Meet Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale

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I. Introduction

In recent three months, to see the movie Seediq Bale seems to become what most of the islanders in Taiwan should do. Many people, when they meet, must ask one another if they have seen Seediq Bale, a movie full of blood and tears. This movie is about aborigines’ struggling against the Japanese, narrating what really happened in Taiwanese history. Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale, directed by Wei Te-Sheng and produced by John Woo, is a Taiwanese historical drama epic film in 2011. The film is divided into two parts: The part one is called “The Flag of Sun” (太陽旗), and the part two is called “The Bridge of Rainbow” (彩虹橋). What the film Seediq Bale mainly represents is based on the Wushe Incident, which occurred in 1930 in Taiwan under the Japanese rule. After we see this movie, we think that the director, the actors, the underscore, or the plot in the whole movie can be praised in one word, namely, impressive!

Many people should be deeply touched after seeing this movie. No matter how good or bad the review of the film is, the director, the actors, and all the staff are really diligent to take a good movie. What impress us most are the meanings of the traditional culture behind the Seediq tattoo on the face and hunting heads, Mgaya (出草), in the part one of the film and the suicide of Ichirou (花崗一郎) and Jirou Mikage (花崗二郎) in the part two, which urge us to have the study in this essay.

II. Thesis

1. The cultural meaning of Seediq Tattoo and Mgaya

1.1 Seediq Tattoos

Since 1895, under the Japanese rule in Taiwan, the Seediq, one of the fourteen officially recognized aboriginal tribes of Taiwan, were forced to give up their faith and culture. Men had to labor arduously and give up traditional hunting; women had to do household work for the Japanese families and keep from traditional weaving work. Moreover, they were forbidden to tattoo on their faces. The tattoos were thought of as the Seediq traditional belief to convert themselves into Seediq Bale, literally “A Real Seediq or A Real Man”. (Wikipedia, 2011: November 1st)

What is “A Real Man”? Besides the human body, everyone has his soul, the spirit. For the Seediq people, the tattoo on the face represented the mark of the spirit. Not
everyone could have tattoos. If the Seediq wanted to have tattoos, girls would have to be good at weaving clothing, and boys would have to hunt and cut off their enemies' heads. (Wikipedia, 2011: September 3rd) Therefore, we think having tattoos should be regarded as a rite of passage, a ritual event that marks a person's progress from one status to another.

The Seediq people who had tattoos were to grow into adults, real persons, and could get married, and after death, they could be allowed to meet their ancestors. Therefore, this is sort of like eugenics; in other words, that is because boys having tattoos must be very clever, brave, and healthy, the same as the girls. Conversely, those who could not have tattoos would always be like children, never grow up and never get married. Although the Seediq people like that were still able to live in the tribe having shared resources, they would live without dignity. (Deng, 1998: 60) So, every man, in order to live with dignity, had to “Mgayaya”.

1.2 Mgaya (出草)

For Seediq aborigines, hunting heads, seemed like an exchange of life and soul under a fair circumstance. If one hunted the other’s head, the soul of the latter would become a part of the former and vice versa, which is like making friends with each other through their souls. The Han Chinese, different from the Seediq, killed enemies and then might hang the head of the dead on the beam for three days, try the best to insult the dead, and even cook human flesh to eat. However, the Seediq, after the head hunting, would take care of the dead, sincerely worship him, and let him drink, eat, or even smoke. (Wikipedia, 2011: October 16th) That is, the Seediq hunted the heads of their enemies because of the competition for survival but became friends with the dead they killed.

1.3 Rainbow Bridge: the bridge to meet ancestors

Rainbow in the film in Seediq language is Hakaw Utux, the bridge to meet
ancestors. Only the bravest warriors had earned the right to have their faces tattooed; what’s more, another significant meaning of tattoos for the Seediq people is to “have their souls guided over the Rainbow Bridge by their ancestors’ spirits when they die”. (Ivy Magazine, 2011: 12-13) However, during the period of Japanese rule in Taiwan, the Seediq tattoos were prohibited. No more tattoos, no more “Mgaya” either, not only means blocking the ties between the Seediq family and their ancestors, but also means the Japanese intention to domesticate the Seediq people, to wipe out the Seediq culture, and to transfer a hunting tribe into an agricultural one. However, in a society under the situation of multi-ethnic coexistence, different peoples should respect the culture of one another. Thus, that the Japanese do not respect the Seediq culture, we believe, is one of the main reasons that contribute to the tragedy of the two peoples.

2. The dilemma of the Seediq people

2.1 The racial and cultural conflicts

With the elaborate plot in this film, we are led to see an inevitable fighting resulting from irreconcilable conflicts. During the time when the Japanese ruled Taiwan, Wushe actually was considered a very progressive township, and people living there had more comfortable life than before. Therefore, in the uprising against the Japanese colonial rule, Ichirou (花崗一郎) and Jirou Mikage (花崗二郎) wondered why their tribe rebelled and whether it was not well under the Japanese rule. In fact, the life of the Seediq people maybe became more comfortable, but the important point is that the “ties” between the tribe and their ancestors disappeared; namely, their “roots” also disappeared. On the other hand, the Japanese might be angry at why they got such an outcome because their efforts were in vain after they spent so many resources there. Unavoidably, the racial and cultural conflicts of two races broke out.

2.2 The death of Ichirou (花崗一郎) and Jirou Mikage (花崗二郎)

Ichirou (花崗一郎) and Jirou Mikage (花崗二郎) were not brothers of the same blood. They were deliberately cultivated by the Japanese to be models of aboriginal children. There were many mountain cherry blossoms surrounding their residence; therefore, they were called Ichirou and Jirou Mikage. Both of them were the Seediq but became the “products” of the aboriginal policy, receiving Japanese education, wearing kimono, and were taught what so-called “civilization” should be like. Because they behaved outstandingly, they got good positions. Later because Wushe Incident happened, they were always struggling, trapped into the dilemma of facing
loyalty, disloyalty and morality. In the film, Mona Rudo asked Ichirou, “After you die, you are to enter the Japanese shrine or the home of Seediq ancestral spirits?”

Japanese highest moral integrity is “Giri” (義理), the samurai code of honor; the Seediq’s is “Gaya”, the inherent meaning of traditional culture, including the teachings of forefathers. When “Gaya” meets “Giri”, for Ichirou and Jirou Mikage, suicide is the only way to choose. (Yabu Syat, 2001: 31) Qiu Ruo-Long, a cultural and historical writer, said that Ichirou killed his wife and children, and then performed harakiri on himself. Their bodies lay side by side, like the Chinese word “川” . Over 20 of their tribespeople committed suicide by hanging themselves on Sukuradan (花崗山). (Qiu, 2011: 237-240)

When Wushe Incident happened, Ichirou and Jirou Mikage were really difficult to choose which side to stand on. For them both, their situation was really very contradictory. The director, Wei Te-sheng, said they were born Seediq but raised by the Japanese. When the birth mother and the adoptive mother had fights, their family fighting with benefactors, which side should they stand on? According to historical records, in Jirou Mikage’s quarters, before leaving, they left their suicide note. Not knowing where to go, at the end, they chose to end their own lives. Obing Tadao (高山初子), Jirou Mikage’s wife, told Deng Xiang-Yang, a historical writer, that Jirou Mikage, choosing suicide, died very “beautifully”. (Deng, 2000: 160-161) He was worthy of the respect of the Japanese, even more worthy of the honor of his family and compatriots. If he had chosen to rely on the Japanese or our compatriots, keeping alive like a coward, he would not live “beautifully”!

2.3 Survey Analysis

The method to carry out our study was using two questionnaires. The first questionnaire included a statement to which the respondents were expected to write down their opinion. The total number of the questionnaires sent out was 132. The respondents were all students in our school, St. Ignatius High School. Then, we concluded the respondents’ opinions into five points in the second questionnaire, in which another group of respondents, about 125, were expected to choose one point they also agreed with.

Our statement in the questionnaire is what your opinion is to the death of Ichirou (花崗一郎) and Jirou Mikage (花崗二郎) in this film and whether they had other choices. The five points we concluded from our respondents’ opinions are as follows:
Meet Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>opinion</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>They should take their wives and children to leave where they lived, leaving the dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>They should help the Japanese who educated them to cultivate their tribesmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Suicide is the best choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Others.</td>
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</table>

After seeing this movie, we feel deeply sorry for the death of Ichirou and Jirou Mikage. Therefore, we are eager to know if there is anyone like us wishing to change this tragic history. The above data shows that more than 70% of the respondents want to change the tragic outcome, believing suicide is not the only way to choose.

It is difficult to believe that Wushe Incident happened only 80 years ago from now. We, living in 2011, are not capable of placing ourselves in Ichirou and Jirou Mikage’s position to think about the situation they met in 1930. That’s why 10% of the respondents support the first opinion, the second one is 35% and the third one is 20%.

Besides the four points of opinions, we also get some other opinions from respondents. What impresses us most is that many respondents suggest Ichirou and Jirou Mikage be negotiators between the Seediq and the Japanese to persuade both to avoid the tragedy happening.
III. Conclusion

In fact, there is no political position inside this film, which mainly narrates the aborigines’ struggling against the Japanese. From this movie, we can feel the aborigines’ enthusiasm and their heart to protect their own homeland and the beauty of the nature. We not only can learn the traditional culture of the aborigines but can feel their helplessness to protect their culture as well. Going to see this movie, we can find what we will not learn from the textbooks. Therefore, we really recommend everybody see this movie from which we can understand more about the aboriginal culture and history. Most important of all, Taiwanese movies are reviving now, how can we not support them more?

IV. References

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4. Yabu Syat、許世楷、施正峰(2001)。霧社事件：台灣人的集體記憶。台北市: 前衛出版社。
5. 長春藤生活雜誌(2011)。賽德克．巴萊 Seediq Bale。9月號，12-13。
Dear respondents:

We are all eleventh graders in St. Ignatius Senior High School. This is a survey toward the movie Seediq Bale. Your valuable opinions will become an important basis of this study data. All your answers to the questionnaire will only be served as academic research purposes. Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.

Students: Huang Sheng-Hao
Shen Xin-Min
Ding Ming-Lun

I. Background information:

All our respondents will be students aged sixteen to eighteen who have seen the movie Seediq Bale.

II. Contents of the questionnaire:

Sheet 1

Please write down your opinion to the death of Ichirou (花崗一郎) and Jirou Mikage (花崗二郎) in this film and whether they had other choices.

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Thank you for your valuable opinions!
Sheet 2

The following five points are what we concluded from our respondents’ opinions. Please check the opinion you agree with most:

<table>
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Reasons: ________________________________________________________________
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Thank you for your valuable opinions!