

# Fragmentation And Displacement: Edwin's Accented Film Practice

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**Abstract:** This article aims to explore the sense of displacement and fragmentation evinced in the short films made in the post-Suharto's era by Chinese Indonesian independent filmmaker, Edwin. This emphasizes on the sense of dislocation and alienation arguably relates closely to his experience of growing up as Chinese in Indonesia during the New Order period (1966-1998). Under President Suharto's government from 1966 to 1998, Chinese Indonesians were placed in a state of uncertainty. In one sense, they were forced to assimilate to the indigenous culture, however, they were constantly reminded of their difference. This paper argues that Edwin's films are deeply informed by his personal biography as a Chinese Indonesian, but that this ethnic background appears indirectly, producing an 'accented' form of filmmaking. Edwin brings his own experiences of hybridity and 'in-betweenness' to bear on his filmmaking practice to produce more complex representations of Indonesian society. His upbringing in the socio-political context of the Suharto era, together with his membership of the archipelago's long-standing Chinese diasporic community, has contributed to his development as an 'accented' filmmaker.

**Index Terms:** Accented film practice, Chinese Indonesian filmmaker, fragmentation, displacement,

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Under President Suharto's government from 1966 to 1998, Chinese Indonesians were placed in a state of uncertainty. In one sense, they were forced to assimilate to the indigenous culture, however, they were constantly reminded of their difference, especially with the enforcement of the WNI label (foreign descendant Indonesian citizen), that distinguished them from their pribumi counterparts. The tension between the indigenous and Chinese Indonesian was at its zenith when large-scale riots broke out on 13 May 1998. The riots were primarily ignited by the onset of the Asian economic recession, which had caused the Indonesian economy to collapse earlier that year. Chinese Indonesians were targeted by the indigenous rioters, making them victims of the social unrest. Following this political and economic crisis, Suharto's government (1966-1998) was overthrown. When the Indonesian Presidency was assumed by Megawati Sukarnoputri, under her open and democratic administration, she subsequently restored all forms of Chineseness that had been suppressed for many decades. Since then, the expression of the Chinese language and Chinese press has been permissible in public and Chinese filmmaking begun to revive. Edwin, a Chinese Indonesian independent filmmaker, is perhaps one of the most prominent directors to emerge in the post-Suharto's era. His films rarely address Chinese themes directly; instead they are inflected by a more subtle treatment of the ideas of hybridity, displacement, alienation and the shifting role of family in contemporary Indonesian society. This article examines Edwin's early filmmaking career, the development of his unique cinematic style and some of his recurrent themes. It will argue that Edwin's films are deeply informed by his personal biography as a Chinese Indonesian, but that this ethnic background appears indirectly, producing an 'accented' form of filmmaking (Naficy, 2001). Edwin brings his own experiences of hybridity and 'in-betweenness' to bear on his filmmaking practice to produce more complex representations of Indonesian society. This article attempts to explore the sense of fragmentation and displacement that is evident in Edwin's short films. This emphasizes on dislocation and alienation arguably relates closely to his experience of growing up as Chinese in Indonesia during the New Order period. According to Gaik Cheng Khoo, historical and socio-political contexts are crucial to understanding the specific diasporic condition of Chinese South East Asian filmmakers,

as the complexity of their ethnic backgrounds deeply influence their filmmaking practice (2009, p. 69). In relation to Edwin, this article argues that his upbringing in the socio-political context of the Suharto era, together with his membership of the archipelago's long-standing Chinese diasporic community, has contributed to his development as an 'accented' filmmaker. More specifically, it will demonstrate how Edwin works, in what Hamid Naficy calls, an 'interstitial mode of production', a key condition of accented filmmaking. The discussion will begin with a brief summary of Edwin's biography as a filmmaker before turning to look more closely at the themes and aesthetics of his short films.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Accented Cinema

In his book, *Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), the Iranian-American film theorist, Hamid Naficy, sets out to describe a set of characteristics that define exilic, diasporic and post-colonial filmmaking. Naficy argues that "the accented style helps us to discover commonalities among exilic filmmakers that cut across gender, race, nationality and ethnicity, as well as across boundaries of national cinemas, genres and authorship" (Naficy 2001, 39). As well as highlighting a range of stylistic and thematic concerns shared by films from a range of contexts and backgrounds, Naficy places great emphasis on the conditions of production that give rise to the "accented mode". The following section thus aims to place Edwin's film practice within Naficy's "accented" cinema framework. It will argue that while Edwin rarely focalises themes or stories that relate directly to his ethnic Chinese background, his films nevertheless exhibit, what Naficy understands as, "structures of feeling", that speak not only to his hybrid identity and sense of in-betweenness, but also encode his cinematic practice in terms of the particular socio-political context in which he works. In this sense, Edwin's work engages with his complex identity formation, while simultaneously transcending the film's actual subject matter, granting it the border-crossing qualities that Naficy attributes to the accented mode. Given the emphasis placed by Naficy on production context, it is useful to first examine Edwin's production methods, which closely correlate with what Naficy calls the "interstitial mode of production." For Naficy, one of the defining aspects of

accented cinema is the extent to which this kind of filmmaking takes place outside or at the margins of commercial and industrial filmmaking, and refers not only to production but also distribution and consumption (Naficy, 2001, p. 40). Such filmmakers engage in production and distribution practices that are either “interstitial”, “artisanal” or “collective” and in turn, the films they produce give rise to alternate modes of consumption (Naficy, 2001, p. 40). Edwin’s filmmaking practice certainly shares many of the characteristics associated with the interstitial mode of production.

## 2.2 Identity and Self Inscription

Edwin was born in 1978 in Surabaya, East Java, to a Chinese Indonesian family. He has since established himself as one of the leading Indonesian independent filmmakers, working within the new wave mode. Edwin has focused his career on stylistic and visual experimentation, “testing boundaries as the country figures out just how liberated it wants to be since a dictatorship dissolved in 1998” (Sharkey, 2012). While Edwin came of age and commenced his filmmaking career in the period immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime, his early life was spent under the shadow of the dictatorship and the harsh policies imposed on ethnic minorities. Edwin has recalled his family’s experiences of discriminatory policies against Indonesians of ethnic Chinese background during the New Order period. He did not speak openly, however, about such marginalization until several years after the reformasi (Edwin, 2006). During the peak period of ethnic Chinese discrimination in Indonesia in the early 1990s, his father attempted to hide the family’s Chinese identity. It is likely that the single name, Edwin, used since a young age, may have also been a strategy employed by his parents to hide his Chinese identity. Most of Edwin’s short films were made when he was a film student at the Jakarta Arts Institute (Institut Kesenian Jakarta, IKJ). Aside from his formal education, Edwin also benefited from various initiatives designed to support young filmmakers. In 2005 he participated in the Asian Film Academy, organized by the Pusan Film Festival. The training at the Berlinale Talent Campus and Asian Film Academy exposed the young filmmaker to several prominent European and Asian filmmakers. These included Wim Wenders (Germany), Walter Salles (Brazil), Christopher Doyle (Hong Kong), Lee Chang-Dong (South Korea) and Hou Hsiao-Hsien (Taiwan). These training events significantly developed Edwin’s filmmaking skills and inspired him to embark on his first full-length feature film. Indeed, Edwin considers the *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) as the beginning of his commitment to filmmaking (Galatio, 2014). Edwin made several short films during his four years at film school, and in the years following. These received numerous international and domestic awards, and established him as a prominent, young Southeast Asian filmmaker. In 2002, his short film *A Very Slow Breakfast* - made during school break with his friends - opened the door to a filmmaking career. The film, which explores the loss of family values within modern society, was screened at least ten different international film festivals, including the Jakarta International Film Festival in 2003, the 7<sup>th</sup> Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival in 2003, the 9<sup>th</sup> Pusan International Film Festival in 2004 and the 30<sup>th</sup> Clermont Ferrand International Short Film Festival in 2007. After the making of *A Very Slow Breakfast* (which focused predominantly on contemporary issues), Edwin embarked on an experimental film based on a legendary folk tale. This

seven-minute short, *Dajang Soembi: The Woman Who Was Married To A Dog* (2005), is a black-and-white silent film that explores myths and social taboos via the folk tale of a princess. Like *A Very Slow Breakfast*, *Dajang Soembi* had a successful run at local and international film festivals. In 2004 it won 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize in the Short Film Competition at the Jakarta International Film Festival and was selected to screen at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2005, as part of the SEA Eyes program (a special section devoted to independent and new cinema in Southeast Asia). In the same year, Edwin directed *Kara: Daughter of A Tree* (2005), a film that critiques transnational capitalism and media. It was also screened at the 10<sup>th</sup> Pusan International Film Festival in South Korea in 2005 and was awarded the Best Short Film at the Film Festival Indonesia (FFI) in 2005. Edwin then continued his filmmaking career with the nine-minute short, *A Very Boring Conversation*, in 2006. This film tells the story of the relationship between a younger man and an older woman purely through the device of a simple dialogue. *A Very Boring Conversation* was screened at the 35<sup>th</sup> Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2006 and was awarded the Best Short Film at the Jogja Netpac Asian Film Festival in Yogyakarta in 2007. With a handful of critically acclaimed short films early in his filmmaking career, Edwin soon established himself as a prominent independent filmmaker. His particular sense of aesthetics led him to develop his own unique filmic style, while the thematic emphases of his short films went on to inform his feature filmmaking with the *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012).

## 3 RESEARCH METHOD

The primary goal of this research project is to investigate what constitutes short films made by Chinese Indonesian in contemporary Indonesia and to analyze the cultural and aesthetic significance of the films in the context of contemporary Indonesian filmmaking. In order to do this, practical and conceptual research methods have been employed. These have included: primary fieldwork designed to gain a deeper understanding of production practice and the close analysis of Edwin’s short films. This research employs the method of close-textual analysis to examine the themes, narrative structures aesthetic strategies in the films made by the Chinese Indonesian filmmakers, Edwin.

### Primary Research Data

The research conducted an in-depth interview with Edwin, the directors for the short films analysed in this article. Data collected from the interview help to provide better understanding of the short film, its thematic concerns as well as the mode of production exercised by the filmmaker.

### Secondary Research Data

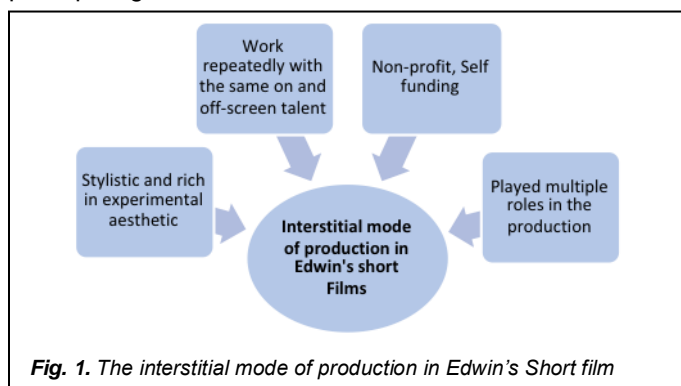
The secondary data for this research is from existing resources such film reviews, magazines, academic journals. A detail analysis on the short films directed and produced by Edwin is done to gain a better understanding of the stories, visual representation, and aesthetic strategies used.

## 4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Edwin’s Accented Mode of Production

According to Naficy, the interstitial mode of production is, variously supported by “rhizomatically interlinked independent,

nonprofit, political and ethno-religious organizations, and by a variety of mediating cultural institutions” (Naficy, 2001, p. 43). All of Edwin’s short films undoubtedly satisfy Naficy’s criterion. Figure 1 shows the interstitial mode of production in Edwin’s short films. His first few shorts were made during his time at film school on minimal budgets and Edwin has emphasized the non-profit ethos underpinning these films. For example, *A Very Slow Breakfast* was primarily funded by Edwin and his art director, and was also supported by the Kodak Student Filmmaker Program. Edwin contributed (USD) \$100 towards the production costs and his art director, Eros Eflin, injected (USD) \$150 to be used for set decoration (Edwin, 2006). Similarly, the film *Kara: Daughter of A Tree* (2005), which was written and directed by Edwin, was made with the filmmaker’s own savings, together with money contributed by members of the crew (Edwin, 2006). The production viability of Edwin’s short films also relied heavily upon the prizes and awards received from film competitions, the funds of which were then used to help finance his next film. In terms of production, Edwin’s short films certainly constitute an interstitial mode of production. Another important aspect of the interstitial mode of filmmaking, according to Naficy, is that of the “multifunctional and integrated” director (2001, p. 46). Filmmakers frequently play multiple roles including “producer, director, screenplay writer, editor, and sometimes on-camera talent and cinematographer” (p. 46). They are also often “involved in all phases of their films vertically, from preproduction financing to exhibition” (Naficy 2001, p. 46). Throughout his career, Edwin has played multiple roles in the production of his films. For example, he directed and edited *Dajang Soembi: A Women Who Married a Dog* (2004), he both wrote and directed *Kara: Daughter of A Tree* (2005), *Hullahoop Soundings* (2008), *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008), *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012) and his later short *Someone’s Wife in the Boat of Someone’s Husband* (2014). He wrote, produced and directed *A Very Boring Conversation* (2006), and he has also been directly involved in raising the funding for many of his films. By functioning in a variety of roles, the accented filmmaker is able to shape a film’s vision and aesthetic, and truly become its auteur. This is especially important as Edwin often develops an idea for a film from a single image, and loads his films with idiosyncratic symbolism that is inexplicable to newly participating team members



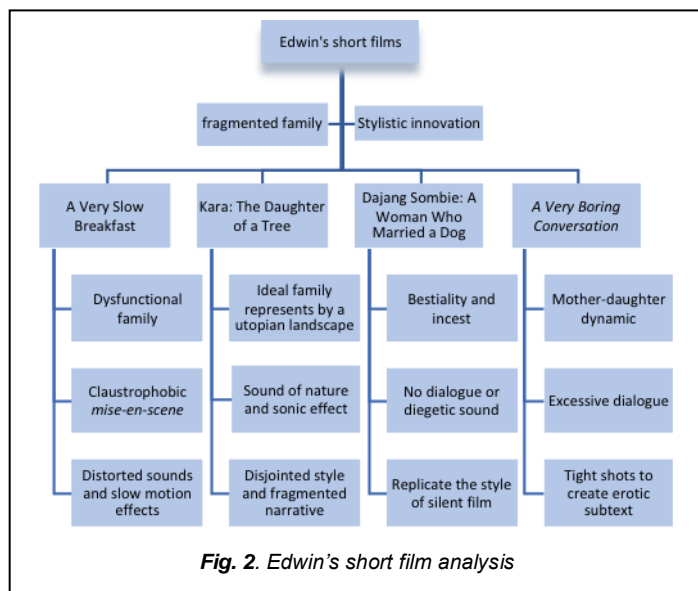
Accented filmmakers also tend to work repeatedly with the same on and off-screen talent over several films. This is linked to, what Naficy describes as, the “artisanal” nature of the interstitial mode of film production, where the film is privileged as an art form, before its commercial value (Naficy, 2001, p. 4). For example, in terms of on-screen talent, the Chinese

Indonesian actress, Ladya Cheryl, has appeared in five of Edwin’s films, including his two features. In addition to Edwin’s long-term collaboration with Ladya Cheryl, he has also frequently worked with the same off-screen talent. According to Naficy, this is an important feature of the interstitial mode of production. Together with engaging in multiple roles himself, employing a stable repertory of talent and production crew allows the accented filmmaker to maintain control over “the authorship and the cost of the projects” (Naficy, 2001, p. 37). Edwin certainly employs this strategy, allowing him to have executive control over the style and content of his films (Naficy, 2001, p. 37). In turn, this permits Edwin to inscribe more of his own personal history and obsessions into the films. Some of the key personnel who Edwin has enjoyed long-term working relationships with include Meiske Taurisa (producer), Sidi Salleh (cinematographer) and Herman Panca (editor). These key players have worked on most or all of Edwin’s shorts and features. The experiences they have shared and the close friendships they have established has allowed trust to be forged between Edwin and his production crew. It has also permitted the team to develop and establish artistic continuity and control. This is very important for the accented filmmaker, whose auteurist vision is a defining aspect of the stylistic and thematic dimension of their films. Another significant dimension of the interstitial mode of production lies in its critical potential. For Naficy, accented films take part in disrupting the hegemonic, industrial conditions of production. Stylistically, accented films also implicitly maintain “a powerful criticism of dominant film practices” (Naficy, 2001, p. 45). Naficy thus highlights the relationship between how a film is produced, and the stylistic, aesthetic and thematic aspects of its final production. For Naficy, the accented mode of production “encourages the development of an accented and deterritorialized style, which is driven by its own limitations, that is, by its smallness, imperfection, amateurishness, and lack of cinematic gloss (many of the films are low-tech shorts with extremely low budgets and small crews and casts)” (p. 45). In addition to these qualities of imperfection, such films are also characterised by their “textual richness” and “narrative inventiveness” (p. 45). It is possible to locate all of these characteristics in Edwin’s short films, as well as within his feature films. Even though *Postcards from The Zoo* displays a much more polished style, it still exhibits a rich and experimental aesthetic. In order to better understand the textual, narrative and thematic features of Edwin’s accented style, the next section will undertake a close analysis of some of his short films. These films, which were all made with very small budgets, are undoubtedly stylistically diverse. However, they are all connected by the following key features: the use of no or minimal dialogue, a preference for low-key or chiaroscuro lighting, abstract, oblique and partial framing of people and objects, distorted or amplified sounds, and associative montage. Edwin’s short films also tend to lack any clear plot structure or narrative progression, and they also resist the conventions of narrative realism. Instead, they hint at a story and gesture towards the social implications of such stories. In this sense, they mount a critique of and resistance to dominant modes of cinematic storytelling, tying them closely to Naficy’s characterisation of the accented mode. Thematically, the shorts are also linked in their continual return to the notion of the fragmented, disjointed or alienated family; a theme that stems from Edwin’s own experiences of his

familial relationships and those he observed around him growing up. Furthermore, this theme is linked in the short films to other forms of social disruption, usually as a result of capitalism. Once again, it is clear to see how the accented mode of production, and its inherent critique of industrial cinema, is emblematised by Edwin's oeuvre and his assessment of an increasingly consumer-oriented society. This article will now look more closely at these short films for their treatment of the fragmented family and Edwin's deployment of stylistic innovations in an accented mode. Thus, it is argued that Edwin's cinematic style in his short films is rooted in his own experience of his Chineseness, an issue that is widely perceived as an Indonesian "domestic" problem", known as "masalah Cina" or the "Chinese problem" (Hoon, 2006).

#### 4.2 Stylistic Innovation and The Fragmented Family

Edwin's short films revolve primarily around the theme of the family unit as a dysfunctional institution, as well as exploring sexuality and social trauma. Many of the issues depicted in the films derive indirectly from Edwin's own experiences of hybridity and in-betweenness as a Chinese Indonesian, and as such they also inform the aesthetic dimensions of Edwin's accented style. The filmmaker explained, "we are [as Chinese Indonesians] a minority because of everything that happened in [history]. To call it self-hatred would be too strong. Actually, we don't know how to be ourselves. It's an identity problem" (Rayns, 2008). This psychological state of in-betweenness has inspired many of the central themes that have developed in his short films. Figure 2 shows the themes and stylistic innovation in Edwin's short films.



*A Very Slow Breakfast* (2002) is a five-minute experimental short with no dialogue that explores a dysfunctional father-son relationship. The film is almost exclusively set in an apartment, shared by a father, a mother, a son and a daughter, who never speak and rarely acknowledge each other. The mother only appears very briefly as a silhouette. *A Very Slow Breakfast* is clearly a student work; a filmic exercise made when Edwin was still learning his craft (Galatio, 2014). As such it exhibits the imperfections common to the accented mode, but as a student work Edwin is able to take risks and experiment with innovative stylistic techniques. Edwin employs a number of strategies to create an atmosphere of estrangement that applies not only to the diegetic world of the characters, but also makes for a highly

estranged viewing experience. He has constructed a claustrophobic *mise-en-scène* reminiscent of German expressionist films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), by lowering part of the ceiling so that neither father nor son can fully sit up straight. This strange and uncomfortable mood is then intensified by a series of unusually framed extreme close-ups and canted mid-shots, together with amplified and distorted sounds and slow motion effects in some key shots. The film opens with an extreme close-up of a cup of black coffee, accompanied by an amplified scratching sound. Dandruff flakes then begin to drop in slow motion onto the surface of the black coffee. This is followed by a cut to a mid-shot to reveal the son scratching his head, the distorted scratching sound continues ensuring continuity from the previous shot. The film cuts back and forth several times between the two shots, before cutting to an over-the-shoulder shot, revealing the presence of the father sitting at the dining table reading the paper. His only acknowledgement of his son is a slow glance in his direction, revealing a look of disdain. Shots of the pair stooped under the unusually low ceiling serve to suggest a strained familial relationship. Eric Sasono suggests that the oblique staircase above the pair, which occupies a large portion of the screen, seems to place an enormous pressure on the family (Sasono, 2012). Clearly, the *mise en scène* creates a claustrophobic ambience, intensified by the *chiaroscuro* lighting, that comes from a single source. The atmosphere is one of suffocation and darkness that emphasizes the dysfunctional family, where money seems to be the only way for the apathetic father to communicate with his children. The amplified sound of the father lighting a cigarette, an action which is then mirrored by the son in a subsequent shot, while the daughter's workout video screeches uncomfortably in the background in a cartoon-like voice-over, creates, what Khoo describes as, the "social alienation of the urban capitalist family" (Khoo, 2010, p. 137). In the next shot the father can be seen framed between the legs of his daughter, an uncomfortably sexualized image that is, according to Khoo, suggestive of his incestuous affairs (Khoo 2010, p. 137). He then reaches over to the cup of coffee with the dandruff and swallows it down, as if to eliminate the problem of his son, before throwing down money for him. Similarly, there is no conversation between father and daughter; instead he merely gestures to the daughter to come over to him to receive money. Khoo reads this as an act of paying for sex (2012, p. 137). The mother, who is attending to a phone-call, passes by them, obscured by the darkness, implying her shadowy role in the patriarchal/familial hierarchy. Edwin claims, "I want to portray a family where the major authority is in the father, and [the] mother usually cannot do anything even [if] she knows that something bad is happening in her family" (Edwin, 2006). Through the use of these techniques audiences are exposed to the isolation and loneliness of each family member (Sasono, 2012). The filmmaker has suggested that *Breakfast* depicts a personal aspect of Edwin's own experience: "I've seen this kind of family in my childhood, in my own family" (Edwin, 2006). In Edwin's films, family is thus frequently depicted as a dysfunctional institution, where family members remain alienated and bound by their socio-economic roles. The theme of the fragmented family persistently pervades Edwin's short films. *Kara: The Daughter of a Tree* also addresses this issue via the reimagining of a folk tale. Like *Breakfast*, the story of *Kara* unfolds without dialogue. Instead, Edwin adopts ambient sound, the sounds of nature and other sonic effects to help tell the story. Edwin has said, "sound is very important [...], I only choose whether [I will concentrate] on the picture or the dialogue, I cannot concentrate on the two at the

same time" (Edwin, 2006). Kara opens with a montage of shots of the mesmerizing landscape of Mount Semeru where the film was shot. Sounds of a gentle breeze introduce audiences to the serenity of the setting, where a little girl, Kara, is born in a hut. Soon after she is born, we see an object fall from the sky, crashing through the ceiling of the small hut and killing the mother. After a series of shots depicting blood-splattered objects, drawings and a portrait of a woman, the film cuts to reveal that the object that has fallen from the sky, is a statue of Ronald McDonald, mascot of the fast food outlet. The image of the blood splattered Ronald McDonald, sitting next to the mother's dead body, in front of the crying baby (who is cradled in her father's arms) is darkly suggestive of the manner in which fast-food outlets have subsumed the role of parents. The film thus provides a searing critique of the influence of capitalism and globalization on the institution of the family. As Edwin has said "I [...] focus on [...] globalization and media exploitation" (Edwin, 2006), and this is certainly true for the story of Kara and her family. After this short introduction, the film then flashes forward to observe Kara at about eight years old, when her father also seems to have disappeared, suggesting that she has grown up alone. A photographer then abruptly appears and the clicking sounds of the camera's shutter dominates the soundtrack, and seems to trigger traumatic flashbacks to Kara's bloody entry into the world. The photographer, who is symbolic of the media, is represented as invasive and Kara is hostile towards him. After a brief interlude Kara is suddenly transported to a busy city, appearing in front of a McDonalds restaurant. To effect this transition, Edwin uses a hand-held shot moving across a grassy plain. The image is accompanied by the sounds of a film camera. The image then begins to spin rapidly, maintaining continuity of movement as the image changes from the countryside to the city, where Kara miraculously appears in front of the McDonalds. Kara then walks into the restaurant, where a child's birthday party is in progress. As this happens the point of view switches from a third person perspective, of a mid-shot following Kara from behind, to jerky and disjointed hand-held shots, some of which are upside down and are suggestive of Kara now carrying the camera herself and recording these images. This is interspersed with close-up shots of the little children looking directly at the camera and more general shots of Kara walking through the restaurant. The ticking sound of an old film camera is still ever-present in the sound track throughout this scene. Kara then approaches the statue of Ronald McDonald and begins beating it with a long machete and patrons turn to look in surprise at the girl's strange behavior. A woman gives her a drink, which seems to pacify her and she sits next to the statue, as the photographer appears and looks on. This is followed by a flashback to Kara's parents, sitting and walking serenely by a lake, her mother pregnant with Kara. The film ends on this shot, together with the return of the soundscape of the ticking film camera. The edges of the image begin to bleach out, as if we have reached the end of the film reel before cutting to the end credits. With this enigmatic short film, Edwin seems to be concerned with the hazards of cultural homogenization, a pervasive effect of global capitalism in Indonesian society, in which the media (signified by the photographer) plays an important role in reinforcing the power of consumer capitalism. This is part of a broader criticism of post-modernity, where familial-cultural roots are destroyed (represented by the death of the mother) and culture and identity are homogenized. The ideal family can only be temporarily represented by a utopian landscape, which is destroyed by the arrival of the fast food 'god' (emblemized via the life-size effigy of Ronald McDonald) which,

the film suggests, metaphorically invaded the nation in a violent, bloody manner. This thematic critique is supported by the film's disjointed style, a fragmented narrative that needs to be actively pieced together by the spectator. The consumption of western products has long been associated with the construction of Indonesian wealth and social class formation (Heryanto, 2005). Before 1990, as Ariel Heryanto claims, "the popular identification of the rich has been with Westerners and Chinese". (1999, p. 161) Although the Westerners are non-Indonesian, their 'superior' modernity, as represented in the media via advertisements, films and other forms of entertainment, is often privileged by Indonesians culturally. The Chinese of Indonesian decent, on the other hand, are labeled as non-indigenous but they are also considered the richest and most industrious community in the country (Heryanto, 2005). The wealthy in Indonesia, therefore, are associated with the "non-Asian, or non-indigenous, non-Muslims, and non-rakyat or non-citizen" (Heryanto, 2005, p. 163). After the 1990s, the Muslim elite constituted the new middle-class in Indonesia. With greater wealth, political patronage and thus more money in hand, the salient feature of the new middle class was their consumer culture and their idolization of western goods. Keniciro (2001) asserts, it was their consumptive lifestyle that stimulated the consumption of new products, and also the construction of new facilities in high-class shopping centers, condominiums, housing complexes, and fast food restaurants, making the new middle-class highly visible (Kenichiro, 2001, p. 482). Their emergence is closely related to the property boom and the expansion of shopping complexes in the 1990s. The presence of a Western fast-food restaurant, like McDonalds, is perceived as adding value to the location of the shopping mall, which is one of the main attractions for patrons. The fast food outlet was brought into Indonesia in 1991 by Bambang N. Racmadi, the son-in-law of the ex-state secretary (Kenichiro, 2001, p. 501). It became a major draw-card when it first opened in Sarinah Department Store in central Jakarta. Subsequently, the fast-food chain quickly proliferated into almost every new shopping mall in Indonesia. Edwin's Kara, made more than a decade after the burgeoning of the new-middle class in the 1990s and the trend of increasing demand for westernized goods, constructs a strong criticism of the power of capitalism and cultural root destruction. Yet the film also seems to suggest an additional critique of bourgeois hegemony (Heryanto, 2005) that indisputably links capitalism to the consumerism of the ruling classes. Edwin often represents a problematic dispute in his films, in the form of a fragmented visual motif. For example, in *A Very Slow Breakfast*, the issue of the family in a capitalist society, is represented by the extreme close-up of a cup of black coffee, that is progressively tainted by dandruff flakes. The dandruff can be understood as a kind of affliction, suffered by the son, but eventually gulped down (and thus made invisible) by the father. In *Kara: The Daughter of A Tree*, the invasion of transnational capitalism is represented by the bizarre image of the falling Ronald McDonald, that gruesomely murders the mother, only moments after giving birth and creates chaos. A similar visual symbolism operates in another of Edwin's short films, adapted from a peculiar folk story. *Dajang Sombie: A Woman Who Married a Dog* is based on the legend of Sangkoeriang. It is shot in black-and-white and, like Edwin's previous films, contains no dialogue. In terms of style and themes, the three short films form a loose trilogy, that together mount a damning critique of the family in contemporary Indonesian society. The legend of Sangkoeriang is an ancient myth of the Sundanese tribe in Indonesia. It tells the tale of the creation of various locations: Lake Bandung, Mount

Tangkuban Parahu and Mount Bu. In the film, the complex fable has been simplified to focus on three main characters – Dajang Sombie (the mother), Toemang (the father or human dog) and Sangkuriang (the son). Edwin places emphasis on the love story between the mother and the son, and thus embeds the film with a social allegory regarding Indonesian society. The filmmaker said, "I choose this [...] because [...] Indonesia has a very dark culture between the father, mother and son" (Edwin, 2006). If the previous two short films were about the devastating effect of modern capitalist society on the urban family, Dajang Soembie takes an ever darker perspective, also exploring bestiality and incest. This film functions as a pessimistic critique of Indonesian society. Dajang Soembie is presented in black-and-white and is a silent film, in the sense that it has no dialogue or diegetic sound. Set in the colonial period, the film recounts the tale of princess Dajang Sombie, who is deceived into marrying Toemang, a demi-god, who has taken the form of a dog. Their son, Sangkoeriang, who falls in love with his mother, kills Toemang as his jealousy grows. Stylistically, Dajang Soembie has been made to deliberately replicate the style of a film from the silent era. Edwin also uses intertitles and accompanying piano music to complete the effect. More specifically, the artificial and theatrical mise en scène, as well as the low key and chiaroscuro lighting pay homage to the German expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) (Khoo, 2010, p. 139). Edwin had first hinted at this stylistic influence with the angular ceiling in *A Very Slow Breakfast*. In as far as the German expressionists were also concerned with bringing folk tales to the screen, Edwin's stylistic choice seems not only innovative but highly appropriate. The filmmaker has explained that silent films made in Indonesia were made under Dutch rule, before Indonesia gained sovereignty. Thus Dajang Soembie is the first silent film in Indonesian cinematic history to be made by a local filmmaker. As with his previous shorts, Edwin deliberately disrupts dominant modes of film production and creates unique cinematic artefacts. Dajang Soembi opens with black and white still photographs of the princess Dajang Soembi and Toemang, a demi-god who takes the form of a dog. This is interspersed with intertitles that introduce the characters. Fitted in a white, colonial dress, posing like a beautiful goddess, Dajang Soembi is portrayed as a symbol of beauty, wealth and sensuality. However, as the intertitles state, her "wit matches not her beauty" (Khoo, 2010, p. 139). As a result, she is deceived into marrying the dog, who has been able to transform temporarily into a man, as indicated by a still photograph in the film. We see their son, Sankoeriang (10 years old), laying on the bed in the following scene. When Dajang Soembi approaches him to hunt for deer for her husband, he reluctantly complies. On his way out together with Toemang, he murmurs "she's only my mother". The mocking expression of the mother, posing languidly, while watching Toemang and Sangkoeriang depart, seems to suggest that she is in control of the men. Khoo relates this to her preference for acting in the role of lover, rather than that of a good mother, as exemplified in the scene where she is depicted as gratified when eating her husband's liver that is served to her by her son (2012, p. 139). Dajang Soembi's shirking of her familial duties, is reminiscent of the urban career woman (the mother) in *A Very Short Breakfast*, who is virtually absent from the film. The incest and patricide in Dajang Soembi, however, more explicitly challenges the moral and ethical mores of Indonesian society. During the hunting trip, for example, the conflict between the father and the son is intensified as reflected in their dialogue, when Toemang states "...she is my lover..." and Sangkoeriang responds "...she is his

boss...". The conflict comes to a point of crisis later when Sankoeriang is shown peeping at his mother while she takes a shower, the intertitles revealing his thoughts: "she will be my lover eternally...". Moments later Sangkoeriang sees Toemang flirting with a pretty wild boar (a woman wearing a mask with a snout), who Toemang claims is a god from heaven, cast into a boar. Sangkoeriang shouts that he is a liar and without hesitation the son kills his father with a spear and digs out his liver, to be served to his mother. Sangkoeriang's wicked expression and evil smile at the dining table, while watching his mother eating is shown in a high angle close-up shot, that emphasises his rebelliousness and vicious personality (Khoo, 2010, p. 139). Allegorically, Sangkoeriang's behaviour may be understood as the ultimate act of rebellion by a child from a broken family in contemporary Indonesian society. By adopting and re-working this legendary tale, Edwin yet again places his emphasis on the fragmented family unit that stems from "the rotten root of the family tree" (Jonathan, 2012). This theme of the fragmented family returns again in Edwin's next film, *A Very Boring Conversation* (2006) but in this production he instead examines a mother-daughter dynamic. The nine-minutes short film revolves around a dialogue between a fifty-year-old woman, who is having a conversation with her daughter's boyfriend, while listening to the music composed by her daughter on a CD. The film creates an erotic subtext via the dialogue between the two, the suggestive camera work and the music (Khoo, 2010, pp. 140-141). While the subject of family fragmentation is central to Edwin's short films, this pivotal theme also persists in the young filmmaker's first two feature films, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* and *Postcards from the Zoo*.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Edwin's films rarely directly represent Chinese stories or themes. However, he consciously crafts stories that derive from or reflect the intricacies of his Chinese Indonesian background, his experience of cultural hybridity and the social-political context of Indonesia. His films tend to inscribe his biography in a subtle and implied way, rather than being an overt portrayal of his personal history. Even when Edwin turns to more explicitly Chinese-themed material, this remains the case. Such an approach imbues his films with cinematic, rather than linguistic, "accents." Edwin's ethnic status and state of liminality, informed by the long-term displacement and erasure of Chinese identity in Indonesian society, are registered as a kind of "lostness" (Naficy, 2001, p. 33) or "longing for something lost".

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