

Body Narratives in the Film *Marry My Dead Body*: Symbols, Power, History

Mao Wenyu¹, Roslina Ismail^{2*}

¹Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Malaya(UM), 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: 17222160@siswa.um.edu.my

²Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Malaya(UM), 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: roslina_i@um.edu.my

CORRESPONDING

AUTHOR (*):

Roslina Ismail
(roslina_i@um.edu.my)

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a detailed analysis of the body narrative in the Taiwan's comedy film *Marry My Dead Body*, exploring how bodily representations serve as a vehicle for examining Taiwan's complex social and cultural contexts. Utilizing Foucault's theory of discourse and power, this study investigates the narrative strategies and power dynamics embedded in the film's portrayal of bodies. The contrasting depictions of human, ghostly, and gendered bodies dissolve conventional fears surrounding ghosts and death, while simultaneously addressing the contentious issue of same-sex marriage. Through the characters Mao Mao and Ming Han, the film reflects Taiwan's intricate social fabric, where traditional and modern gender roles intersect. Mao Mao's body symbolizes Taiwan's evolving gender culture, while Ming Han's body embodies traditional Chinese gender symbols, making bodily representation a multifaceted carrier of cultural, social, and historical meanings. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of gender culture in Taiwan, challenging the conventional view of LGBTQ+ representation in contemporary Taiwan's cinema.

Contribution/Originality: This study examined how the body influences and reflects the contextual complexity of Taiwan's society in the narrative space of the film and emphasized the value of the body power discourse in the film for the representation of subcultural group power and subjectivity, and the study provided new research paradigm for the representation of the power discourse in Taiwan's cinema.

1. Introduction

In this study, we analyze the body narrative of the horror-comedy film *Marry My Dead Body* (MMDB), produced in Taiwan, China. The ghosts, homosexuality, police, and folklore elements in the film provide interesting strategies for the narrative and representation of the body. Using textual analysis and genealogical methods, we examine how the film's male protagonists, Ming Han and Mao Mao, achieve narrative through their bodies, especially each other's bodies. The bodies in the film assume the triple opposition and unity of human and ghost, heterosexual and homosexual, and traditional and modern,

showing the complex social and political contexts in Taiwan. The theoretical support for our research is [Foucault's \(2005\)](#) discourse of power. By introducing this conceptual model, it is used to understand how the LGBTQ+ group develops in Asia, especially in areas with a colonial background in Taiwan, resulting in gender representations and cultural expressions unique to Taiwan. It is found that Taiwan's LGBTQ+ films characterize that the identity of Taiwan's LGBTQ+ group is no longer their main conflict; Instead, the LGBTQ+ group is actively reshaping Taiwan, and the LGBTQ+ group, both in and out of the films, is becoming the other that is breaking away from the society and culture, thus reconstructing a self that has Taiwan's local characteristics. Instead, the LGBTQ+ group is actively reshaping Taiwan, both in and out of the film, becoming the other that is breaking away from the social culture and thus reconstructing the self that has Taiwan's local characteristics.

The key to our study is that it contributes to a deeper understanding of gender culture in Taiwan from film texts. Usually, the analysis of all story texts such as novels, films, and TV dramas involving LGBTQ+ group in Taiwan focuses on exploring them with identity theories. On the one hand, the study neglects the representation of image bodies and power relations, and on the other hand, we need to reassess the development of LGBTQ+ others' identities in Taiwan. Our results challenge the conventional view of gender and political contexts in contemporary Taiwan films. Our results suggest that gender culture in contemporary Taiwan is at a dynamic node, and identity is no longer the main contradiction for the Taiwan LGBTQ+ group. We will reevaluate the theory of power discourse of the body, especially in terms of gender and culture.

The study of body narratives in Taiwan LGBTQ+ films does not only explore the styles of the films in Taiwan, but also aims primarily to identify the complexity of identity in the intersection of the gender cultures of Taiwan and traditional Chinese culture. Our study emphasizes that the body is an important carrier of power discourse, and the image body characterizes the cultural identity of the group. This cultural identity produces a new self in the process of localization and opens new avenues for exploring the diverse expressions of images of the LGBTQ+ group around the world.

2. Literature Review

In Chinese film *Yi Yi* ([Yang, 2000](#)), director uses a camera to capture the back of one's head, because people cannot see the back of their heads, but taking photographs enables people to see the neglected body. The emergence of photography allows the body to be reproduced in images, enabling viewer to reconnect with the body, with which cinema has been inextricably linked since its inception. [Benjamin \(2005\)](#) argues that it is no accident that the portrait occupies a central place in early photography. [Deleuze \(2004\)](#) argues that cinema formally accomplishes its marriage with the spirit, the mind, through the body (rather than the agency of the body). According to [Metz \(2005\)](#), cinema deals with the human 'libido' with human desire, and cinematic representations can be seen as representations of the human being, representations of the body. Body is the most intuitive element of film narrative, and the creator narrates the story through the writing and reproduction of the body. The body narrative in film involves many levels of narrative, for example, how to reproduce the body - the way the image is constructed lurks in the narrative discourse, and the image of the body can be interpreted as a narrative element. According to [Freud \(2015\)](#) we can determine that desire and pleasure are the fundamental driving force in artistic production. To film, as an art linked by seeing, contains complex irrational factors, and the body itself can act as a driving force in the

film narrative. The body itself can act as a driving force in film narratives. Therefore, body can be used as a path to explore film narrative.

The use of the body as a means of exploring Taiwan's film narratives, especially Taiwan's queer film narratives, is innovative and scientific. Mainland film academics have mostly studied the context, narrative, aesthetic features, and identity within the scope of the thesis of Chinese LGBTQ+ films, and while Taiwan's cinema certainly belongs to Chinese cinema, the corresponding Taiwan's film texts have rarely been mentioned when exploring related issues. The only articles that focus on the discourse of homosexuality in Taiwan's film only interpret the discourse of homosexuality in some Taiwan's film from certain angles, while others analyze the phenomenon of homosexuality or the homoerotic elements that appear in Taiwan's films at the sociological and cultural levels, and still others are case studies of the discourse of homosexuality in Taiwan's films, and no comprehensive study of it. Zhao (2014) only uses six Taiwan's films involving homosexual discourse as research objects and analyses them in terms of the perception of identity, the reality of the dilemma, and the theme of love. The article is also a case study of homosexual discourse in Taiwan's cinema. Shi (2008) analyses some of the Taiwan's LGBTQ+ film from the new century in terms of image style and audio-visual combinations and discusses the normality of the unconventional love affair of the combination of youth and iconography Narrative Expressions. Song (2011) argues that Taiwan's LGBTQ+ film is a genre that has trespassed on Taiwan's traditional romance literature since the new millennium and analyses the reasons for the prevalence of LGBTQ+ discourse in Taiwan's cinema in terms of growing up experience, identity, policy guidance and cultural orientation, which is more original.

Research in Taiwan has also paid little attention to the impact of various manifestations of the body on the narrative and cultural significance of cinema, but LGBTQ+ cinema in Taiwan has become a unique landscape of the Taiwan's film genre, and more scholars are still focusing on the study of gender identity and narrative discourse. A search of the Taiwan Academic Database with the keyword 'LGBTQ+ film' yielded a total of 11 articles. Among them, there are seven articles on the discourse of homosexuality in Taiwan's films, and the other four are textual analyses of specific films, none of which involves the study of body narratives.

To sum up, homosexual discourse has been increasingly presented in Taiwan's films, but body narrative research has not been sufficiently discussed in Taiwan's homosexual film texts. In our opinion, it is necessary to establish a sense of body research in cinema, and to discuss identity, film narrative, and other aspects in conjunction with body narrative. In this paper, we will combine discourse analysis on the relationship between the subject and the discourse of power, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and other theories to discuss the artistic presentation and characteristics of the discourse of homosexuality in Taiwan's cinema, as well as the social and cultural phenomena that it reflects.

3. Methodology

The mechanism of action of body narrative refers to the video body as a part of the film narrative system, and studies how it drives and participates in the narrative process, generating, conveying and occurring the mechanism and way of narrative meaning. According to Brooks (2005), we can determine how the body acts as a driver of narrative and as an agent of meaning at the level of the narrative lineage and examine how the body participates in film narratives, incorporating the study of the body in the field of

narratology. In this way, systematically explain the connotation, ideas and application path of the mechanism of body narrative in film, and search for the theoretical foundation for the application of body narrative in the field of film studies. Then we will be guided by discourse analysis, combined with psychoanalysis, to arrive at the symbolic, social, and historical connotations reflected in film texts. How film texts construct Taiwan's unique social and cultural connotations under the role of the body, which in turn reconstructs Taiwan's gender history.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. The Body as Narrative Dynamics

First, in psychoanalytic theory, [Freud \(1987\)](#) mentioned that among the many sensory desires of human beings, vision has priority in the process of civilization. Compared with touch, taste and smell, vision has a sense of distance, and when human beings walk upright, their reproductive organs have the need to be covered, and vision surpasses smell as the main sense for sexual stimulation, and their curiosity is satisfied in visual observation.

Secondly, [Brooks \(2005\)](#) discusses the motivational mechanism of visual desire in the process of narration. In the psychoanalytic perspective, there is a close connection between vision, desire and cognitive fetishism in body narratives. This reflects the three levels of meaning of seeing: First is visual desire is the main form of desire in modern narrative, and the bodily desire embodied in vision becomes the main driving force of narrative. Second is the rationality of cognitive desire embedded in visual desire. The way and process of seeing is also the process of marking the body, i.e. the process of symbolization of the body. Third is the way of seeing to reach the place of desire is tortuous and circuitous, due to the taboo nature of sexuality. Because of the taboo character of sex, the process of realization is indirect and voyeuristic. The omniscient narrator is like the panoramic open prison where the discourse of power carried by the desire to see is embodied ([Foucault, 2019](#)). As [Brooks \(2005\)](#) puts it, the narrator is also the subject of seeing, and the angle and manner of his viewing become the object of interpretation.

At the beginning of the film, physical desire forms the first narrative suspense. Mao Mao's grandmother gives him the coffin in the cold and horrible ancestral hall at night, and the hair and nails on the body that has already died are cut off, and together with other props that symbolize the body are stuffed into the red envelope, which is a kind of ceremony to recruit the fated person, and the fated person who picks it up will have to marry the ghost bride, which is a ceremony that is known as the Posthumous Marriage to the Chinese. The posthumous marriage is an ancient practice in China, widely practiced in Shanxi, Hebei, Henan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other regions. The main reason for the marriage is the traditional Chinese idea of 'emphasizing men over women', whereby a woman cannot find a suitable position or title after death, and only by marrying a man can she be included in the genealogy of the man's ancestors and enjoy the sacrifices of her descendants ([Lin, 2000](#)). In Chinese culture, female ghosts represent being excluded from patriarchal social concepts ([Wong, 1993](#)). The essence of the marriage is to establish a personal clan affiliation, a social bonding of the original family through the incorporation of the human-ghost relationship ([Lin, 2020](#)). The search for Mao Mao's husband becomes the driving force behind the beginning of the plot. When police officer Ming Han picks up a red packet symbolizing Mao Mao's body during an operation in the park to collect evidence of a crime.

Then the focus of the plot begins to shift towards Ming Han, who begins to help Mao Mao fulfill his wishes. During this time, Mao Mao's wishes became the cause of action for Ming Han's body, and when necessary, Mao Mao pushed the narrative forward through the act of possession to achieve the purpose of the action. The audience discovers through the narrative that Mao Mao's desire to get married not only has the resistance of his family but also the neglect of his boyfriend, who before his death refused to reply to Mao Mao's messages and phone calls, which became the trigger for Mao Mao's death. Therefore, after learning about Mao Mao's experience before his death, the main suspense and question that runs through the film is who killed Mao Mao, and that only by finding the murderer and fulfilling his wish can he be reincarnated and regain his real body.

A key character in the film is Mao Mao's father, who appears in important key episodes in Ming Han's search for the murderer, such as finding Mao Mao's mobile phone and visiting Mao Mao's ex-boyfriend. If fulfilling Mao Mao's first two last wishes, to save the planet, and to help the puppy find a new owner, is a way to understand Mao Mao's character and outlook on life, then fulfilling the third last wish to visit his grandmother is a way to gain a deeper understanding of the space of the family that Mao Mao was living in, especially Mao Mao's father. The transformation of Mao Mao's father from initially opposing and rejecting Mao Mao's sexual orientation and physical behavior, to his continued acceptance of Mao Mao's body, and Mao Mao's death, is built on Ming Han's presence in this already broken family relationship. It can be said that the presence of Ming Han's body stitches up this broken family relationship, while the absence of Mao Mao's body makes those around him who do not accept him rethink and reflect on the presence of Mao Mao's body. Accordingly, Ming Han changed into Mao Mao's favorite gay's clothing to understand more about the spiritual world of gay and the mystery of their bodies.

The final reversal is that Ming Han fully understands the truth about Mao Mao as well as his own body. Mao Mao reappears at Ming Han's home and chooses to stay to help Ming Han solve the case. After finally completing solving the case, Ming Han and Mao Mao finally learn the truth about their father. The father, persuaded by his grandmother, tries to prove his acceptance of his son's same-sex marriage through his actions, but he crashes into Mao Mao's boyfriend's cheating, but the father doesn't know how to open up to Mao Mao to show him the truth, and can only regulate his son's body through the traditional Chinese multiple-choice question of choosing between his father and his boyfriend to stop him from entrusting his marriage to someone else. Here, Mao Mao and Ming Han learn the truth, firstly, that the father's seeming absence from Mao Mao's space has in fact kept him hidden at the bottom of Mao Mao's space, expressing his care for his son in his own way. On the other hand, the outcome of Mao Mao's body is sublimated in the reconciliation of the family, the love of the family, towards the end, and Ming Han has a redefinition of his own life, and his understanding of the human being. Mao Mao is reincarnated, and Ming Han moves on to a new life. The film's narrative ends.

As can be seen, the question of the body forms the core of the film's plot narrative. The question of Mao Mao's body is always at the potential level of the film's narrative. From the beginning, the following of Mao Mao's soul gives the plot a kind of narrative pressure, whether Ming Han will find the real killer with the help of Mao Mao's soul, who the real killer is, and what is Mao Mao's final ending, etc. have always become the core motivation of the film. This motivation is the audience's motivation to watch the film. Although the audience has known for a long time that ghosts and human beings have different paths, and that Mao Mao will be reincarnated after fulfilling his wish, Mao Mao's wish is neither to marry his living lover nor to find out the real murderer, which creates a discrepancy

with the audience's perceptions: the audience expects Ming Han to find out the real murderer with the help of Mao Mao. The fulfilment of this wish is not only in line with the traditional Chinese belief that the real culprit must be caught before he can rest in peace. Moreover, this is the only way to make sense of this mistaken marriage connection. When the real culprit who killed Mao Mao is caught and Ming Han completes his pursuit of the case, the audience's cognitive desire ends, and the audience's viewing of the film tends to come to an end.

On the other hand, Mao Mao wants to be recognized by his father for his body, and this search for reconciliation with his father continues throughout the plot. From the very beginning, not only does the father disapprove of Mao Mao's cisgender identity during his life, but there is still a great deal of rejection after his death; specifically, Mao Mao does not even feel his father's love after he has become a ghost, as the film shows in the first half of the film that his father only loves the heterosexual Mao Mao, who conforms to the traditional notion of gender. In this case, the family is not fully accepting, and it is this absent and unappreciated father figure that Mao Mao is trying to turn into a present father figure. According to [Lacan \(2001\)](#), this means a return from the symbolic and imaginary realm to the real one. The symbolic realm concerns language, and the institutions and meanings formed by culture. The imaginative realm is the content controlled by the pictorial image, and more medically, the relationship between the subject and the pictorial image, while the real realm exists outside the symbolic order, as an alternative that constantly tries to break this cultural structure and destroy the existing system ([Fuery, 2004](#)). Therefore, the father that Mao Mao repeatedly mentions in his words with Ming Han constantly takes him into the memory, that is, the imaginary realm, in an attempt to find an orderly way of expression for his bodily unconsciousness, which simply means that Mao Mao has always been trying to find a way of expression in line with the Chinese tradition of respecting the authority of the father, and expressing the truth of his body in a way that is acceptable to the father. In short, Mao Mao has been trying to find a way to express the truth of his body in a way that is in line with the Chinese tradition of respecting his father's authority, in a way that is acceptable to him. This attempt coincides with the internal logic of the film's narrative effect on the viewer's spirit, and this attempt is even higher than the search for the true attitude of Mao Mao's partner towards this relationship: the narrative always starts from a certain state of ambiguity and suspense, and through the dual role of linguistic structure and the chain of meanings, it constantly restructures and regulates the viewer's unconsciousness, so that the ambiguity of the viewer's awareness at the beginning of the narrative is transformed into a rational and orderly structural state at the end.

The nudity of the body becomes the greatest subversion of the narrative metaphor. According to [Freud \(2015\)](#), sex as one of the most basic instincts of the body, provides the biological impetus for all human activities. Considered in the context of the film, Mao Mao's homosexual body can be no different from the castrated body in the Chinese context, as both have lost their male physiological characteristics. Such a body is not only a symbol of the diversity and complexity of the individual, but also involves the transformation of the gender power relations in the society at a deeper level. Sex is the most discursive, the most desirable, and the most intrinsic element in the unfolding of sexual experience organized by power for the purpose of controlling the body and its texture, strength, energy, sensation, and pleasure ([Foucault, 2005](#)). Sexuality is subordinated to the domination and manipulation of power discourses, and the nudity in three parts of the film, where the bodies of the drug addicts, Ming Han, and Mao Mao are rendered and magnified in the bathroom, on the street, and in their homes, represents the expansion of

the LGBTQ+ group in Taiwan and its subversion of mainstream heteronormativity. Switching metaphors is replacing the whole with the part. It emerges from natural temporal and spatial proximity, and metaphor is substituting one word for another. Metaphor is located at precisely that point where meaning emerges from meaninglessness (Lacan, 2005). Our bodies are the flesh of society (O'Neill, 1999). The traditional heterosexual binary male-female theory is no longer the mainstream of Taiwan's society. Ming Han's naked body represents the gradual dissolution of traditional masculinity, and through the lens of the camera the female viewer is pulled back into the audience, as Mao Mao's body rebuilds the order of gender cultural power in Taiwan.

The body is real and has an absolute materiality. The body provides the building material for the symbol and ultimately for language itself, which in turn leads us away from the body, but always in a state of tension (Brooks, 2005). Abstract language is always trying to penetrate the body, to make it a controlled and ideographically capable object in all kinds of orders (cultural, social, legal, etc) while the body, with its impenetrable materiality, is constantly addressing and escaping from language. A body is what cannot be read in a writing (Jean, 2003). It is easy to understand why by the end of the film, when Mao Mao learns about his father's heart and reconciles with him, it must be the moment when the narrative comes to an end. For Mao Mao, the real love of his father is already present, the family accepts his body, one returns to the realm of reality, escaping from the realm of imagination and symbolism, and the desire to perceive, the desire to see, is silenced by the presence of his father's love. Then, the text of the film is at the same time meant to function in the symbolic realm, which requires that the film's narrative achieves the subjugation of the body. At this point, for the disappearance of Mao Mao's real soul means that eventual death is inevitable. Although father and son are reconciled, yet the time approaches for Mao Mao's soul to disappear and for him to be reincarnated. Through the demise of the soul, the narrative removes the anxiety caused by the appearance of Mao Mao's immaterial body, allowing the film to return to the symbolic realm once again after a brief narrative jolt and become a normal element in the structure of socio-cultural representation. Similarly, Mao Mao's love encounters are an example of this. When Ming Han breaks down the door of Mao Mao's ex-boyfriend's room and sees him in the room with his date, he realizes that the person who really loves him is not his ex-boyfriend. Love only exists in the realm of imagination; when real bodies appear in the real world, love is doomed to die out. In short, the symbol always wins.

Thus, the body constitutes the suspense of the film's narrative and is the locus of narrative pleasure. By setting up, covering up, and discovering the relief of the body's problems, the film succeeds in completing the narrative of the body at the level of the plot.

4.2. The body as a symbol of culture and history

In terms of the film's thematic connotations, Mao Mao's body image plays an epigrammatic role on three levels. First, the body image in patriarchal society and culture. In the whole movie, the body narratives of Mao Mao and Ming Han are completed under the effect of 'gaze'. The appearance of Mao Mao's ghost is accompanied by his marriage to Ming Han. This setting is in line with the patriarchal society and culture of East Asia, where only the husband can see the soul of his beloved, and no one else can. Moreover, the soul has the property of traveling through physical space at will, disappearing and appearing at will. In the film, Ming Han reproduces the soul of Mao Mao through his 'gaze' on it, which is consistent with the relationship between the operations of power. This is referring to the surveillance of the body by the panoramic open-view architecture, where those at the

edge of the ring are completely seen but not able to watch, and those in the central tower can see everything but not be seen. This relation of being seen Automatically produces a real subjugation, thus ensuring that the power works automatically (Foucault, 2019). Mao Mao can even produce a punishment of power over Ming Han, and a disobedient Ming Han is possessed to go dancing naked in a public place. Ming Han's gaze on Mao Mao ends up producing a change in his position on discrimination against homosexuality even as his power works. The discipline of power is effectively tested.

Secondly, in terms of the use of shots, in the shots of the male characters portrayed by Ming Han, as can be seen from Figure 1 and Figure 2, the elevation shot is used a lot, making it the most used shooting perspective except for the flat shot. The elevation shot manipulates the way the audience looks and guides the audience to look up at the male characters, thus creating a sense of oppression and reinforcing the dominance of the male characters.

Figure 1: Ming Han is arresting drug dealers



From the Screenshot of *MMDB*,05:11 (Chen, 2023)

Figure 2: Ming Han called Mao Mao is a “fucking gays”



From the Screenshot of *MMDB*,29:48 (Chen, 2023)

On the contrary, most of the shots of Mao Mao use the downward and flat view. Or, as can be seen in [Figure 3](#), using the direction of Ming Han's line of sight, he looks straight at the camera, talks to the camera, as shown in [Figure 4](#), and interacts with the camera, creating the Mao Mao perspective. Through Mao 's point of view, the movie gives the audience the identity of Mao, and the audience becomes a passive object, while Ming Han's subject position and initiative are maintained. The obviously patriarchal words such as 'fucking gays', 'fuck' are Ming Han's declaration of his unwillingness to de-gender his power.

Figure 3: Ming Han and Mao Mao are talking in the park before the first departure



From the Screenshot of *MMDB*,1:22:03 ([Chen, 2023](#))

Figure 4: Ming Han's final goodbye confession to Mao Mao



From the Screenshot of *MMDB*,2:01:27 ([Chen, 2023](#))

Mao Mao is a LGBT+ ghost, and the fact that he establishes a marital relationship with a straight man through a form of plutonic marriage is worth thinking about in itself. Mao Mao no longer possesses a material body, and all his will has to be done through Ming Han's body. The fact that Ming Han, a heterosexual man who is a policeman by profession,

can only complete the narrative through the actions of his body in the real world is itself a reflection of the inferior status of the bodies of a marginalized gender group in a patriarchal society: the male body is always to be preferred over the female body, over the cisgender male body. Mao Mao's initial last wish is not to find the real culprit who ran him over, as the public expects, but rather to save the planet, to help Mao find a new owner, and to visit Grandma. And these are all wishes that male protagonists in mainstream film narratives hardly ever have as they are simple and not dramatically conflictual. In patriarchal social cultures, conforming to the traditional male body image is encouraged to engage in constant cognition, whether it is building a career, going out and travelling far and wide, or studying hard and taking exams, all of which are different manifestations of the male's legitimized desire for cognition. Whereas women and even the current LGBTQ+ group are not the mainstream of traditional Chinese patriarchal society and culture, their cognitive desires are not promoted and are even dangerous - posing a challenge to the status of orthodox males. Therefore, Mao Mao's last wish can only be fulfilled through Ming Han's concrete and material body to fulfil it. In the film, when Ming Han is tricked by Mao Mao into dancing naked in public to the well-known song Dancing Lady (Tsai, 2006), and plays the role of a LGBTQ+ group that enters a gay bar in pursuit of the real culprits, and so on, the image of Ming Han's body, which has been possessed by Mao Mao, becomes a symbol that interrogates the notion of a patriarchal culture. This symbol corresponds to what the man in the field of visibility, and the man who understands this assumes the responsibility for the control of power; he makes the control of power automatic on himself, he inscribes himself in the relations of power (Foucault, 2019). The heteronormative binary that subverts patriarchal socio-culture and the power relations that adhere to this binary, in the struggle for the body, become this symbol, gazing at the unidirectional connection between a single observer and a diversity of observed to provide a metaphor for anonymous centralized modern power (Dews, 2001).

The second is the image of the physical other in identity. Identity mainly refers to the confirmation of one's own identity or social role. Self-identity has a lot of relationship with the value system, spiritual system and cultural system, and in which it is confirmed for spiritual comfort (Barker, 2008). Self-identity is an important element of psychological activities since human beings have their own culture. Lacan (2010) argue that the completion of the ego is formed through mirror viewing. Through mirror-viewing, the infant confirms the existence of the 'self' in the mirror, forming a self-conscious and narcissistic self-identity (Wu, 2010). According to Lacan (2010), the mirror image is the beginning of the formation of the self, and through viewing, the synthetic path of self-consciousness is formed. In the movie, the confirmation that Mao Mao is a ghost is impossible to re-form the self. But the gaze from Ming Han on Mao Mao begins to form Ming Han's self. For the first time, Ming Han sees the ghost of Mao Mao through the reflection of the mirror in the bathroom. Thus, the formation of Ming Han's ego begins.

Mao Mao in the film has always been the image of the Other in the network of character relationships, firstly a soul without matter in the world of souls, he does not have a body and is different from all the characters appearing in the film, the Other in the real world. Secondly, through the words of his ex-boyfriend, he confirms once again that his idea of marriage is only his own self-interest, the Other in the love relationship; in the family relationship, he is the Other constructed by his father's patriarchal cultural notion of disciplining power. In this context, discipline is the association and deterrence of punitive and coercive behavior to make a person tame, as in the case of a disobedient child (Danaher et al., 2000). In the eyes of his father, who used to be a high-ranking military

officer, Mao Mao is a disobedient child who does not conform to the image of a child under the concept of patriarchal culture, and does not possess the masculinity that a man should have; in the eyes of Ming Han, his husband, he does not look like a man, and he is 'dead gays'; he is the Other in the heteronormative gender power relations. In the eyes of Ming Han's husband, he is not like a man, but a 'dead gays', the Other in the cultural relations of heterosexual gender power. Therefore, from the beginning, the appearance of Mao Mao's ghost is not due to the accidental death of a man who wants to find the real culprit and return to the world of the living; he does not have a strong desire to come back, but only because of his grandmother's pity for him to find the object of his marriage in the underworld, and is summoned by his husband to return. Even though his first disappearance, thinking it would fail because his ex-boyfriend's disinterest got confirmed that he could be reincarnated. The desire of man is the desire of the Big Other. The Big Other is big because it has power over the subject, who willingly obeys him, pleases him, and strives to seek his approval and praise (Guéguen, 1995). Therefore, in the movie, Mao Mao's self-doubt and confusion about the other imaginations of the people around him show the tension and anxiety about his own cultural identity. Throughout the narrative, Mao Mao and Ming Han's actions are not in their own hands but are subject to the intervention of the Other. Only in the last time - the time that is about to disappear - is the time that belongs to Mao Mao. Their souls and bodies work together in the pursuit of the murderer. Finally, in the father's monologue, the word of the Other, he surrenders his power, and his soul dies completely.

Third, body image in colonial history. Looking back on Taiwan's history, Taiwan and mainland China have been isolated for a long time since the Kuomintang ruled Taiwan after 1949. The complex historical background, depending on the ethnic identity and identity issues have been troubling the people (Mo, 2020). So, more films exploring ethnic and cultural identities have emerged from Taiwan's film industry. In this film, the film is set in the current reality of Taiwan, but the subject matter is the surrealistic theme of ghosts and monsters with Asian cultural characteristics. Mao Mao, as the main character of the film, becomes a microcosm of the image of Taiwan's LGBTQ+ group, a cohesive archetype in the historical context to which the film refers. Mao Mao's favorite clothing brand during his lifetime was MUJI, a well-known Japanese clothing brand. Here it shows the Taiwan people's identification with Japanese society and culture. In the society, the LGBTQ+ group is treated kindly, they can fall in love, hug, kiss and even get married under the sunlight. His dream during his lifetime represents the dream of most of Taiwan's LGBTQ+ group, which is to be themselves and be with the people they love forever. Attention to oneself as an ethical principle open to shaping one's way of life can resist the shaping of the subject by mechanisms of power (McWhorter, 1999). The film's setting of Mao's dream is somewhat trimmed; his last wishes after becoming a ghost are to save the planet, to help Mao find a new owner, and to visit his grandmother.

However, after Ming Han fulfills his last wish for him and even learns the truth that his ex-boyfriend never loved him, Mao Mao thinks he has nothing left to go to reincarnation after he disappears. This body image is about to completely disappear into the world of the living. With the return of Mao Mao after Ming Han's intense pursuit of the murderer, the film's narrative accomplishes the final imagining of the Chinese tradition, which is the return to the family. Mao Mao's last shot is in Ming Han's hospital room, where the words of his father, Mao Mao, and Ming Han transform Mao Mao's identity from that of the Other to that of the concerned self, which enables individuals, either by their own power or with the help of others, to carry out a series of manipulations of their own bodies (Foucault, 2016).

Mao Mao, as the younger generation of the current LGBTQ+ group in Taiwan, uses Chinese words and language, but wears Japanese branded clothes, eats Japanese food, and enjoys Japanese culture. Taiwan people travel visa-free to and from Japan, and to and from China but are repeatedly blocked by the stance of Taiwan's leaders; they are the result of the symbol of Taiwan's historical colony, and Mao's body can be seen as a symbol of Taiwan's cultural and political identity at the present time. The movie even arranges for the biggest villain at the end to turn out to be a female colleague working undercover at the Ming Han police station, which is a further reflection of the current state of gender culture in Taiwan and the rise of feminism. In addition to this, there are also the gay coworkers in Ming Han, the police chief who suspends the police in Ming Han without knowing right from wrong, the gay drug addicts who are arrested as soon as the movie comes out, and they are a group of people who are disciplined in the surveillance mechanism. They populate Ming Han's social space, and they represent the unregulated body, which in turn is constantly attacking Ming Han's ego and reconstructing it.

Through his body image and his perspective, we not only see the image and encounters of the LGBT+ group, but also delve deeper into the context that the movie refers to, what we also see is the current situation of Taiwan's complex conflict of cultural belonging and sense of belonging to a homeland. According to [Foucault \(1989\)](#), his challenge to the emergence of discourse. Just proves once again that what is important is not that this movie has any significance, but why it is that such a movie has appeared at this time in the long course of history. After going through as the body image of Mao Mao, the film is more successful in realizing a narrative of the current state of gender in Taiwan, showing the impact of colonialism on Taiwan's society and culture, and on the younger generation.

4.3. The Body as a Battleground of Desire and Regulation

The film *Marry My Dead Body*, when subjected to the analytical lenses of [Lacan \(2010\)](#) and [Foucault \(2019\)](#) on the body, becomes a rich tapestry of insights that unravel the intricate dynamics of desire, identity, and societal norms. The central character, Mao Mao, whose spectral existence blurs the boundaries between the ethereal and the corporeal, serves as a compelling conduit for delving into these profound dimensions of the human experience.

According to [Lacan \(2010\)](#), its tripartite model of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, provides a framework for dissecting Mao Mao's journey. His initial existence as a ghost, a presence that exists beyond conscious understanding, embodies the enigmatic and elusive qualities of the Real. This serves as a metaphor for the complex, often hidden layers of human desire that resist easy categorization. The body, a symbolic construct, symbolizes not only the physical form but also the desire, societal expectations, and norms it represents ([Lacan, 2010](#)). Mao Mao's quest for acceptance and reconciliation, especially in the face of patriarchal ideals, mirrors the struggle for identity and acceptance in the symbolic realm. His journey challenges preconceived notions and reveals how societal norms influence and restrict bodies. It is a narrative critique of the power dynamics that dictate who one should be based on their body.

On the other hand, according to [Foucault \(2019\)](#), we can determine that illuminates how power permeates and regulates the body. Mao Mao's spectral existence, unable to act independently, represents the embodiment of biopower – the control exerted by society over bodies and populations. His story highlights the constant surveillance and discipline under which bodies operate, revealing the omnipresence of societal power. With Mao Mao's journey exemplifying the norms and expectations that bodies, particularly those

deviating from the norm, must adhere to. It underscores how the pressure to conform to patriarchal and heterosexual ideals shapes his narrative. This reflects the impact of societal power on bodies. Crucially, the film offers a compelling narrative of resistance within these oppressive systems. Mao Mao's actions, driven by his desires and yearning for acceptance, serve as a form of resistance. His spectral existence challenges the rigidity of societal norms and serves as a catalyst for transformation in how other characters perceive and accept his body image. Mao Mao's journey showcases how, even in the face of overwhelming societal pressures, individuals can carve out spaces for self-expression and assert their desires. Mao Mao, with his spectral existence and the influence he exerts on the tangible world, becomes a central character in a story that navigates the complexities of subjectivity and desire, societal power, discipline, and resistance. These two analytical frameworks intersect to offer a multifaceted commentary on the dynamics between the body, culture, and society, showcasing the profound impact of power, norms, and human agency on the ever-evolving narrative of the self within a larger societal context.

The film, viewed through these critical lenses, unveils profound revelations about the intricacies of desire, identity, and societal norms. Mao Mao's spectral existence stands as a unique canvas for exploring subjectivity and desire of [Lacan \(2010\)](#). The film encapsulates Mao Mao's ethereal presence, which profoundly influences the tangible world, serving as a conduit for the exploration of [Lacan \(2010\)](#) notion of subjectivity. His existence encapsulates the complex interplay between the conscious and unconscious realms, embodying idea of the 'mirror stage' where the individual forms their self-identity by recognizing themselves in the gaze of others ([Lacan, 2010](#)). In the film, Mao Mao's transition from a marginalized identity as a gay ghost to a figure with influence on the tangible world showcases the malleability of identity in response to societal norms.

Simultaneously, power discourse of [Foucault \(2019\)](#) takes center stage as the film addresses issues of discipline, regulation, and resistance in shaping the body. Mao Mao's embodiment of an othered identity, both as a ghost and a gay individual, puts forth the concept of power in society. The film represents how societal norms dictate what bodies should be, and how these norms regulate and discipline those bodies that don't conform. It is within this framework that Mao Mao's unorthodox existence challenges established norms, illustrating resistance against conventional structures of power. Essentially, the intersection of the psychoanalysis of [Lacan \(2010\)](#) and the discourse of power of [Foucault \(2019\)](#) creates a multidimensional commentary on the interplay between the body, culture and society. Mao Mao's journey, from a ghostly outsider to an influential figure, mirrors the intricate process of subject formation, deconstruction, and negotiation. His story exemplifies how individuals navigate societal norms and power dynamics, reshaping their identities and desires in the process.

Zooming out to a larger societal context, the implications are extensive. *MMDB* holds a mirror to the complexities of contemporary Taiwan's society and its evolving attitudes toward LGBTQ+ identities. The film, through its exploration of desire, identity, and societal norms, contributes to ongoing dialogues about LGBTQ+ rights and social acceptance in Taiwan. It has the potential to challenge and change perceptions, influence policy, and promote discussions about diversity and inclusion. Moreover, the film's innovative approach to storytelling and its thought-provoking narrative elevates its significance in contemporary Taiwan's cinema. It not only provides a platform for LGBTQ+ representation but also highlights the creative potential of Taiwan's filmmakers in addressing relevant social and cultural issues. As a work of cinematic art, it paves the way

for more diverse and inclusive narratives within Taiwan's cinema, offering a new dimension to storytelling and cultural expression.

5. Conclusion

In our study, the characters in the film reshape Taiwan's gender culture through their bodies, and the LGBTQ+ group, faced with patriarchal norms and even colonialism, continues to actively contest power discourses and participates in the contestation of gender discursive power in Taiwan and even in Asia and globally. It is worth noting that in our study, we emphasize the value of the discourse of bodily power in the film for the representation of group power and subjectivity. In the film text, the director not only challenges the traditional mode of film narrative, but also characterizes a new state of socio-cultural representation of the Taiwan's LGBTQ+ group, who form a uniquely Taiwan-style of the LGBTQ+ group, who are in dialogue with traditional Chinese culture. They form a unique Taiwan-style LGBTQ+ group, and their dialogues with traditional Chinese culture and heterosexuality form a unique form of cultural identity expression that challenges traditional Chinese norms.

We advocate a body research turn in film studies analysis to study the ever-changing socio-cultural contexts and thus explore the discursive power of the body in film representations. However, the final presentation in a film text is determined by a very large number of factors, and our study does not adequately examine the impact of the remaining factors of the film's production process on the presentation of the visual body. Despite this, it lays the foundation for our future understanding of the historical changes in Taiwan's social context and culture.

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