently captured at the expense of the sense of spatial continuity of the scene. Such an approach of shooting reveals the cinematic interest of turning a topographic feature of the location into a recurrent motif in the film. In terms of its narrative function, it functions as a monument that accompanies Jingjing through her emotional fluctuations on her avenue of love, as well as through her confrontation with local villains. In this regard, the rock is not a random topographic feature on site; we cannot take its high visibility on screen for granted. Indeed, it is captured as a temporal marker of different stages of Jingjing's life, yet in the disguise of a *mise-en-scène*, a technique unnoticeable in *Golden Phoenix*.

iii. Creating a double vision

¹¹ See the analysis of the construction of spatial continuity through the use of the "180 degree system" in Hollywood films in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1997), 285-298.

In addition to its high frequency of appearing on screen, the rock also gains a stronger narrative function by serving as the object of common interest of both the actress and the audience. In the shot of Jingjing arriving at the other side of the hill, the camera captures her searching for her man from afar through an extreme long shot (fig. 5a). Suddenly, the camera pans right, framing the rock and its surrounding space in full for almost ten seconds (figs. 5b-c). This long take bears a duo function: first, it visualizes what Jingjing is looking at from a long distance away; second, it frames the landscape for the viewing of the spectator. With the rightward panning of the camera at the same level, the spectator is brought to examine the topographic conditions of the land as if he is physically standing there.

Such method of filming the lands overlaps the vision of Jingjing with that of the spectator. Not only does it capture the rock as a distant background on site, but also empowers it as a significant object of visual interest, both for the actress within the narrative and the watching experience of the spectator. For the protagonist, this is the first moment when she addresses the presence of the rock in full. As for the spectators, it offers them the opportunity to examine the layering effect of the fields and the monolith. This contributes to their understanding and perception of the location as a place exuberating a great sense of natural spontaneity and wilderness as opposed to the sense of artificiality rendered by film set.

iv. Auditory accentuation

Furthermore, the auditory dimension of this film also charges the rock with additional meanings. In the scene of Jingjing asking Weisheng why he always comes to a particular spot in the field to speechlessly gaze at the rock, the camera quickly pans along

her arm to the left to capture the rock in full (fig. 6a). The question “What were you doing?” posed by Jingjing sounds offscreen as the shot freezes the rock (fig. 6b).

Following that is a reverse-shot of Weisheng staring at the rock, and then the insertion of the shot that freezes the rock with the second part of Jingjing’s question “Tell me...” sounding offscreen (fig. 6b). The integrated use of shot/reverse-shot, and offscreen voice heightens the cinematic functions of the rock in the construction of both the filmic narrative and the viewing experience of the spectator. It charges the rock with the personal history and memory of both the female and male protagonists, as well as provoking the spectator’s curiosity of its narrative function in the film – again, a technique unexplored in *Golden Phoenix*.

v. Alluded site of violence

Lastly, the rock gains further cinematic weight by functioning as the alluded site where the final fighting takes place. In the scene of Zhang Third threatening Jingjing to give out the object that can testify to the crime of the wealthy man, the actions are again staged on the patch of land that is viewable to the rock. Again, this turns the rock into the background of Jingjing’s confrontation with him, as well as of the subsequent fighting scene between him, Weisheng, and the Big Head.

The rock functions more than just a backdrop of the fighting scene due to careful editing work. As the fighting scene on the lawn is promptly cut to another shot that captures the three men chasing and escaping on a slope, the rocky surface of the slope evokes mental associations of that site with the monolith. With the following long shots capturing the three men reaching the hill top that bears a characteristic undulating profile (fig. 7), it further enhances such a mental association of the fight as taking place on top of

that rock. Although we lack textual and iconographic evidence of whether the fight was really shot on the rock or on other hilly sites, the strategic use of staging actions, filming and editing constitutes the cinematic illusion of the rock as the theatrical site of violence. Consequently, the rock functions not only the object of visual and auditory interest, but it also actively invites the spectator to imagine it as the locale for the finale drama. It shapes and engages with the viewing and the reading experiences of the spectator.

Apparently, captured through a variety of cinematic techniques stated above, the location used in *Moonlight Serenade* is depicted as a spatial entity bearing the fullest sense of place. While the concept of place has changed over history, and has been interpreted differently in the field of cultural geography in the past few decades,¹² its usage here echoes what Edward Casey has argued that place is experienced by the body, and can be known to people in terms of its color, texture, and depth.¹³ In *Moonlight Serenade*, the location is presented as a hilly, open and grassy field sitting under the blue sky. As the environmental and topographic conditions of the location are substantially presented on screen, it is no longer presented as a passive platform that is subordinate to human actions as in *Golden Phoenix*. It is captured as a significant component of the *mise-en-scène*, a contestable cinematic language on screen.

¹² For instance, see Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976); and Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

¹³ Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: a Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 204.

D. Location as a Medium

The question that confronts us now is, as some cultural geographers has posed in their study of the representation of landscape in painting and map,¹⁴ what does it mean to feature a place in film? In the case of *Moonlight Serenade*, why did the filmmakers bother to employ a variety of cinematic techniques to engage with the environmental and topographic conditions of the location, to an extent that it actively restructures the filmic narrative and languages?

While the intentions behind such a filming approach remain unknown, we may consider a variety of contexts surrounding the production of this film. Indeed, in the mid-1960s, the practice of location shooting in Taiwan had been frequently adopted in many film productions of Shaw Brothers. When it comes to Yen Chun, such a filming practice took the function of shaping the filmic language of a story. For instance, in his film *Lady Jade Locket* 連瑣 (1967), it has a scene depicting the main character taking his ghostly female companion on a boat trip. Shot in and around a lake in Taiwan, the natural scenery there makes a stunning impression to the spectator versus those shot with film sets in studio.¹⁵ Additionally, *Mist Over Dream Lake* 寒煙翠 (1968), another film of Yen Chun produced around the same period, equally makes use of various locales around the Kenting Park as the location to structure the filmic language of the story.

Similar to *Moonlight Serenade*, *Mist Over Dream Lake* makes use of a variety of cinematic techniques to capture of the sense of place of the park in connection with human actions. In terms of cinematography, like *Moonlight Serenade*, it frequently

¹⁴ See Edward Casey, "Prologue: What Does It Mean to Represent Landscape?" in *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii-xviii.

¹⁵ Some of the outdoor scenes in this film were shot on location in Wulai 烏來 (northern Taiwan) and Chengcing Lake 澄清湖 (southern Taiwan). See *Xianggang yingpian daquan*, 166.

employs a long shot positioned from a low angle and level to capture the female protagonist, Yongwei 詠薇, running atop the hill. Such a shooting distance and angle charges the location with a sense of kinetic energy and freedom. Concerning the symbolic use of topographic feature there, the igneous rock that was significantly featured in *Moonlight Serenade* is equally captured as the monument of love in this film. Particularly in the middle portion of the film, a long shot is used to capture Yongwei standing speechlessly in front of the rock for almost seventeen seconds (fig. 8). With the non-diegetic use of the song *The Bitter Love Flower* 苦情花 as the background music, the rock is charged with an unspeakable sentiment of bitter love. Furthermore, in the following scene of her conversation about unobtainable love with her two friends, Lingxiao 凌霄 and Lingfeng 凌風, the rock is equally framed as the background of some of their personal monologs. Interestingly, the hilly setting of this scene remains a filmic invention, as in the original novel, this scene was intended to take place somewhere between the house of the host family and a stream instead.¹⁶ The final decision of situating it on the hilly land viewable to the rock in the film adaptation reveals the cinematic interesting of putting these topographic elements of Kenting Park on screen, and charging them with symbolic meanings. With the broadness and the hilly topographic conditions of the park captured along with the filmic narrative, the location is represented as a place that is intertwined with romance, sentiment and memory to an extent that is comparable to that of *Moonlight Serenade*.

¹⁶ Such a plot was a filmic invention as it was not depicted in the original novel. In the novel, Yongwei comes to talk to Lingxiao right after leaving the house of the host family before reaching a stream, making a sharp difference from the hilly setting in the film. See Chiung Yao, *Han-yan-cui* 寒煙翠 (Taipei: Huang guan zazhi she, 1966), 193.

Apart from a strategic use of cinematography and sound effect, the concept of spatial arbitrariness is also suggested in this film. Adapted from a novel written by Chiung Yao 瓊瑤 (b. 1938) in the early 1960s, this film features a story that supposedly takes place in a host family living around Puli 埔里, Nantou County 南投 in central Taiwan.¹⁷ In this story, the female protagonist Yongwei has come to discover and get involved in the intricate interpersonal relationships between people who live there and in the neighborhood. Logically, the places that she manages to visit should be located within the same region where her host family lives. Yet, as pointed out in a few articles published in *Southern Screen*, the monthly official magazine of Shaw Brothers, the film was indeed shot on a several locations in different parts of Taiwan, including the Kenting Ranch 墾丁牧場 (southern), the Chia-nan Irrigation System 嘉南大圳 (southwestern), Cheng Ching Lake 澄清湖 (southern), and Shihmen Reservoir 石門水庫 (northern).¹⁸ The use of numerous disconnected locations to film a story that supposedly happens around a single specific region creates a sense of spatial discontinuity and fragmentation to spectators who are familiar with the geography in the original novel. Even more ironically, as the igneous rock at the Kenting Park is viewable from where the host family lives, we come to realize that a majority of the story was indeed shot at the Kenting Ranch located in the south, instead of faithfully following the original location depicted in the novel by filming it in Puli in central Taiwan.

From this analysis, we can see that the concept of spatial continuity and truthfulness was not closely adhered when the novel was adopted into a film. What is

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 425.

¹⁸ “*Han-yan-cui waijing dagong gaocheng*” 寒煙翠外景大功告成 (Completion of location shooting for *Mist Over Dream Lake*), *Southern Screen*, no. 114, August, 1967, 50-53.

being pursued here instead is the cinematic interest of capturing an accessible and ideal location on screen. Oftentimes, Yen Chun, among other Shaw directors and filmmakers, sought to search for an ideal location overseas for filming.¹⁹ In this context, again, we can see that location functions more than an empty platform that is subordinate to human actions. It can indeed be a factor of decision in the process of film production, in which the film production team may exhaust their time and resources to select for the most appropriate, if not the ideal, location as the setting of the film. When captured through specific cinematic techniques, echoing what W.J.T Mitchell has argued for the function of filmic landscape,²⁰ the location can equally function as a medium due to its instrumental power of structuring the approach of acting and shooting a scene.

Certainly, we can equally see how location has operated as a cinematic medium in *Moonlight Serenade*. First, it contributes to the reordering of the sequence of plots in the narrative. Second, it invites the actress and actors to engage with the topographic conditions of the lands through reconfiguring their approach of acting and their way of using body, as well as instructing the cinematographers to position their camera at usual angles, levels and distances. Moreover, it provokes the spectator's interpretation and imagination of the symbolic function and meaning of the lands in the filmic narrative. Examining from the perspective of the agency of the location, we can see how it may function as a mediating agent that can significantly renew the filmic narrative and languages of an old story, as well as the viewing experience of the spectator.

¹⁹ See "Cong choubai dao shezhi: *Han-yan-cui de huiwei*" 從籌備到攝製: 寒煙翠的回味 (From preparation to filming: an aftertaste of *Mist Over Dream Lake*), *Xianggang yinghua* 香港影畫 (Hong Kong Movie News), no. 20 (August, 1967): 31.

²⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.

E. Taiwan: an “Alternative” China

Apparently, shooting overseas as a filmic practice can be a complicated problem for investigation on many levels. In addition to what has been discussed in this paper thus far, politically, it can equally function as a mediating agent as it crosses with the politics of the representation of place. Unlike some martial art films produced by Shaw Brothers in the 1960s that had downplayed the level of specificity in its time and space,²¹ many films on modern era bore a clear geographical reference to specific places or regions in mainland China. For instance, in Pan Lei 潘壘’s film *Downhill They Ride* 山賊 (1966), it is designated as a story taking place in northeastern China where the village people combat against the nomadic bandits invading from the north.²² Depicting a love story that happens at the time of the Second Sino-Japanese War in China, Doe Chin 陶秦’s *The Blue and the Black* 藍與黑 (1966) features a variety of war scenes taking place in a few battle sites such as Taihang Mountains 太行山, Mount Du 獨山, and the Yellow River 黃河 in China.²³

The practice of shooting overseas can become a political problem especially in the triangulated political relations between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China in the 1960s. On one hand, since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC),

²¹ For instance, *The Twin Swords* 鴛鴦劍俠 (1965), *Temple Of The Red Lotus* 江湖奇俠 (1965), *Come Drink With Me* 大醉俠 (1966), *The Sword And The Lute* 琴劍恩仇 (1967), *The Trail Of The Broken Blade* 斷腸劍 (1967), and *One-Armed Swordsman* 獨臂刀 (1967). Also see Fu Poshek, “Xiangxiang Zhongguo: Shao shi dianying” 想像中國: 邵氏電影 (Imagined China: Shaw films), in his edited volume (2011), 18; and He Siying, “Shao shi guodu shiqi de liang wei daoyan – Li Hanxiang he Zhang Che” 邵氏過渡時期的兩位導演——李翰祥和張徹 (Two directors in the transitional period of Shaw – Li Hanxiang and Zhang Che), in Wong Ain-ling ed., 97-99.

²² “Pan Lei takan *Shan-zei waijing*” 潘壘踏勘山賊外景 (Pan Lei searches for and examines the locations for *Downhill They Ride*), *Southern Screen*, no. 83, January, 1965, 134; *Xianggang yingpian daquan*, v.6, 69.

²³ “*Lan-yu-hei waijing dui di Tai*” 藍與黑外景隊抵台 (The location shooting team of *The Blue and the Black* arriving at Taiwan), *Southern Screen*, no. 91, September, 1965, 36-7.

sending film production teams to the mainland for location shooting had become even more difficult due to a stricter control of cultural interactions and the flow of capital between the colonial city of Hong Kong and the socialist PRC.²⁴ On the other hand, benefited by a variety of favorable economic and cultural policies, filming on location in Taiwan had become a tempting option or alternative for many film studios in Hong Kong.²⁵ For instance, in *Downhill They Ride*, the village that was supposedly situated in northeastern China was indeed shot on set constructed atop a snowy mountain in Taiwan.²⁶ In *The Blue and the Black*, some of the battle scenes that supposedly took place in China were indeed shot at Cheng Gong Hill 成功嶺, Shalu 沙鹿, and Daduxi 大肚溪 in Taiwan.²⁷ As a result, for many filmmakers in Hong Kong, Taiwan had become an alternative location for the construction of the “cinematic China” due to the availability of a broader range of terrains compared to what the small colonial city could offer. For the spectator who were informed of the locations used for the shooting of these films, Taiwan had come to function as the surrogate of the inaccessible China, their motherland, during the politically sensitive period across the strait.

Indeed, the concept of Taiwan as an alternative China was frequently articulated in *Southern Screen* in the 1960s. For instance, Kwan Shan 關山, the main actor in *The Blue and the Black*, uses the word “*zuguo*” 祖國 (the motherland) as the synonym of

²⁴ However, this is not entirely impossible. Some of the leftist film companies in Hong Kong, such as Xinlian 新聯, was able to film on location in Hangzhou, China, in the early 1960s. See Lee Sun Fung 李晨風's film, *So Siusiu* 蘇小小 (1962).

²⁵ Liu Xiancheng, 133-6.

²⁶ “Laolong gou beiguofengguang – sui *Shan-zei* waijing dui shidi cangan ji” 老龍溝北國風光——隨山賊外景隊實地參觀記 (The scenery of the northern land of Old Dragon Creek – visiting the location of *Downhill They Ride* with the location shooting team), *Southern Screen*, no. 88, June, 1965, 48.

²⁷ “*Lan-yu-hei* waijing dui di Tai” 藍與黑外景隊抵台 (The location shooting team of *The Blue and the Black* arriving at Taiwan),” *Southern Screen*, no. 91, September, 1965, 36-7.

Taiwan in his article published in the magazine.²⁸ This term has also become a synonym of Taiwan in many articles published the magazine that time. In this context, for Shaw Brothers, the concept of the “imagined China” operated not only through the construction of a “timeless China” in its majestic imperial time on screen in the 1950s and the 1960s as insightfully argued by some cinema scholars.²⁹ However, geopolitically within East Asia, it was also engendered through a cinematic appropriation of the territory of Taiwan as the surrogate of mainland China for location shooting.

The perception of Taiwan as an alternative China could have conveyed a more specific political meaning particularly in the case of *Moonlight Serenade*. While the film narrates a story taking place in a village located in Jiangnan area in southeastern China,³⁰ ironically it features the majority of its outdoor scenes filmed in the countryside of Taiwan. On screen, the geographical incongruity of the site of depiction and the site of shooting creates a relay for people to imagine the framed land as an alternative China. Coupled with shooting this place as the site of romance and freedom, where the actresses and actors can physically engage with the land freely without any physical confinement, Taiwan is shaped as a liberated territory versus the politically turbulent mainland China where the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) has just began when the film was released. As a result, location shooting in Taiwan is not a mere cinematic practice constituted through the entangled contexts of film industry, economy and politics. However, politically and culturally speaking, it had functioned as a mediating agent of the concept

²⁸ Kwan Shan, “Nanwang de yitian” 難忘的一天 (An unforgettable day), *Southern Screen*, no. 91, September, 1965, 38.

²⁹ Fu Poshek (2011), 17-18.

³⁰ This story takes place in town called Lanqiaozen 藍橋鎮 (the town of blue bridge) in Jiangnan, southeastern China. See “Yazhou yinghou Li Ching xinzuo *Jing-jing*” 亞洲影后李菁新作菁菁 (New work of Asian Best Actress Li Ching, *Moonlight Serenade*), *Southern Screen*, no. 92, October, 1965, 13.

of “the free China” during the politically sensitive period between the colonial city, the People’s Republic of China, and the Republic of China relocated to Taiwan, in the 1960s.

F. Medium of Territorial Promotion

As the location captured in *Moonlight Serenade* functions as a medium in renewing the visual language of an existing story and constituting the concept of “the free China” on screen, in reality, it co-joined the political climate of promoting the lands of Taiwan through different cultural media in the 1950s and the 1960s. For one thing, the igneous rock that was captured in the two films of Yen Chun is widely known as “the Big Pointed Hill” 大尖山 in the Kenting Park. Stretching 308 meters above sea level with a varying profile viewed from different angles (figs. 9a-d), it is considered as a distinctive landmark among other igneous rocks within the park (fig. 10).³¹ Through staging actions and scenes around this rock, these two films put the geological landmark of the Kenting Park on screen, and characterized it as the site of romance and freedom. The market strategy of releasing one film after the other one within several months further enhanced such a cultural discourse of the park as the site of personal liberation and romantic pursuit.³²

Such a cinematic promotion of the Kenting Park echoes with the political climate of promoting places in different cultural media in Taiwan at that time. While the phenomenon of publishing guidebooks and travel literature on Taiwan (formerly known as Formosa) in different languages in both Euro-America and China began as early as the

³¹ Lu Jiahuang, *Kending guojia gongyuan fengjing judian jianjie* 墾丁國家公園風景據點簡介 (An introduction to scenic spots in the Kenting National Park; Pingdong county: Kenting guojia gongyuan guanlichu, 1991) 46.

³² *Moonlight Serenade* was released on April 12, 1967, whereas *Mist Over Dream Lake* was released on January 5, 1968. See *Xianggang yingpian daquan*, 131 and 171.

first half of the twentieth century,³³ yet, in the mid-1950s and the 1960s, it witnessed the proliferation of the publication of these two types of materials in Chinese language in the territory of Taiwan. Among these, some publications specifically promoted the geographical knowledge of lands and landscapes in Taiwan,³⁴ while some specifically took mountains as the key subject of discussion.³⁵

The political discourse of land promotion was not only limited to textual media but was also sprawled to visual media. While the concept of the depiction of landscape has its own historical discourses and dynamics in art history, the 1950s and the 1960s witnessed the rise of the depiction of specific places among some ink painters in Taiwan. Some of the frequently depicted places in these works include Alishan Range 阿里山, Yushan 玉山 (literally jade mountain), Suhua Highway 蘇花公路, Cross-Island Highway 橫貫公路, and Sun Moon Lake 日月潭.³⁶ The depiction of these places in paintings echoes the phenomenon of capturing these locations in many Shaw Brothers films around that time. For instance, Alishan Range was featured in both *Mist Over Dream Lake*³⁷ and

³³ Some publications include Harry A. Franck, *Glimpses of Japan and Formosa* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924); José María Alvarez, *Formosa geográfica e históricamente considerada* (Taiwan geographically and historically considered; Barcelona: L. Gili, 1930); and Zhou Wende, *Taiwan jianwen lu* 台灣見聞錄 (Shanghai: Zhongguo kexue tushu yiqi gongsi, 1947).

³⁴ For instance, Guoli bianyi guan ed., *Taiwan dili* 台灣地理 (Geography of Taiwan; Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1958);

³⁵ For instance, see Cheng Zhaoxiong, *Taiwan shandi ji xing* 臺灣山地紀行 (Travel notes on mountains and lands in Taiwan; Taipei: Zhonghua wenhua chubanshiye weiyuanhui, 1956), which was officially published under the series of the “General Knowledge of Modern Nation.”

³⁶ Flora Li-tsui Fu, “Shijing shanshui yu jiangtu lunshu – qishi niandai yiqian Zhongguo dalu yu Taiwan de shanshuihua yu zhengzhi” 實景山水與疆土論述——七〇年代以前中國大陸與台灣的山水畫與政治意識” (Landscape Discourse and National Identity: Political Meanings in Representations of Specific Places in China and Taiwan 1911-1970s),” In *Chinese Culture Centenary* 中華文化百年論文集 1901-2000, ed. National Museum of History (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1999), 124.

³⁷ “Han-yan-cui waijing dui di tai, ji qi yipian ying xing rechao” 寒煙翠外景隊抵台，激起一片迎星熱潮 (The location team of *Mist Over Dream Lake* arrived in Taiwan, sparking a wave of star fever), *Southern Screen*, no. 113, July, 1967, 46-49.

Ho Meng-hua 何夢華's *The Monkey Goes West* 西遊記 (1966).³⁸ Cross-Island Highway was also captured in Ho's film.³⁹ Suhua Highway was also captured as a site in Pan Lei 潘壘's *Lovers' Rock* 情人石 (1964).⁴⁰ Sun Moon Lake was featured in Yuan Qiufeng 袁秋楓's *Songfest* 山歌姻緣 (1965).⁴¹

Examined from a marketing perspective, shooting overseas had become something so fashionable that the marketing department of Shaw Brothers had highlighted it as a selling point in the promotional materials of many films. Oftentimes, the geographic conditions of the location, the itinerary of the shooting, as well as the anecdotes or memoirs of those places written by the directors or the actors/actresses were published in *Southern Screen* months before the release of the films.⁴² In the case of articles related to *Moonlight Serenade* and *Mist Over Dream Lake*, the location of Kenting Park is often described as a beautiful and romantic place as if a mythical site in fairy-tale.⁴³ In this context, the Shaw Brothers industrial practice of shooting overseas co-joined the political climate of promoting lands in Taiwan in various discourses.

Interestingly, in terms of the aftereffect of this politically cultural phenomenon, more

³⁸ "Xi-you-ji baodao qujing" 西遊記寶島取景 (*The Monkey Goes West* seeking locations in Taiwan), *Southern Screen*, no. 88, June, 1965, 45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ "Cheng Pei-pei, Chiao Chuang, *Qing-ren-shi*" 鄭佩佩, 喬莊, 情人石 (*Lovers' Rock*), *Southern Screen*, no. 70, December, 1963, 54.

⁴¹ "Shan-ge-yin-yuan li Tu Chuan sheming jiu qinglang" 山歌姻緣裡杜娟捨命救情郎 (In *Songfest*, Tu Chuan desperately saves her love), *Southern Screen*, no. 68 (October, 1963): 54.

⁴² "Han-yan-cui waijing dui fangwen ji" 寒煙翠外景隊訪問記 (*Mist Over Dream Lake* on location), *Southern Screen*, no. 115, September, 1967, 56-59; "Shiqinghuayi de Han-yan-cui" 詩情畫意的寒煙翠 (The poetically beautiful *Mist Over Dream Lake*), *Southern Screen*, no. 116, October, 1967, 54-57.

⁴³ "Jing-jing waijing dui shilu" 菁菁外景隊實錄 (*Moonlight Serenade* goes on location), *Southern Screen*, no. 101, July, 1966, 76-77; "Jing-jing waijing meili ru hua. Li Jing Jin Feng de caoyuan qingge" 菁菁外景美麗如畫, 李菁金峯的草原情歌 (The picturesque location in *Moonlight Serenade*. The prairie love songs of Li Jing and Jin Feng), *Southern Screen*, no. 101, July, 1966, 76-7.

publications on the subject were published in Hong Kong in the 1970s.⁴⁴ As for the Kenting Park, it kept on receiving public attention, and was designated as the first national park in Taiwan in 1982.⁴⁵

G. Conclusion

Admittedly, as a film industrial practice, location shooting derives from the interest of seeking to capture a physically more genuine setting for the depiction of a narrative. Fundamentally, it frames a location as a platform where a plot can take place. However, as the filmmakers strategically capture the location through a variety of cinematic techniques, it can indeed render the site with a variety of cinematic effects, like the Kenting Park in *Moonlight Serenade*, through which the narrative and the filmic languages of an existing story can be restructured and renewed. The agency of location or place in film industry echoes what Franco Moretti has shown in his study on the atlas of European novel, that the choice of site or location can indeed be a literary device as it may shape or encourage the development of a kind of story.⁴⁶ Moreover, as shown in this paper, a location may instruct the ways of acting, shooting, and editing, through which the story can be tightened and thus become bounded to the location itself. Considering the multiplicity of the mediating powers of location, we can see that shooting outdoor is not a simple industrial practice simply at the service of constructing a narrative. Nor should we consider location as an empty platform where acting and filming take place.

⁴⁴ For instance, Jia Yifu, *Baodao jiyou* 寶島紀遊 (Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongguo bi hui, 1970); Rongmaoshusheng, *Taiwan xing* 台灣行 (Hong Kong: Huaqiao xinwen she, 1972).

⁴⁵ Lu Jiahuang, 2.

⁴⁶ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), 70.

Yet, it can indeed function as a medium through its multiple agency of instructing the approaches of acting, filming, interpreting, and imagining a story.

Politically, location shooting may likewise function as a medium by mediating people's conception of various spatial categories. In the mid-1960s, when mainland China was generally geographically inaccessible for film studios in Hong Kong for location shooting, filming in Taiwan had become an alternative, which in turn constituted the concepts of an "alternative" China and the surrogate motherland on screen.

Furthermore, through characterizing the use of these locations in publication materials, the Shaw Brothers's practice of location shooting in Taiwan co-joined the political climate of promoting land both within and outside Taiwan. In light of this, location shooting functions not simply as a way to create the backdrop of a film; however, it is cinematic medium that can actively reshape a filmic language, and can engage with people's perception of place and nation in the specific geopolitical context of Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan in the 1960s. Location shooting, especially those taking place abroad, is an unaddressed academic topic;⁴⁷ certainly it is also an amply malleable and revealing topic that deserves more scholarly attention in cinema study.

⁴⁷ Seemingly, the question of using locations in films, including in Hong Kong, is beginning to gain scholarly attention. See Linda Chiu-han Lai and Kinburley Wing-yee Choi eds., *World Film Locations: Hong Kong* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013). However, as a preliminary study, this book puts together and examines primarily films that were shot on location within the territory of Hong Kong, instead of framing it as a critical problem across the geopolitical context of East Asia for extensive studies.

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* The years listed below refer to the release year of the feature film.

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Squadron 77 七七敢死隊. Dir. Yen Chun 嚴俊. 1965.
Downhill They Ride 山賊. Dir. Pan Lei 潘壘. 1966.

Illustrations



Fig. 1 Yen Chun, *Golden Phoenix*, 1956. Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studio. Film still.



Fig. 2 Yen Chun, *Golden Phoenix*, 1956. Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studio. Film still.



Fig. 3 Yen Chun, *Moonlight Serenade*, 1967. Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited. Film still.



Fig. 4 Yen Chun, *Golden Phoenix*, 1956. Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studio. Film still.



a.



b.



c.

Fig. 5 Yen Chun, *Moonlight Serenade*, 1967. Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited. Film stills.



a.



b.

Fig. 6 Yen Chun, *Moonlight Serenade*, 1967. Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited. Film stills.



Fig. 7 Yen Chun, *Moonlight Serenade*, 1967. Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited. Film still.



Fig. 8 Yen Chun, *Mist Over Dream Lake*, 1968. Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) Limited. Film still.



Fig. 10a Big Point Hill (frontal view). Lu Jiahuang, 48.

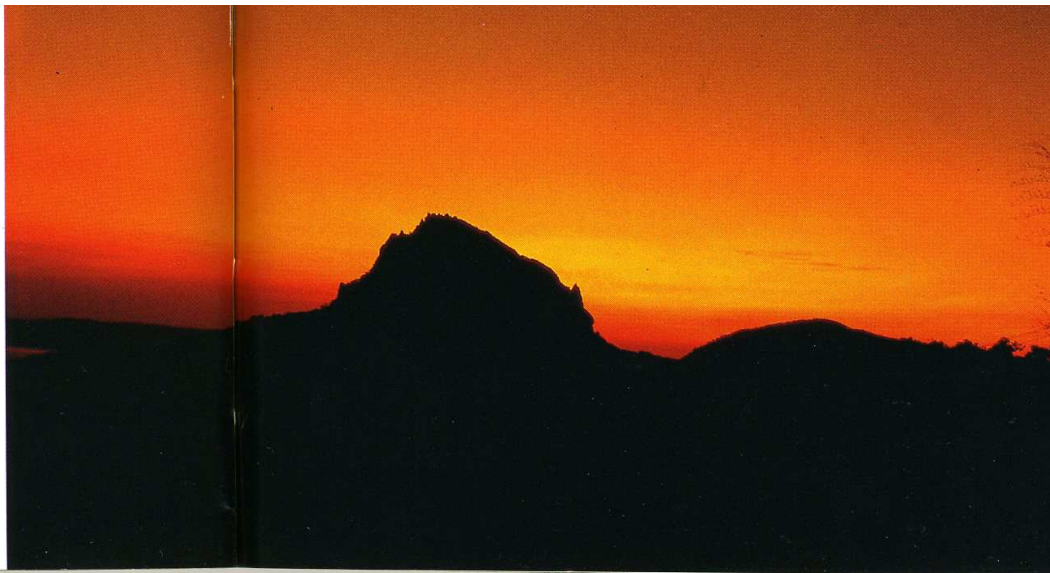


Fig. 10b Big Point Hill (back view). Lu Jiahuang, 46-7.

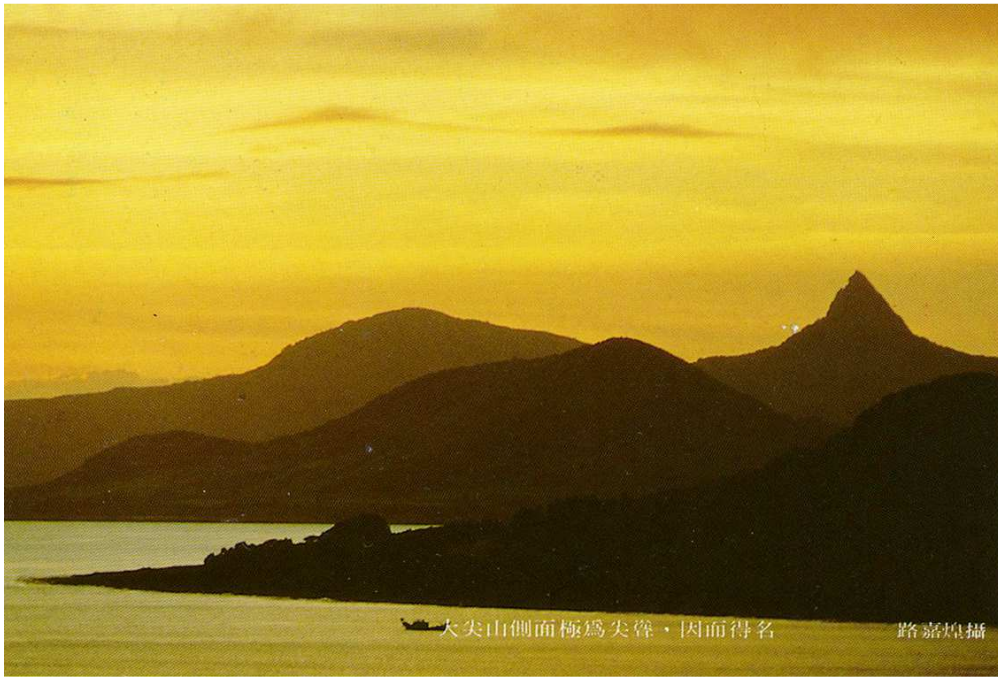


Fig. 10c Big Point Hill (side view). Lu Jiahuang, 48



Fig. 10d Big Point Hill (side view). Lu Jiahuang, 40.

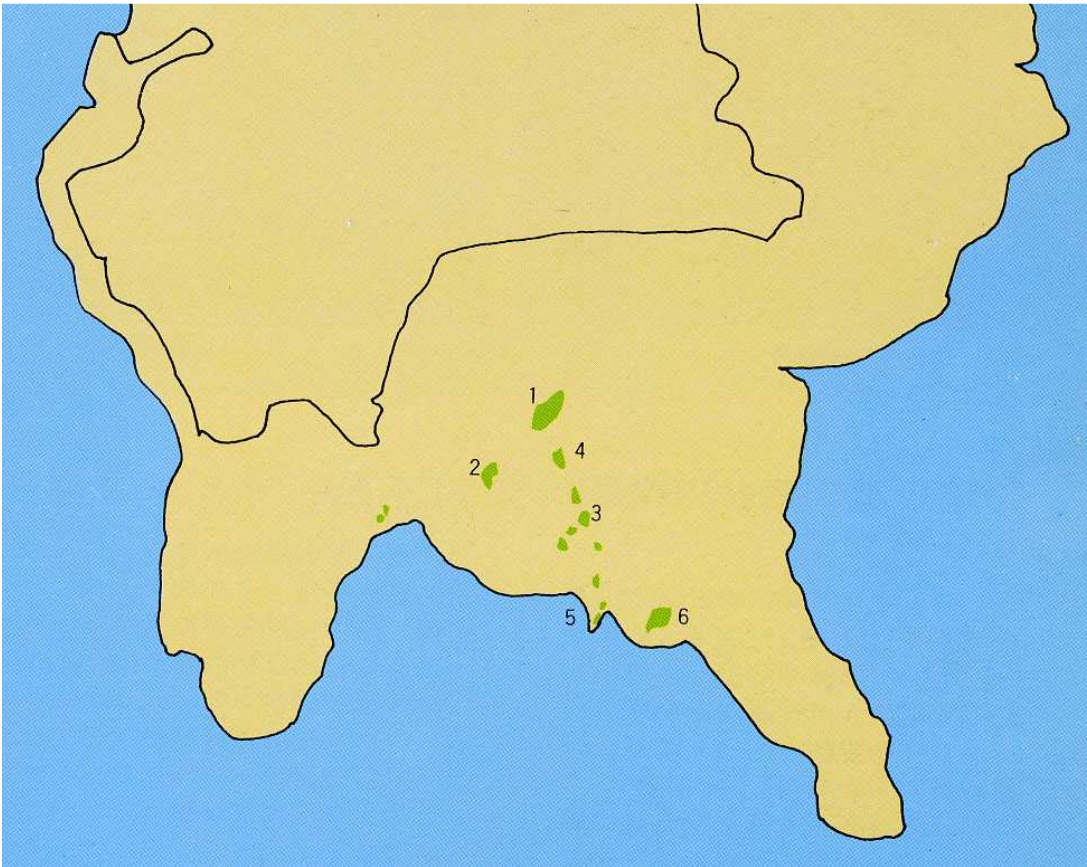


Fig. 10 Map showing the location of the Big Pointed Hill and other igneous rocks at the Kenting National Park. Lu Jiahuang, 49.

Legend

1. Menmaluo shan 門馬羅山
2. Dashan mu shan 大山母山 (Big hill principal hill)
- 3. Dajian shan 大尖山 (Big pointed hill)**
4. Xiaojian shan 小尖山 (Small pointed hill)
5. Qingwa shi 青蛙石 (Frog rock)
6. Dayuan shan 大圓山 (Big round hill)