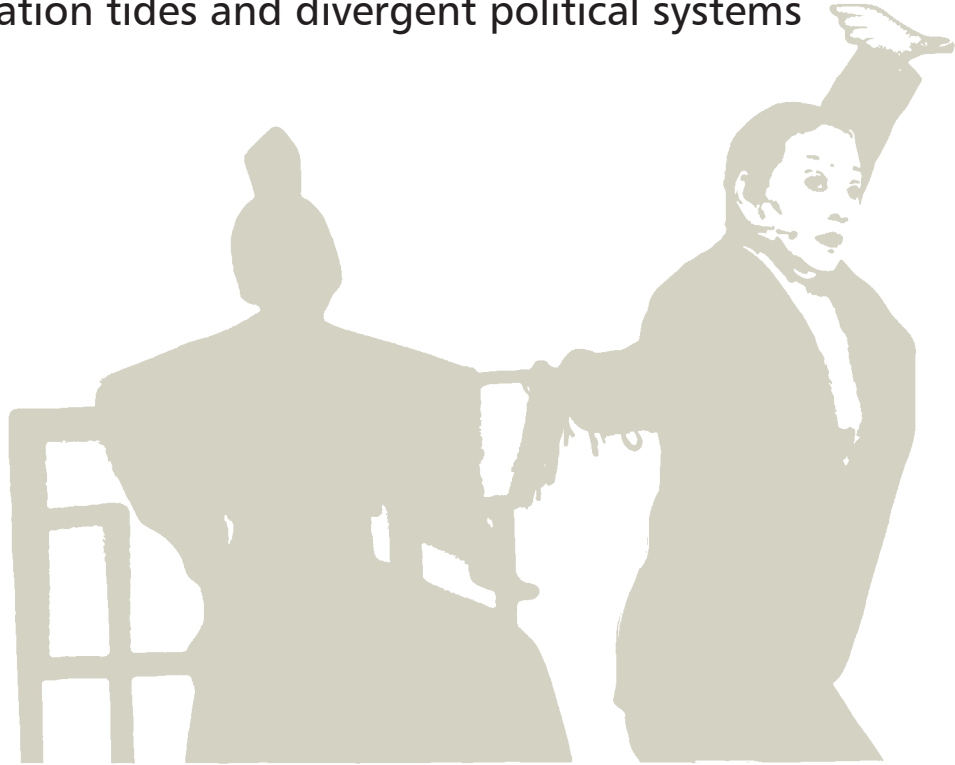


Map of merging — a concise history of Taiwanese theatre

A History of Taiwanese Theatre by Professor Ho-Yi Lin describes the merging trajectories of Taiwanese drama, which has its roots in several migration tides and divergent political systems



Taiwanese drama is a prominent example of the convergence of diverse cultures and political systems. Taiwanese culture – whose history involves ethnic fusion, colonial government, authoritarian regimes, and democracy – absorbed elements of mainland Chinese, Japanese and US-derived Western culture before developing in its own manner. In other words, Taiwanese drama demonstrates the harmony and confrontation of the Western Civilization with the two prevailing Eastern Civilizations. *A History of Taiwanese Theatre* by Professor Ho-Yi Lin provides concise details for everyone who wishes to explore Taiwanese drama.

Many variables have influenced the development of Taiwanese drama. Professor Lin investigates a substantial number of repertoires and the peaks of their popularity to measure each drama genre's circumstances during every historical period. Furthermore, she uses variables, including demographics, policies, material conditions, social structures and key promoters, to explain each genre's ascension and decline. Among all of these factors, language has played a dominant role, owing to its unusual frequently changing trajectory produced by the ethnic origins of immigrants and a series of political power transfers.

The earliest historical evidence of drama in Taiwan is associated with immigrants from mainland China, before which narrative-oriented performance had yet been developed in the aboriginal community. Before 1784, most of these immigrants came from Quanzhou (泉州). They brought Nanguan Opera (南管戲), which had been the prevailing form of drama in their hometowns since the middle of the Ming Dynasty. In 1784, during the Qing Dynasty (清朝), an important commercial port was constructed in Lukang (鹿港), thus leading to another wave of immigration. More immigrants from Zhangzhou (漳州) with a different dialect and distinct

cultural habits flooded into Taiwan. These immigrants brought Beiguan Opera (北管戲), which gradually became more prominent than Nanguan Opera after the Jia-Qin Period (嘉慶年間) of the Qing Dynasty.

These waves of immigration not only resulted in ethnic fusion but also produced a subdialect, Taiwanese, that thrived relative to the preexisting dialects of Quanzhou and Zhangzhou. With the accumulation of the folk lyrics and the prosperity of theatre in Taiwan, it was not until the Japanese Colonial Period had a new local opera genre sprouted: Taiwanese Opera (歌仔戲; ge-zi-xi). Taiwanese Opera emerged during the period of Japanese rule over Taiwan (1895-1945). During that time, the Taiwanese language had already matured and had become the prevalent dialect spoken by the main audience for Taiwanese drama. Therefore, Taiwanese Opera quickly overtook Nanguan Opera and Beiguan Opera because it used the dominant language of Taiwan. Subsequently, Taiwanese Opera maintained its dominance despite Japanese and the ruling Kuomintang policies against local culture. However, the KMT's derogation policy against Taiwanese had incrementally undercut the connection of the language from its people. This decree delivered a crushing blow to Taiwanese Opera, which had already been weakened by the transformation of entertainment after World War II.

In addition to traditional operas, modern theater productions have also appeared in Taiwan since the period of Japanese rule. However, after the R.O.C. government assumed sovereignty over Taiwan in 1946, the KMT party imposed martial law on Taiwan, and used drama to disseminate anti-communism ideology. These policies strictly confined the development of modern theater. However, modern theater related to American/Western culture was embraced by the KMT government. Furthered by key propagandist Man-Kuei Li (李曼瑰), the pro-Western modern theatre using Mandarin grew through Christian associations and colleges and thrived in the 1980s after the government abolished martial law. Subsequently, modern theater became the dominant genre of drama in Taiwan; it continues to maintain this dominance to the present day.

In addition to the Taiwanese Opera and the modern theatre, there have been several other important drama genres in Taiwan, such as Hakka Tea-picking Opera, Taiwanese Glove Puppetry, and even Peking Opera. The Chinese modern drama had showed up briefly in Taiwan during the Japanese Colonial Period. Approximately forty Peking opera troupes had toured Taiwan and thus triggered the motivation of those Taiwanese Beiguan performers who also specialized in Xipi (西皮) and Erhuang (二黃) to polish their skills. The popularization and spreading of

the Drama have evolved from the amateurs troupes of the Qing Dynasty to the Christian associations and societies on campus during the KMT ruling period, and, in particular, the small theatres.

A History of the Taiwanese Theatre, Second Edition absorbs the essence of the research results in Taiwanese Theatre to date, calibrates the clues of migration, development and integration ever since the Dutch rule of Taiwan (1624–1662) until 2013 with succinct information and elegance. This work has already been adopted as a textbook by several drama classes in Taiwanese colleges and universities. Professor Ho-Yi Lin, the author of this classic volume, teaches in the Department of Drama and Theatre of National Taiwan University and has long been dedicated to Taiwanese theatre and associated research.

Reference

Ho-Yi Lin. A History of the Taiwanese Theatre, Second Edition. Taipei: NTU Press, February, 2015.

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