

Film Review

Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale (2011)

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Although the Taiwanese period drama *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* can be seen as a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of Taiwan's historical and cultural dynamics, viewed through a Chinese lens. Yet it is similar to the Kuki resistance against British imperialism in Northeast India, commonly called Anglo-Kuki war.¹ The movie's themes of cultural clash, identity, and resistance resonate with the experiences of many ethnic and indigenous groups in China and highlight the ongoing challenges of building a diverse and inclusive society for a region dominated mainly by a mono-ethnic culture and people.

Directed by Wei Te-Sheng, The film is based on the 1930 Wushe Incident, a rebellion led by the Seediq tribe against Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan. The movie tells the story of the Seediq tribe's struggle for independence and their eventual defeat at the hands of the Japanese colonial government. In this analysis, I will look at the movie's characters, narratives, and historical themes.

The Boar and the Rising Sun: A Character Study

The movie revolves around the character of Mouna Rudo, played by Lin Ching-Tai. He is the tribal leader of the Seediq people and the driving force behind the rebellion against the Japanese. Mouna Rudo is a complex character, torn between his desire to protect his people and his understanding of the futility of their fight against a powerful colonial force. He is a tragic hero who sacrifices everything for his people, including his own life.

Another important character in the movie is the Japanese Governor, played by Akira Hibino. He is portrayed as a ruthless and uncompromising leader who sees the Seediq people as inferior and believes that they must be brought under Japanese control. Hibino's character represents the cruelty and inhumanity of the Japanese colonial regime.

In addition to Mouna Rudo and the Japanese Governor, there are several other essential characters in *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*. Each symbol represents different aspects of the historical context and cultural conflicts that shape the story.

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One of the central supporting characters is Mona Rudao, played by Da Ching. Mona Rudao is Mouna Rudo's uncle and a respected warrior within the Seediq tribe. He is initially opposed to the rebellion, arguing that it is a futile and suicidal mission that will only lead to the destruction of their people. However, after witnessing the brutality of the Japanese colonial regime and the mistreatment of the Seediq people, he changes his mind and becomes one of the rebellion's leaders. Mona Rudao represents the complexity of the Seediq people's decision-making process and the difficult choices they faced in resisting colonialism.

Another important character is Tado Mona, played by Vivian Hsu. Tado Mona is a Seediq woman who becomes a messenger and spy for the rebellion. She infiltrates the Japanese army and provides crucial intelligence to the Seediq leaders. Tado Mona represents the role of women in the Seediq community and their contributions to the rebellion.

The Japanese characters in the movie are also portrayed with complexity and nuance. In addition to the Governor, some several other Japanese officials and soldiers play essential roles in the story. Some of them are depicted as sympathetic to the Seediq people and conflicted about their role in the colonial regime. For example, Higashiyama, played by Masanobu Ando, is a Japanese official who is sympathetic to the Seediq cause and helps them during the rebellion. The movie's inclusion of sympathetic Japanese characters reflects the complex historical relationship between the Seediq people and the Japanese colonial government.

To encapsulate the study overall, the characters in *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* are multi-dimensional and reflect the complexity of the historical events depicted in the movie. The various character illustrate the problematic choices and conflicts faced by the Seediq people and the Japanese colonial government and the tragic consequences of their actions.

A Critical Narrative on the Soul of the Rainbow

The movie is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on the Seediq people's way of life and their struggle against the Japanese colonial government's policies, and the second part is about the rebellion itself. The film employs a non-linear narrative style, with flashbacks and dream sequences that add depth to the characters and provide insight into their motivations. One of the movie's central themes is the clash between different cultures and values of the diverse tribes. The Seediq people's traditional way of life and their connection to the land are at odds with the Japanese colonial government's desire for modernization and progress. The movie also explores the theme of identity, as the Seediq people struggle to maintain their cultural identity in the face of Japanese colonialism.

From a Chinese perspective, the movie can be seen as a commentary on the history of Chinese imperialism and its impact on Taiwan. The Sinofication of the island of Formosa which was populated by tribal societies of Austro-Asiatic descent is neatly hidden away in the narrative about the Japanese colonial ambitions. The movie portrays the Seediq people as a marginalized and oppressed community, struggling to maintain their cultural identity and sovereignty in the face of Japanese colonialism. This can

can be seen as a reflection of the experiences of many ethnic and indigenous groups in China, who have faced similar challenges throughout history.

The non-linear narrative style of the movie, with its use of flashbacks and dream sequences, adds depth to the characters and provides insight into their motivations. This approach can be seen as a reflection of the traditional Chinese storytelling technique of using multiple perspectives to create a complex and layered narrative. At the same time, the movie's portrayal of the Seediq people as primitive and uncivilized has been criticized by some Chinese critics as reinforcing negative stereotypes of indigenous groups. This criticism reflects the ongoing debate in China over how to balance the preservation of ethnic and cultural diversity with the need for national unity and modernization.

The Historical Significance of the Wushe Incident

The Wushe Incident was a significant event in Taiwan's history and represented a turning point in the relationship between the Seediq people and the Japanese colonial government. This may seemingly appear for the Anglo-Kuki war incidents of Mombi (lonpi), which subsequently drew the attention of all the Kuki Brethern in all the dominated areas and took an oath of loyalty to the tribes by *sajam lhah*. The movie accurately portrays the brutality of the Japanese colonial regime and the oppression faced by the Seediq people. It also highlights the resilience and bravery of the Seediq people in their fight for independence. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, the movie sheds light on the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing struggles for self-determination and cultural identity.

One of the key historical themes of the movie is the impact of Japanese colonialism on the Seediq people and their struggle for independence. The movie portrays the Seediq as a people who are deeply attached to their cultural traditions and way of life, and who are fiercely determined to resist the Japanese colonial regime that seeks to assimilate them. Through their rebellion, the Seediq challenge the legitimacy of Japanese colonialism and assert their right to self-determination and autonomy.

The movie also highlights the violence and brutality of colonialism and its impact on indigenous communities. The Japanese colonial government is depicted as ruthless and oppressive, using violence and force to subjugate and control the Seediq people. The movie portrays the atrocities committed by the Japanese army against the Seediq people, including the use of chemical weapons and the mass execution of Seediq warriors very similar to that of what the Nazi regime would do to Jews in the Holocaust some 15 years later. Through these depictions, the movie underscores the devastating effects of colonialism on the lives and well-being of indigenous peoples.

Another important historical theme of the movie is the role of cultural identity in resistance and liberation struggles. The Seediq people's rebellion is rooted in their attachment to their cultural traditions and their determination to defend their way of life against the forces of colonialism. Through their struggle, the Seediqs assert the importance of cultural identity in the face of cultural assimilation and colonization. At the same time, the movie also raises important questions about the politics of identity within marginalized communities. The movie portrays the Seediq people as a diverse and complex community, with different ideas and perspectives on the

rebellion and its goals. This complexity underscores the challenges of building a collective identity and political movement within a diverse and heterogeneous community.

The movie also contains several feminist themes that are imperative to the story and are expressed through the portrayal of female characters and their roles in the rebellion against Japanese colonialism. One of the most prominent feminist themes in the movie is the importance of women's agency and contributions to the struggle for justice and freedom. The movie depicts several female characters, such as Tado Mona, who take on key roles in the rebellion, serving as messengers and spies for the Seediq leaders. Their bravery and determination to resist colonialism challenges traditional gender roles and underscores the importance of women's involvement in political struggles.

Another feminist theme in the movie is the impact of colonialism on women's lives and bodies. The movie portrays the rape and sexual exploitation of Seediq women by Japanese soldiers, highlighting the devastating effects of colonial violence on women's physical and psychological well-being. This theme speaks to broader feminist concerns about the intersection of gender and power in colonial contexts and the need to address the long-term effects of colonialism on women's lives.

The movie also touches on the theme of gender inequality within Seediq society. Despite their important contributions to the rebellion, women are depicted as facing limitations on their roles and opportunities within Seediq culture. This theme highlights the need to address gender inequalities within marginalized communities, even as they fight against external oppression.

On a more pragmatic note, some historians and critics have criticized the movie's portrayal of the rebellion as overly simplistic and romanticized. The movie presents the rebellion as a heroic struggle for independence, without fully exploring the complex political and social factors that led to the uprising. Additionally, the movie has been criticized for its stereotypical portrayal of the Seediq people as primitive and uncivilized.

Conclusion

The film was shown in competition at the 68th Venice International Film Festival and was selected as a contender for nomination for the 84th Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film in 2011. It was one of nine films shortlisted to advance to the next round of voting for nomination. The movie was also released in mainland China and received mixed reactions from Chinese audiences.

Thus a retrospective analysis of *The Warriors of the Rainbow* and the Anglo-Kuki war, some Chinese audiences praised the movie for its stunning visuals, epic storytelling, and powerful themes of resistance and identity. They appreciated the movie's portrayal of the Seediq people's rebellion against colonialism and its exploration of the complexities of cultural identity and tradition. Likewise, as regards to the Anglo-Kuki war, intellectuals from all over the world, be it Indian or abroad, appreciated the forces of resistance put up by all the Kuki tribes stretching across Burma-India and Chittagong hill tract (now in Bangladesh), which was essentially in

defence of their ancestral land and hunting grounds.

On the other hand, some Chinese audiences criticized the movie for its portrayal of the Japanese colonial government and its use of violence against the Seediq people. They felt that the movie unfairly demonized the Japanese and presented a one-sided view of history which can be attributed to the historical amnesia that both the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Japanese government has perpetuated to forget a bloody, grim, shameful past. Ironically some Chinese audiences also expressed discomfort with the movie's depiction of indigenous cultures and traditions, which they felt were foreign and unfamiliar, this can be seen as an extension of the alienation a monoethnic race feels when it encounters a culture of people who resembles them physically but is something completely different behaviorally.

Another significant aspect of the film is pertaining to the *Soul of Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* and the Anglo-Kuki war explores themes of resistance, identity, and the power of cultural traditions. The movie tells the story of the Seediq people, who are determined to defend their way of life and cultural identity against the forces of colonialism and assimilation. The Seediq people's resistance against the Japanese colonial government is at the movie's heart. The Seediq are portrayed as a people who are deeply committed to their cultural traditions and who are willing to fight and die to defend them. For them, the divine was seen as a charioteer who would always lead them to victory. Through their rebellion, they challenge the legitimacy of colonialism and assert their right to self-determination and autonomy.

The movie also highlights the importance of cultural identity and tradition in the face of colonialism and globalization. The Seediq people's rebellion is rooted in their attachment to their cultural traditions and their determination to preserve them against the forces of assimilation and modernization. Through their rebellion, the Kuki and the Seediq assert the importance of cultural identity in the face of cultural erasure, colonial domination, and cultural supremacism.

Another critical element of the essence of the movie is the depiction of the Seediq people's strong sense of community and solidarity. The film portrays the Seediq as a diverse and complex community with different ideas and perspectives on the rebellion and its goals. However, despite their differences, the Seediq come together to fight for a common cause and to defend their cultural identity against the forces of colonialism. This apparently is all but accurate for the Kuki people as well. All in all, the movies are a deep introspection into Taiwanese history, colonial identity and their resistance against aggressive forms of colonialism. In the same wavelength and spirits does the Anglo-Kuki war for the Kuki peoples.

Note

¹ To understand more about the Anglo-Kuki war in India's Northeastern and Burma's Northwestern region, read the following books: Jangkhomang Guite and Thongkholal Haokip eds (2018). *The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917–1919: A Frontier Uprising against Imperialism during the First World War*. New Delhi: Taylor & Francis; Ngamjahao Kipgen and Doungul Letkhojam Haokip, eds (2020). *Against the Empire: Polity, Economy and Culture During the Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919*. New Delhi: Taylor &

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