

First as Farce, Then as Tragedy: Popular Allegory and National Analogy in Contemporary Taiwanese Opera*

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To analyze the different poetics of working-class and intellectual popular history, this paper compares two *koa-a-hi* 歌仔戲 (Taiwanese opera) performances which take Qing dynasty Taiwan as their setting, and are loosely based on the same folk legend. *Kam Kokpo Goes to Taiwan* (*Kam Kokpo Koe Taioan* 甘國寶過臺灣) was performed at a temple festival in Taipei, in the bricolage *o-pei-la* 胡撇仔 style; *India Coral Reblossoming* (*Chhiatang Hoe Khui* 刺桐花開) is an original “refined” opera performed at the National Theater. *Kam Kokpo* is a farce about class relations; *India Coral* is a tragedy about ethnic relations.

Kam Kokpo constructs an *allegorical* relationship between the past and the present, in which characters stand for abstract essences. The combination of the “real” historical setting with the *o-pei-la* style makes the characters simultaneously social types and moral exemplars, allowing for a critical reading of both contemporary class relations and a traditional moral economy. In contrast, *India Coral* constructs a relationship between past and present that is *analogical*—the Pingpu aborigines were to the Han settlers as Taiwanese are to Americans. Despite the opera’s explicit purpose of constructing a unique Taiwanese identity, its analogical poetics ironically replicate a distinctly American model of ethnicity.

Keywords: *koa-a-hi*, allegory, analogy, nationalism, class

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Introduction

Chinese “opera,” or *xiqu* 戲曲, is historical in both content and form. In terms of content, it is historical in that narratives are set in the past, relative to the time of performance. Its form is historical in that its codified movements, language, singing style, and symbolic use of props have been seen in the twentieth century as embodying a “traditional” aesthetic. The relationship between the content of *xiqu* and its form is fluid, and the meaning of the past within *xiqu* varies not only between specific genres of local opera but also with the concerns of different performers and audiences in specific historical moments. The *xiqu*’s dual historicity is always a resource for the creation of particular, situated visions of the present and future.

The history of Taiwan’s most popular genre of *xiqu*, *koa-a-hi* 歌仔戲, illustrates how the meaning of opera’s historicity transforms along with political, economic, and cultural formations.¹ During its first period of mass popularity, during the Japanese colonial era, Taiwanese intellectuals generally saw *koa-a-hi*’s content as problematically “feudal,” and its style as symptomatic of colonial decadence. In their efforts to promote a modern society, they largely rejected *koa-a-hi* in favor of the modern-dress spoken drama (Qiu 1992; Silvio 1998). During *koa-a-hi*’s second Golden Age in the 1950s and 1960s however, Taiwanese intellectuals who sought to construct a unique Taiwanese cultural identity began to revalue the genre. After the Japanese colonial administration was replaced with the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) government, Taiwanese intellectuals began to define their cultural identity in relation to Beijing, rather than Tokyo. Lü Sushang’s seminal 1961 work, *A History of Cinema and Theater in Taiwan*, began the process of reclaiming *koa-a-hi* as an authentic regional folk tradition. Lü and his colleagues in the Taiwan Local Drama Improvement Association argued that *koa-a-hi*’s performance style, particularly its poetic use of the Holo dialect and its musical rhythms, embodied a specifically Taiwanese “spirit.”

By the late 1970s, *koa-a-hi* had lost much of its audience to cinema, television and other new entertainments. Many Taiwanese theater scholars felt that *koa-a-hi* was not only declining economically, but artistically as well. In

¹ I use the Taiwanese Holo pronunciations for all terms directly related to *koa-a-hi*, including the names of operas and characters in them. For terms more generally used in Chinese theater studies, such as *xiqu*, I use the Mandarin pronunciation. I also use Mandarin for names of people and places. For Mandarin, I use the Pinyin Romanization system, except where other spellings are more common (e.g., Taipei). For Holo, I have used the Romanization system developed by the Taipei Language Institute.

response, they used various strategies to reestablish *koa-a-hi*'s cultural purity and artistic legitimacy. These included making *koa-a-hi* the subject of historical and ethnographic research, recognizing master performers and encouraging them to pass on their skills, and attempting to reconstruct a "pure" *koa-a-hi*, or to "refine" (*jingzhi hua* 精緻化) and "reform" (*gailiang* 改良) the genre. On the one hand, troupes were established to preserve and pass on the genre's earliest forms (those that developed around the turn of the twentieth century); on the other hand, young playwrights and directors were encouraged to create new forms of *koa-a-hi* that would blend modern themes and stage techniques with "traditional" performance. As the Taiwanese Native Soil Consciousness (*bentu yishi* 本土意識) movement gained political legitimacy, *koa-a-hi*'s status as "Taiwan's local opera" gradually solidified. By the mid-1990s, *koa-a-hi* was widely recognized as a "theater of Taiwaneseeness" (Su 1990; Chang 1997; Zhou 1995; Cai 2000).

In general, intellectuals attempting to legitimize *koa-a-hi* during the KMT era focused on performance style, on establishing "correct" and "traditional" repertoires of music, movement, language, costumes and sets. The project of purifying, refining, and authenticating *koa-a-hi* implies that certain forms of the genre are, by contrast, stylistically impure, vulgar, and inauthentic. From the 1950s on, the most problematic form of *koa-a-hi* for intellectuals has, ironically, been the most popular one. This is the type of *koa-a-hi* known as "*o-pei-la* 胡撇仔." *O-pei-la* is a bricolage style developed in the 1950s and 1960s which incorporates a wide variety of elements drawn from Japanese, American, and local popular culture genres. While older forms of the genre and "refined" *koa-a-hi* have received more and more academic and government support, *o-pei-la* has remained the most popular form of *koa-a-hi* performed at temple festivals.

At the height of the native soil consciousness movement and the period leading up to and following the election of Chen Shuibian, a new style of intellectual *koa-a-hi* emerged which focused on reforming *koa-a-hi*'s historical content as well as its style. Between 1999 and 2001, a number of original *koa-a-hi* productions took the history of Taiwan during the Qing dynasty and the early Japanese colonial era as their theme. These productions were based on the ideas that (1) Taiwanese folk art forms should represent Taiwanese content, and (2) that *koa-a-hi* is an appropriate forum for the rectification of popular history, for presenting historical "truth."

One of the most interesting of the new *koa-a-hi* operas was *India Coral Reblossoming* (*Chhiatang Hoe Khui* 刺桐花開), which thematized Han-Aboriginal relations during the Qing dynasty. *India Coral* was adapted from a story, *Kam Kokpo Goes to Taiwan* (*Kam Kokpo Koe Taioan* 甘國寶過臺灣),

which has been a staple in the *koa-a-hi* repertoire since at least the 1950s. In this paper, I will compare the production of *India Coral* by the Chen Meiyun *Koa-a-hi* Troupe (陳美雲歌劇團) which was performed at the National Theater in February 2000 with a performance of *Kam Kokpo* performed in the *o-pei-la* style by the Sim Yim *Koa-a-hi* Troupe (心音歌劇團), which I recorded at a temple festival in Taipei in May 1994.

O-pei-la is a theater primarily of and for the working, and what Hill Gates (1981) calls the “traditional middle class.” Refined *koa-a-hi* is a theater largely by and for cultural nationalist intellectuals.² These two performances both deal with the Taiwanese experience of marginalization within global systems, but they do so in ways that reflect the different positions of their creators and audiences. This paper compares these two performances in order to examine the relationship between working-class and intellectual uses of Taiwanese history. Looking not only at differences in plot, but also at differences in performance style, I ask: What is gained in the process of transforming *koa-a-hi* from a popular theater to a national one? What is lost? How do these different *koa-a-hi* performances construct the relationship between past and present, and how does intellectual *koa-a-hi* rewrite not only history, but the meaning of historicity?

I argue that the relationship which *o-pei-la* constructs between the historicity of the stageworld and the present of the performance is primarily *allegorical*, while refined *koa-a-hi* constructs a relationship between past and present that is primarily *analogical*.³ In allegory, concrete figures stand for abstractions. In traditional Chinese *xiqu*, allegory takes a specific form: characters are the embodiments of abstracted qualities. In *Kam Kokpo*, the combination of the Qing Taiwan setting with the *o-pei-la* style imbues contemporary class stereotypes with the emblematic aura of traditional paragons of virtue and vice. This allows temple festival *koa-a-hi* to critique contemporary alliances between the state and big business from the perspective of a traditional moral economy.

Analogy sets up equivalencies between relationships: A is to B as C is to D. Figures in analogy must thus be comparable to each other; elements of the

² There is some overlap in both performers and audiences for these two forms of *koa-a-hi*. Some star actresses, such as Chen Meiyun, perform both on the temple festival circuit and in “public performances” (*gong-yan* 公演) in the National Theater and other official venues. These actresses’ fans, who are virtually all women, go to see them doing both kinds of performance. I do not discuss the gender aspects of *koa-a-hi* performance and reception in this paper, but I do in Silvio 1998 and 2005.

³ Neither of these terms maps easily onto a single Chinese term. The value and meaning of the term “allegory” in the context of Chinese literary studies is a topic of much debate (Saussy 1993). Here I use my own definitions, which come out of my analysis.

past world stand in for other elements *at the same level of abstraction* in the present. In *India Coral*, ethnicities of the past stand in for ethnicities of the present; the Plains Aborigines (*Pingpuzu* 平埔族) were to the Han Chinese as Taiwanese are to Americans. I argue that there is a contradiction between the historicism of *India Coral*'s content and the historicism of its form. Despite the opera's explicit purpose of constructing a unique Taiwanese identity, the structure of its analogy between past and present replicates a distinctly American model of ethnicity.

Kam Kokpo Goes to Taiwan

Context: Temple Festival Koa-a-hi in 1990s Taipei

Koa-a-hi has been a common offering to the gods at temple festivals in Taiwan for over a century. Although *koa-a-hi* performances have been replaced by films or other cheaper entertainments for many festivals since the 1970s, many temples in Taipei still hire *koa-a-hi* troupes for their most important annual rituals.

I saw and recorded the Sim Yim troupe's performance of *Kam Kokpo Goes to Taiwan* at the Chan An Temple on Yanping North Road in May of 1994. The Sim Yim troupe (since disbanded) was typical of the troupes I studied. The troupe consisted of eight actors and six musicians. The composition of the troupe was also typical of the "outdoor stage" (*goa-tai-hi* 外臺戲) troupes that tour temples in Taipei and reflects the history of the genre.

The troupe leader of the Sim Yim troupe, Liao Wenxue, had been a child actress in one of the large "indoor stage" (*lai-tai-hi* 內臺戲) troupes that toured commercial theaters around the island in the 1960s. It was during this period that it became the norm for women to play all of the leading roles. Only one of the actors was a man, Mr. Su, and he too was typical in that he was an older man from the mainland who had begun his career in Beijing Opera. He switched to *koa-a-hi* as a martial arts instructor, and in the Sim Yim troupe he still served this function, as well as playing the older male roles.

The vast majority of *koa-a-hi* actresses entered the profession through two routes. Either they were the daughters of *koa-a-hi* performers, or they were indentured into troupes by impoverished parents (often simultaneously adopted by the troupe owner) as children. Over half of the Sim Yim troupe came from two acting families. Liao Wenxue's sister played a variety of minor roles, and her daughter played the secondary male roles. The leading hero and heroine roles were played by two sisters, Wang Guiguan and Wang Xiuwen, who had been trained in their father's troupe. Wang Xiuwen's husband was one of the musicians and financial backers of the troupe. Only one

troupe member, Yang Qiuping, who played the secondary female roles, had recently entered the profession out of her own interest.

Until very recently, *koa-a-hi* acting was considered one of the “lowest” professions in Taiwan, and *koa-a-hi* actresses were among the poorest and least educated of women. In 1994, a troupe would earn only around 20,000NT per performance. Most actresses are still forced to take secondary jobs such as professional funeral mourners, or in family or friend’s small businesses in order to make ends meet during the “small months,” when there are fewer temple festivals.

The neighborhoods where temple festival *koa-a-hi* is most often performed, and where *o-pei-la* is most popular, are the oldest neighborhoods in Taipei, those on the west side that border the Dan Shui river—Wan Hua, Da Dao Cheng and Da Long Dong. The suburb of San Chong, a crowded working-class neighborhood across the river where many migrants from southern Taiwan have settled, is also a frequent stop on many outdoor stage *koa-a-hi* troupes’ itineraries. In comparison with Taipei’s developed east side, these neighborhoods are relatively run down and property values are low. They are mixed residential and business areas; night markets are many and office buildings are few. Most of the neighborhood residents who come to see the performance are, like the actresses themselves, struggling in small, family-based businesses.

In general, two performances per day are standard for temple festivals. The afternoon show begins with a *pan sian* 扮仙, a short ritual performance for the gods, followed by an opera; another opera is performed in the evening. The choice of which opera to perform belongs to the temple committee, but it is usually left to the troupe manager. Since gods are presumed to have similar tastes to the human audiences, performances are chosen based on the managers’ intimate knowledge of the preferences of neighborhood residents. Following conventions from the 1950s, the afternoon show is usually a *go-chhe-hi* 古冊戲, or “play from old books,” often a military history, while the evening show is a comedy in the *o-pei-la* style. In the Taipei area in the 1990s, the audiences for the afternoon shows tended to be small and around 80% retired men; the audiences for evening shows were much larger and around 80% women.

There are no written scripts for temple festival *koa-a-hi* performances. Before the performance, an experienced member of the troupe will “speak the play” (*shuo xi* 說戲), giving the actors a scene-by-scene outline of the plot and assigning roles, and sometimes giving instructions for how to play certain scenes. The actors then improvise their lines and lyrics. They make use of standard rhyme patterns and conventionalized expressions, and certain scenes may be played in a relatively standardized way in each troupe, but no perfor-

mance is the same, and there is much room for variation. The performers adjust the content and style of each performance to the particular audience and occasion.

In the 1990s, several troupes in the Taipei area performed the *Kam Kokpo* story as part of their repertoire. I saw it performed several times, always in the evening when the audience is largest, and always in the *o-pei-la* style.

The Kam Kokpo Narrative

The *Kam Kokpo* story is, according to *koa-a-hi* performers and scholars I spoke with, based on a historical person. The story, as I saw it performed by the Sim Yim troupe, runs briefly as follows:

Kam Kokpo is an orphan. He lives in Fuzhou with his uncle (mother's brother) who raised him and his uncle's daughter, Soatkiau. In the first scene, we meet Kokpo, Soatkiau, and their cousin Ong Lianlian. The three of them make a vow that if one of them becomes rich, he or she will help the others. Lianlian wants to marry a rich man, and Kokpo and Soatkiau think that she is too proud; they don't believe she'll really help them. Lianlian swears that if she gets rich and doesn't help her cousins, she will kneel before Kokpo and bang her head on his foot.

Kokpo is a mischievous ne'er-do-well and a gambler. Although Soatkiau begs him over and over to stop gambling, he does not, and he winds up losing all his money. Meanwhile, Lianlian runs into Tek Seng, the owner of 13 silk stores. Tek Seng falls in love with her at first sight and marries her. In order to save money, Lianlian makes Tek Seng cut off all ties with his family, and she vows to cut off all ties with her family as well.

Kokpo goes to Lianlian to borrow money. She turns him away. He decides to commit suicide, but meets a fortune-teller who tells him that if he goes to Taiwan, he will become a wealthy official. He goes back to Lianlian and asks her to lend him the boat fare to Taiwan, but she rebuffs him again. He borrows the money from his uncle, money that was meant for Soatkiau's dowry. Kokpo swears that he will come back as an official and return their generosity.

Kokpo takes a boat to Taiwan. When he arrives, he meets Siusiu, a courtesan. She gets him a job at her brothel as a waiter. A comic military official comes to visit Siusiu at the brothel. While he is being served there by Kokpo and Siusiu, a soldier comes to report that the aborigines [*Hengchun fan* 恆春番] are rebelling. The official wants to fight off the aborigines by firing a cannon, but is afraid. Kokpo fires the cannon for him, defeating the aborigines, and the official makes him a commander.

Meanwhile, in Fuzhou, Ong Lianlian tells her uncle (falsely) that Soatkiau and Kokpo are lovers. The uncle, in a rage, sells Soatkiau to a neighbor as a servant. The neighbor turns out to be the wife of the official, and she takes Soatkiau with her to Taiwan. Kokpo recognizes Soatkiau, and decides to take her back to Fuzhou with him. He also buys Siusiu out of the brothel and the three return together to Fuzhou.

Meanwhile, Lianlian's husband, Tek Seng, is framed for murder. Lianlian goes to Kokpo, who is now an official, and begs him to help her. He reminds her of her vow and makes her kneel and bang her head against his foot, although he stops her before she hurts herself. Kokpo marries Soatkiau and takes Siusiu for a concubine, and the family is reunited.

Popular Koa-a-hi Style: O-pei-la and Go-chhe-hi

Kam Kokpo is somewhat unusual for outdoor stage *koa-a-hi* operas in that it is a blend of two different genres. In terms of narrative, it is technically a *go-chhe-hi*, or "play from old books." In terms of style, however, it is performed in the *o-pei-la* style. This combination—*go-chhe-hi* narratives with *o-pei-la* style—is uniquely associated with *koa-a-hi* operas set in Taiwan.⁴

These two sub-genres have very different chronotopes, that is, they establish the relationship between the time-space of the stageworld and that of the performance in very different ways. To understand the significance of setting *Kam Kokpo* in Qing Taiwan, we must look at the general pattern of how chronotope works in *go-chhe-hi* and *o-pei-la*, and what is retained from each.⁵

Go-chhe-hi narratives are, as the name implies, stories taken from folk tales or myths, traditional "family ethics dramas," or the military history plays adapted from Beijing Opera in the 1950s. Thus, actors and audiences believe that characters and events in *go-chhe-hi* represent "real" people or supernatural agents, although they do not necessarily believe that these representations are "realistic."

Go-chhe-hi have a definite historical and geographical setting, often announced at the beginning of the opera in characters' opening recitations. There may be fantastic elements to the story, but the chronotope is homogenous—the characters stay in one world, and that world is the Chinese imperial past. The homogenous historicity of the setting is embodied in the

⁴ I thank scholar and playwright Liu Nanfang for this insight.

⁵ The Russian linguist and literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1981) defined chronotope as the time/space of fiction, and argued that chronotope is critical to the definition of genre. A chronotope is far more than the setting of a novel, play, or film. Chronotope includes the way that events in the fictional world relate to each other, the sorts of characters and actions that are made possible or impossible, and the relationship of the fictional world to reality.

performance style, which is defined as “traditional.” The musical repertoire is restricted to traditional *koa-a-hi* tunes or those from older forms of opera such as *pak-koan* 北管 or *lam-koan* 南管, and costumes are based (if loosely) on those used in Beijing Opera.

O-pei-la is a style of *koa-a-hi* developed during the “indoor stage” era to compete with imported or adapted entertainments such as cinema and the stage variety show. Definitions of *o-pei-la* are quite varied. However, a few characteristics are fairly standard. First, there is no clear historical or geographical setting. Second, the plots come from a mixture of popular culture genres, including swordsman (*wuxia* 武俠), court case, gangster, and ghost stories, and are quite complicated. Many of these narratives were created or put together by well-known playwrights during the 1950s and 1960s, and the characters and events in them are assumed to be “made up.” Third, the music includes popular songs in Holo, Mandarin, Japanese and sometimes English, as well as the traditional *koa-a-hi* repertoire. Fourth, the costumes are gaudy, and mix Chinese, Japanese, and American styles. Fifth, special lighting, sound, and other effects are used (Xie 2000, 2002; Liu 2004).

The chronotope of *o-pei-la* is, in contrast to *go-chhe-hi*, heterogeneous, and the relationship between the stageworld and the present is always in flux. The first and final scenes of an *o-pei-la* performance are usually performed in the traditionalist style of the *go-chhe-hi*, with actresses in costumes coded as “Chinese,” singing tunes from the traditional repertoire. These scenes represent the stable family or court which are the beginning and end point of the drama. In between, however, the characters enter a very different world. Here the hero usually becomes either a swordsman (often as the student of an immortal master) or a gangster. In other operas, this other world is some exotic country beyond the borders of *Zhongyuan* 中原 (the “Central Plains,” or China), such as Xixia or Tibet. When in this Other world, the characters sing pop songs, and usually change into progressively more fantastic and “foreign” costumes (such as kimono, American cowboy costumes, or exotic mixtures involving silk turbans, feather boas, and sunglasses).

Anachronism is rife in this fantastic world. There are two roles, the *sam hoe* 三花 (male clown) and *sam pat* 三八 (female clown) which only appear in *o-pei-la*. The *sam hoe* wears matching pants or shorts, vest, and auto cap; the *sam pat* may appear in a Western ball gown or in a more revealing outfit reminiscent of Las Vegas showgirls. These characters are the hero and heroine’s sidekicks and foils, and they make frequent references to contemporary fashions, technology, events, and persons. Thus, the central portion of most *o-pei-la* performances takes place in a chronotope that careens between a fantastic, Other “past,” and the immediate here and now (Silvio 2005).

Kam Kokpo may be considered a *go-chhe-hi* because the story is a folk legend (*minjian chuanshuo* 民間傳說), and I was told by actresses and others that *Kam Kokpo* was an actual person who lived during the Qing dynasty. The relative simplicity of the plot (no subplots) is also characteristic of the *go-chhe-hi*. The Sim Yim troupe's performance of *Kam Kokpo* also maintained the *go-chhe-hi*'s homogeneity and historical specificity of costume; all of the male characters wore identifiably Qing-era costumes. While the female characters did not all wear costumes specific to the Qing, they did wear costumes that, although gaudy, are marked as "Chinese" in the context of *o-pei-la*.

As in most *o-pei-la*, the beginning and end of the opera are performed in a traditionalist style. The first song in the performance is a *to-ma-tioh* 都馬調, one of the two tunes which are seen as most traditional, as definitive of *koa-a-hi* as a genre. In this brief song, Kokpo, Soatkiau, and Lianlian make the traditional self-introduction, which all characters speak directly to the audience in many *xiqu* genres. The ending, in which Lianlian kowtows to Kokpo, is marked by the most traditional costumes—Lianlian wears a black robe with water sleeves, very rare in *o-pei-la*—and the movement sequence in which Lianlian approaches Kokpo on her knees with her hair twirling, which is a conventional choreography taken from Beijing Opera.

But in the longest, middle section of the opera, the chronotope of *Kam Kokpo* is as heterogeneous as it is in most *o-pei-la* performances. After the first song, the music mixes traditional *koa-a-hi* and *pak-koan* tunes with pop music in Mandarin and Taiwanese, also a characteristic of most *o-pei-la*. As Xie Xiaomei (2000) has noted, the anachronism associated with the *sam hoe* and *sam pat* roles has, since the 1950s, bled into the leading roles as well. In *Kam Kokpo*, these clown roles are absent. Rather, the leading characters take on characteristics of these clown roles, and almost all of the characters in *Kam Kokpo* speak lines that refer to the contemporary world of Taipei. The homogeneity of the stageworld time is broken almost immediately after the brief opening song. The three cousins make vows that they will help each other when they grow up or face some terrible consequence. Lianlian at first claims that if she doesn't help her cousins, she will be "pulled in a pedicab." Kokpo and Soatkiau protest that this is hardly a punishment. Lianlian replies, "But they don't have air conditioning!" Kokpo says, "Besides, there aren't any pedicabs anymore." Such references are scattered throughout the body of the play until Kokpo returns as an official to Fuzhou and Lianlian is forced to fulfill her vow to kowtow before him.

Kam Kokpo as Allegory

Chinese theater scholars have frequently distinguished the aesthetics of the traditional Chinese *xiqu* from the modern Western theater in terms of a dichotomy between *xieyi* 寫意 (essentialism, idealism) and *xieshi* 寫實 (realism). According to PRC theater scholar Huang Zuolin, the traditional Chinese theater is characterized by “the essentialism of life, that is, not life as it is but life as extracted, concentrated, and typified” (Huang 2002[1981]:158). This essentialism functions in a structure of moral allegory through the idea of the character as the embodiment of abstract qualities. Lin Yutang put it this way:

Ts’ao Ts’ao’s hypocrisy, Min Tzu’s filial piety, Wenchun’s romance, Inging’s passion, Yang Kweifei’s pampered tastes, Ch’in Kwei’s treason, Yen Sung’s greed and cruelty, Chuko Liang’s strategy, Chang Fei’s quick temper, and Mulien’s religious sanctity—they all become associated in the Chinese minds with their ethical tradition and become their concrete conceptions of good and evil. [Lin 1939; cited in Ward 1985:184]

I think it is no coincidence that all of the stock characters Lin mentions come from popular history, folk legends, or from plays which were set in dynasties earlier than those in which they were written. The past in traditionalist theater, as in much classical Chinese art, literature, and philosophy, is the space of moral abstraction.

This idealist conception of the stageworld and its characters is evident in the way that *koa-a-hi* actresses describe particular characters in terms of essential characteristics such as those listed by Lin above, and in the comments I overheard spectators making during *koa-a-hi* performances. Much of the pleasure of *koa-a-hi* lies in moral judgment, and comments such as, “Ha, now she’ll get what she deserves!” “Ooh, the judge is corrupt!” “He’s a baddie, that one,” are common.

One of the special characteristics of the *Kam Kokpo* opera is that the abstract moral-psychological qualities of the main characters are linked to social positions. That is, the characters are social stereotypes. Yang Xingzhi, the author of *India Coral* (who was, coincidentally, present when I recorded the Sim Yim troupe’s performance), interprets the *Kam Kokpo* story as it is usually performed this way:

“The original story is about the process of a ‘little guy’ (*xiao ren wu* 小人物) coming to Taiwan and turning over a new leaf. In most opera stories, the *sio sing* 小生 (leading male role) is extremely learned, or extremely righteous and stern. In this story, the protagonist is a gambler, with neither learning nor skills. His transformation doesn’t come about because he works hard and struggles to develop, or for

any glorious reason. Rather, the Qing official is weak and cowardly, and he [Kokpo] can fire the cannon. He's in the right place at the right time, they let him fire the cannon and kill the Pingpu aborigines, and quell the rebellion. So he becomes an official."

The main point of this story, as it has been passed down, is about how a poor person is looked down on and made fun of; after he becomes rich and famous, he transforms, and all the people who looked down on him have to grovel at his feet. [Zhuang 2000]

Note the disparity between how she describes the lead roles in "most opera stories"—as embodying moral qualities—and how she describes Kokpo—as "a gambler."

Yang's reading of the *Kam Kokpo* story as a simple wish-fulfillment fantasy does account for the pleasure working class audiences take in the performance. However, if we take into account the moral economy of popular opera, another layer can be added to the interpretation. According to Tanaka Issei, evidence suggests that during the Ming-Qing period, "[The] dramas presented in small market towns and at temple fairs, performed by low-ranking troupes of itinerant actors, and less under the control of local elites than the plays presented in individual villages or for lineages or other groups of kinfolk, were far more likely to be about romantic love, adventure, and the supernatural than about exemplars of loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and the like." (Issei 1985:149). In contemporary Taipei, a similar dichotomy is evident between the *go-chhe-hi* and *o-pei-la*. The characters in the popular culture genres on which *o-pei-la* draws, those dealing with "romantic love, adventure, and the supernatural," are stereotypes defined more by their social positions than their moral (or evil) purity (e.g., the Rich Girl and the Poor Scholar). By combining *go-chhe-hi* and *o-pei-la*, *Kam Kokpo* allows for a reading of the characters as simultaneously moral exemplars and social types.

I believe that *Kam Kokpo* addresses the specific ethical dilemmas faced by people like the actresses and their audience, relatively poor people engaged in small-scale, family-based businesses. I read the *Kam Kokpo* story, at the level of plot, as an allegory about the tensions inherent in various values that are central to Taiwanese entrepreneurship: family loyalty vs. independence, daring vs. prudence, *guanxi* 關係 (connections, personal relations) vs. economic rationalism. When we look at the performance in terms of its improvisation and adaptation to the specific context of performance, this allegory can be read as a situated critique of late twentieth century globalized capitalism.

At one level, if we look at the framing story of the cousins' pledges and Lianlian's reluctant fulfillment of her vow, Kokpo's success can be read as not simply the product of dumb luck, but as a reward for his family loyalty, for his

willingness to fulfill his promises to his uncle, Soatkiau, and Siusiu. In contrast, Lianlian's lack of filiality—she not only cuts off her family but actually kicks her mother out of her home—is punished. But this fairly straightforward moral tale is interrupted by a story in which the distinction between virtue and vice is far less clear cut.

It is significant that Kokpo is a gambler (*dutu* 賭徒), while Lianlian is a “boss lady” (*shao nainai* 少奶奶, *thau-ke-niu* 頭家娘), the wife of a self-made entrepreneur. In their positive forms, these two social types represent opposing virtues—boldness and prudence, generosity and frugality—equally necessary for entrepreneurial success. Kokpo and Lianlian represent these entrepreneurial virtues taken too far, turned into vices. Ellen Oxfeld Basu writes that Hakka entrepreneurs in Calcutta see gambling as in no way contradictory with their strong work ethic. Rather, gambling, in which they engage with relish, especially during family festivals, is “fateful action” which “re-enacts the central pitfalls and risks of real-life entrepreneurship” (1991: 252). As one of her informants put it, “What is luck? You only get luck if you do something first. You won't know if you have luck until you do something. It's just like business” (ibid.:248). Gambling, in Taiwan as amongst overseas Hakka entrepreneurs, is an activity seen as proper to men rather than women. The figure of the gambler in its positive form represents the masculine boldness necessary for success in business. But Kokpo's gambling is excessive; it is gambling for itself alone, and he improperly reverses the direction of the common metaphor when he tells Lianlian, “Gambling is a kind of business!”

The “boss lady” represents the complementary feminine virtues of frugality and caution. In Taiwanese family businesses, wives are often responsible for bookkeeping and financial management (Greenhalgh 1994; Simon 2003). Lianlian's primary vice is selfishness, but her selfishness can be seen as a parallel to Kokpo's addictive gambling. If his gambling at the beginning of the opera represents the virtues of boldness and generosity taken to excess, her selfishness takes the form of an excess of frugality and caution. This is apparent on her wedding night, in the following dialogue with Tek Seng:

LIANLIAN: You have 13 silk stores now. Did you inherit them, or earn the money yourself?

TEK SENG: I'm a self-made man. Actually, I was orphaned as a child and started with nothing. But I borrowed a bit of money from relatives, and I was extremely frugal. Now I've got thirteen stores.

LIANLIAN: Did you have to network? Do you often entertain clients?

TEK SENG: Of course. I have both large and small social occasions. For small business meetings, I go to a seafood restaurant, but when I have to throw a big party, I go to the wine house, or for Japanese cuisine.

LIANLIAN: You mustn't do that anymore! How much do you spend when you go to the wine house?

TEK SENG: 100,000 yuan.

LIANLIAN: Aiyō! You mustn't go there. It's a waste of money. You should give all your money to me, and I'll give you an allowance. Ten yuan for a month, one dollar a day.

TEK SENG: (laughs) One dollar a day, 10 yuan a month?

LIANLIAN: You spend too much at the wine house.

TEK SENG: If you only give me 10 yuan, I can't go to the wine house at all.

LIANLIAN: Well, you shouldn't go there. There are women there. If you meet a woman there, you'll fool around with her, and it will ruin our marriage. And if you drink a lot of wine, it will hurt your health. If you want to talk business, you can do it at home, or go to a noodle stand.

TEK SENG: You want me to eat *iangchhun* 陽春 noodles! [The cheapest snack at stalls in Taiwan]

LIANLIAN: If other people invite you, you can say you've already eaten. Then they won't bother you.

TEK SENG: You're so stingy! You can't even part with 10 yuan.

LIANLIAN: Credit is very important. If your credit is good, everyone will trust you. Good business depends on real trust; it's not just about spending cash to show a pretty appearance.

TEK SENG: Well, that makes sense. I'll try it.

LIANLIAN: (Gives Tek Seng 10 yuan) Be thrifty—don't spend your money. Soft drinks will give you diarrhea, and cold drinks are bad for your lungs. If you're thirsty, you can ask someone to share their tea with you. You're very lucky to have married me. Do you have a lot of relatives and close friends?

TEK SENG: Yes, I have a business; I have lots of relatives and friends.

LIANLIAN: Let's agree now that you should cut off all of your ties with your relatives. (Gong sounds)

TEK SENG: What do you mean? Why?

LIANLIAN: Don't get angry. You're very rich. Your relatives will always be coming around, asking you for rice or for money to help their sick children. But they'll never pay you back. And then your relationships will all go bad.

TEK SENG: They'll never pay me back, and my relationships will all go bad. Okay. I'll do it. What about your relatives?

LIANLIAN: If you break your ties with your relatives, I, Ong Lianlian, will break off ties with my relatives too.

TEK SENG: Then all our money will be ours alone.

LIANLIAN: Right!

At the beginning of the opera, Kokpo and Lianlian can be said to represent Taiwanese men and women's worst fears about each other as marriage

partners—the dissolute gambler who could ruin the lives of his wife and children, and the “narrow-hearted,” controlling woman who could cut off a man’s chances for success and pleasure. A return to the positive poles of their complementary qualities is necessary for the reunification of the family at the end of the opera. To be a hero, Kokpo must transform his gambling addiction into true “fateful action,” which he does when he seizes the serendipitous opportunities to go to Taiwan and to fire the cannon. Lianlian must lose her money, sacrifice her pride, and demonstrate her loyalty to her husband. After she does this, she is allowed back into the family without rancor. *Kam Kokpo* is unique among the *koa-a-hi* performances I have seen in that the leading roles, those played by the troupe’s star *sio sing* (male role) and *sio toan* 小旦 (female role) actresses, are antagonists rather than lovers. Their antagonism is, however, another form of complementarity.

Outdoor stage *koa-a-hi*, as I have noted, is improvisational, and the performers adjust to the context of the event. If we analyze the dialogue of this particular performance, another layer of interpretation is possible. Lianlian’s selfish frugality, Kokpo’s “fateful action” and his filiality, and the official’s cowardice take on specific inflections that reflect the particular anxieties of the performers and their audience in 1994.

In order to contextualize this particular performance of Lianlian, we need to recall the state of the Taiwanese economy in 1994. The Asian economic crises of the 1980s caused a downturn in Taiwan’s economy for the first time since the 1960s. By the 1990s, the small-scale family businesses which had provided the base for Taiwan’s “economic miracle” in the 1970s had been under threat for a decade. The early 1990s was a period in which Taiwanese government and business were forced to focus on reorienting the economy towards a wider global market. Government economic policy began to emphasize building up high tech industries and encouraging foreign investment. Many medium and large-scale businesses moved their factories to mainland China or Southeast Asia to take advantage of cheaper labor, and their products were selling in Taiwan at prices cheaper than domestic manufactured goods. In all of the neighborhoods where I observed temple festivals, large numbers of American and Japanese chain convenience stores were rapidly edging out family-run Taiwanese dry goods stores. This period was also the height of a discourse, in both the Chinese and English-speaking worlds, that opposed a “traditional Chinese” business culture, characterized by family businesses and *guanxi*, to a rationalist-utilitarian “Western” business culture (Greenhalgh 1994).

Given such a climate, it is not hard to read Ong Lianlian as the epitome of a global business culture, backed by the government and multinational corporations, which was threatening to bulldoze the familiar world of Taiwanese small-scale entrepreneurs. Lianlian personifies a style of modernity associated by most Taiwanese with the West. Her abandonment of her extended family in favor of her marital relationship, and her refusal to bear children because she wants to “keep her figure,” are common stereotypes of the modern, Western or Westernized, woman. We can also reread the dialogue from the wedding night scene cited above in terms of the conflict between two styles of business—Tek Seng’s traditional, local style, based on networks of kin and friends among whom favors are regularly exchanged, and Lianlian’s Western utilitarian style in which such *guanxi* networks are merely “wasteful.”

The character of the official presents a further critique of the coalition of government and big business that threatens the small-scale entrepreneurs of Taipei. After his opening recitation in a traditional mode, he introduces himself by claiming that, “Like Wang Yongqing [the CEO of Formosa Plastics, one of the wealthiest men in Taiwan at the time of the show], I got rich making disposable chopsticks.” He later reveals to Kokpo that he bought his position: he cannot read or write. The official is not merely cowardly, but incompetent in the very particular way of civil servants. When the official gets the report that the aborigines are attacking, his response is: “I’m not prepared for this! It’s Saturday! And tomorrow is Sunday. I let all the soldiers go home!” He represents the worst sides of both the big businessman and the bureaucrat—vulgarity, materialism, corruption, and an addiction to red tape.

Ethnicity in Kam Kokpo Goes to Taiwan

Only two characters in the performance, the aborigine and the official, are marked as “ethnic.” Their otherness makes them structurally equivalent, and they represent opposite boundaries of normality.

In the Sim Yim troupe’s *Kam Kokpo*, the aboriginal character is played in bare chest, black pants of the type worn under most military costumes in opera, a fur pelt around the waist, leaves in his hair, and blue paint on his cheeks in imitation of the facial tattoos of Tayal women. He speaks in gibberish while brandishing a spear. Significantly, the aborigine is played by Mr. Su, the only mainlander in the cast.

The official wears a Qing official’s robe and feathered hat, and his queue is wired to stick up behind his head. The make-up is that used for *sam hoe* clown characters. The official’s ethnicity is registered through his language. Although all of the characters (except the aborigines and possibly Siusiu) are from Fuzhou, they all speak in the actresses’ everyday (Taipei Holo) dialect;

only the official speaks with a distinguishing accent. He speaks a barely comprehensible, extremely nasal dialect of Holo, which allows for an endless stream of obscene puns. None of the Taiwanese friends I asked to help me transcribe the tape of this performance could identify this accent; some guessed Fuzhou, others simply said, "Well, he's from the mainland." The association between mainland ethnicity and bureaucracy is hardly accidental; it reflects a convergence of ethnicity and class that was a major source of tension in the post-war decades (Gates 1981). Given that immigrants from the mainland were over-represented in the civil service throughout the KMT's rule, we might see this ethnicization of the official character as another form of inserting contemporary class politics into the Qing stageworld.

The two characters represent the two boundaries of the social world of small entrepreneurs in Taipei—officialdom (the salaried civil service) and the "savage" underworld. The scene in which the official and the aborigine confront each other highlights their similarities, and ties the official clearly to the KMT:

ABORIGINE: *Totototototo!*

OFFICIAL: What the hell are you saying? Hah? I don't understand.

ABORIGINE: *Gebaliki*. . .

OFFICIAL: What "*ke phah li kui*"? I don't understand. Go fix those broken teeth of yours, then I'll understand you.

ABORIGINE: *Ao! Ao!*

OFFICIAL: Why aren't you wearing pants?

ABORIGINE: *Chipaliali*. . .

OFFICIAL: Aiyo, you can speak Taiwanese? Aren't you . . . you're a Heng Chun aborigine, not "*khalikhali kilibaba chili mama sisi mama*. . ."

ABORIGINE: Your mother! ("*lin nia li a!*", a more vulgar challenge than "Yo mama!" in the US)

OFFICIAL: Aiyo, he speaks more clearly than I do! Officials and citizens cooperate! [*koan bin hap chok* 官民合作, a KMT slogan] Pull off his pants!

KOKPO: Officials and citizens cooperate!

The representation of the aborigine is obviously racist, a figure of pure Otherness. He is referred to only as the "*hoan-a* 番仔," a derogatory term meaning something like "barbarian," once used for all non-Chinese. Like Shakespeare's Caliban, he is a violent creature whose only real language is the curse. If the savage is at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the official should be at the top, embodying the order of Chinese civilization. Yet this official's vulgar and unintelligible language, his mimicking of the aboriginal leader, place him equally beyond the pale of civility, if not civilization. Kokpo is placed between them, equally alienated from both.

History, Morality, and the Stereotype

In an interview the playwright for *India Coral*, Yang Xingzhi (楊杏枝), described her desire to set a *koa-a-hi* opera in Taiwan this way:

"I looked at some old *koa-a-hi* operas and some old songbooks, and I discovered that actually, there aren't many operas about Taiwan." . . . Yang Xingzhi believes that our current plays are all very *Zhongyuan* [the Central Plains]. Many plots talk about freezing in the snow, but in Taiwanese people's lives, there basically is no snow. What is the feeling of having your feet sink deep into snow? We really have a hard time even imagining it. The experiences we're familiar with in our daily lives — the romantic feel of the hot summers of an island nation, the spirit of the plants, animals, and environment, the temperament of the people — these are rarely written into our theater. [Zhuang 2000]

I want to analyze the implications of this logic for *o-pei-la*. That is, I want to ask why most *o-pei-la* performances are NOT set in Taiwan. And what, then, is being excised from the sphere of "Taiwanese culture" when *koa-a-hi*'s content is made "more Taiwanese"?

In *go-chhe-hi*, it is the historicity of the chronotope that legitimates the characters' status as allegorical figures standing for abstract moral-psychological qualities. In *o-pei-la*, the protagonists move from this traditional space of moral abstraction to a chronotope that combines the supernatural and exotic with the everyday of the present. In the Other world of the "martial forest" of knights-errant and gangsters, or some exotic foreign country, an alternative set of traditional ethical values—romance, friendship—prevails. At the same time, the interruption of the narrative with references to the complicated circumstances of contemporary life, with its consumer culture and party politics, challenges the viability of the "traditional" moral economy promoted by the KMT (Silvio 2005). I believe that the setting of most *o-pei-la* operas in China does not reflect an identification with the mainland as "home," but just the opposite—an alienation from the elite values that the KMT made "China" represent in Taiwan.

In *Kam Kokpo*, the Other world of the "martial forest" or Tibet is replaced by the "real" space of frontier Taiwan, blurring the boundaries between alterity and familiarity, allegory and farce. *Kam Kokpo* blends the allegorical historicity of *go-chhe-hi* with the anachronistic clowning of *o-pei-la*, leaving out the element of the fantastic, creating a stageworld that is simultaneously traditionalist and critical. This blending leads to a new type of role. Kokpo, Lianlian, and the official are not simply embodiments of virtues, vices, or abstract psychological qualities, but also contemporary social types, or

class stereotypes. They are embodied not through the traditional repertoire of stylized gestures (*kha-po-chhiu-lo*, or *shen duan* 身段 in Mandarin), but through Brechtian *gest*—the Gambler’s constantly twitching feet, the Boss Lady’s snapping fan. But if *Kam Kokpo* is parodic, its protagonist is still not a rebellious anti-hero. His “fateful action” leads him to become, in the end, a righteous official and filial child.

Moral allegory and social farce bleed into each other in both directions. On the one hand, these new-style characters parody the moral economy of the *go-chhe-hi* through their anachronistic play, juxtaposing traditional ideals with modern reality. On the other hand, because these characters are inserted within the framework of the “play from ancient books,” contemporary class stereotypes take on the abstraction of traditional allegory.

In this way, the ordinary dilemmas of Taiwanese struggling in small family businesses against the tide of globalization are imbued with moral significance. *Kokpo* and *Lianlian* stand, at one level, for axes of virtue and vice, and the story can be read as a didactic fable about the transformation from one to the other. Because each performance is adapted to the immediate context, to the specific time and place of the temple festival, the actors can use this allegorical framework to critique forces they see as threatening their livelihoods and those of their audiences. *Kam Kokpo* can thus be read, like the eighteenth century discourse on English “custom” analyzed by Edward P. Thompson (1993), as a means of critiquing contemporary trends in capitalism through a conservative appeal to “traditional values.”

India Coral Reblossoming⁶

Context

India Coral Reblossoming was created for the 1999 CKS Culture Center competition for original *koa-a-hi* operas to be performed at the National Theater. Chen Meiyun, the manager and star of an outdoor stage *koa-a-hi* troupe, who had also been involved in several previous “reformed” *koa-a-hi* productions at the National Theater, sought out the young playwright Yang Xingzhi to come up with a script for her troupe. Yang’s intended audience was, as she put it, “an intellectual audience, people who have a strong Taiwanese identity” (interview with the author, 2005).

Yang wanted a theme that was “fresh” and “relevant,” and decided, for the reasons discussed above, to set the opera in Taiwan. Yang and Chen chose

⁶ I was not in Taiwan in 2000 and was unable to attend the performance of *India Coral* personally. My analysis is based on a DVD of the performance at the National Theater produced by the Chen Meiyun Taiwanese Opera Troupe, 2001.

to adapt the *Kam Kokpo* story primarily because of the hero, whose mischievous character, they felt, suited Chen Meiyun's stage persona well.

Yang, however, changed nearly everything about the story. Her first draft, the submission which won the Chen Meiyun troupe the spot in the National Theater schedule, kept only the characters of Kokpo, Soatkiau, and the military official. In this draft, Kokpo is torn between Soatkiau, his hometown love, and Ina, a Pingpu (Plains Aboriginal) woman. By the second draft, the hometown love story had also been eliminated, and the relationship between Kokpo and Ina—and between the Han and the Pingpu—became the primary focus of the opera. The entire framing plot of the *o-pei-la* version of *Kam Kokpo*, the story of Ong Lianlian, was eliminated.

The India Coral Reblossoming Narrative

The plot of *India Coral* is as follows:

The time is the Qing dynasty, between the *Yong Zheng* 雍正 and *Qian Long* 乾隆 reigns. Kam Kokpo is a gambler from Fuzhou. He loses all his money gambling in the first scene, and stows away aboard a ship bound for Taiwan. During a storm at sea, he rescues Tek Seng, a fellow stow-away from Quanzhou. The ship is carrying a high-level military official, the *Pachong* 把總. Kokpo and Tek Seng are discovered and arrested by Kang Tiongki, the *Chapchong* 十總 (a lower-level military official). Just as they are about to be sentenced, Chhun Seng, the boy lover of the *Pachong* rushes in. The *Pachong* is desperately ill, and Chhun Seng offers a reward to anyone who can cure him. Kokpo figures out that the *Pachong* is suffering from opium withdrawal and cures him by cutting open all his precious opium pipes and making medicine from the residue he finds inside. At Chhun Seng's request, the *Pachong* makes Kokpo a *Chapchong*.⁷

When they arrive in Taiwan, Kokpo is assigned to the Makado tribal village of Ah Gao Sia. He falls in love with Ina, the daughter of the village's *ang-i* 尪姨 (female shaman) and Ha Pao, the village's leading warrior and hunter. Ina's sister Bala (Guava) falls for Tek Seng, who ignores her. The Qing policy is to Sinicize the Plains Aborigines, and Ina's brother, Dabaning, is studying Chinese, memorizing the Confucian classics and acting as Kang Tiongki's translator.

Despite their mutual attraction, Kokpo and Ina quarrel over their cultural

⁷ This scene was adapted from Chen Meiyun's memories of how the Kokpo story was performed by the "indoor stage" troupe of which she was a child star in the 1960s. This scene is left out by most outdoor stage troupes, as is an ending to the story in which Kokpo returns to Fuzhou to find that his aunt has become the emperor's favorite concubine. (Yang Xingzhi, interview with author)

differences. He wants her to take his surname and act more like a Han gentlewoman; she is from a matrilineal society and wants to stay with her parents. Ina has been chosen to be the next *ang-i*, and her mother does not want her associating with Han people.

Chhun Seng opens a brothel, and Kokpo and Tek Seng go to visit him. A Han prostitute sings, and Kokpo remembers his hometown love, Soatkiau. Tek Seng learns that his wife and children, who were illegally traveling to Taiwan, died at sea. Just at that moment, a report comes that the “marionette savages” (*kuilei fan* 傀儡番, referring to the Paiwan) are attacking Ah Gao Sia.

Kokpo runs to Ah Gao Sia to look for Ina. She has been injured, but escaped. Kokpo knows that she is pregnant with his child. They reconcile, and Kokpo promises to stay in Taiwan and care for Ina and the child. The *ang-i* and Ha Pao decide to lead the surviving villagers to a safer place to live.

The *Pachong* decrees that the warriors of Ah Gao Sia should fight the Paiwan, but Ha Pao hears birdcalls that are bad omens, and refuses to go into battle. Kokpo, using a gambler’s trick, convinces the villagers to stay and fight. Kang arrives and orders the *ang-i* to lead them into battle. The *ang-i* is sick, and Ina takes her place.

The Paiwan are fierce and the outnumbered villagers are being slaughtered. Kokpo and Kang Tiongki report to the *Pachong*. Kang wants to use a cannon to quell the Paiwan, but this would also kill many of the villagers. Kokpo is appalled, but his objections are overruled, and the cannon is fired, killing most of the aborigines on both sides. Dabaning comes to and finds his father dying. Realizing that they have been betrayed by the Qing officials, Dabaning cuts off his queue.

Ina gives birth to a girl, but the birth is difficult and Ina is dying. She asks Kokpo to take her to the river so that she can bathe herself and the baby before she dies. After Ina’s death, Kokpo takes his daughter and follows the villagers as they begin their journey to find a new home.

Refined Koa-a-hi Style

In terms of sets, lighting, and costumes, *India Coral* maintained the style characteristic of most “reformed” (*gai liang* 改良) or “refined” (*jing zhi* 精緻) *koa-a-hi*. This style is intended to modernize *koa-a-hi* by adapting modern stage techniques (with Broadway as a primary model) while maintaining a largely traditionalist performance style. The music was one of the opera’s primary innovations, blending Pingpu tunes into the traditional *koa-a-hi* repertoire. In general, the artists strove to create an “aboriginal flavor” by adapting motifs from archival material, at the same time “*koa-a-hi-izing*” these elements. The

archival material came mostly from books, articles and websites produced by non-academic, activist scholars, especially Liu Huanyue and Pastor Wan of a Presbyterian Church in Tainan, who self-identify as Pingpu.

As with most “refined *koa-a-hi*” productions, the sets are generally realistic, though abstracted, foregoing both the gaudiness of the *o-pei-la* stage and the minimalist symbolism of Beijing Opera sets. The set designer for *India Coral* based his designs on archival images of Siraya architecture, but isolated pure forms from these images from which he created scrims (Fu 2000). Ke Mingfeng, the musical director, says in the program that he was surprised to find that the Pingpu tunes were quite similar to the *chhit-e-a* 七字調, the most characteristic tune in the traditional *koa-a-hi* repertoire. The major adaptation he had to make was in the addition of instrumental accompaniment (Ke 2000).

Although Yang and Chen wanted to keep the “liveliness” of *o-pei-la*, the chronotope of *India Coral* is very similar to that of *go-chhe-hi* in its homogeneity. Although a male and a female clown character (Chhun Seng and Bala) are added to the cast, they are very different from the *sam hoe* and *sam pat* of *o-pei-la*. They do not disrupt the historicity of the stageworld in any way. Anachronism of the type common in *o-pei-la*—that is, visual, musical, or linguistic references to any era other than the Qing—is strictly avoided, as it is in all of the refined *koa-a-hi* performances I have seen.

***India Coral* Reblossoming as Analogy**

India Coral sets up two relationships between the past of the stageworld and the present of the performance, which are occasionally at odds with each other. On one level, the relationship between past and present is seen implicitly as one of cause and effect. Yang saw researching and writing the script as an exercise in “roots-seeking” (*xun gen* 尋根). She sees the history of the Pingpu as something that is lost and needs to be recovered in order to understand the true nature of the present. The narrative of *India Coral* can easily be read as an origin myth. As Lin Heyi expressed it in a review:

The playwright’s goal of “reconstructing the historical situation of racial mixing” is so obvious! From when Kokpo crosses the strait, scene after scene of conflict passes, until the final “New Life” scene, when Ina finally gives birth to their descendent. Racial slaughter once created rivers of blood, as the newborn is dyed in the mother’s blood in birth. And aborigines are like the mother, who offers her own blood, thus creating the greater Taiwanese community of today. This is conveyed clearly by the red cloth which hangs down from the stage and extends forward. [Lin 2000]

On another level, the relationship between past and present is analogical.

Here, situations of the present are projected onto the past. In *India Coral*, the colonialism of the Qing is implicitly compared to the current neo-colonialism of “the West”: Pingpu are to Han as Chinese are to Americans.⁸ Yang explained her motivation for writing the story this way:

I wanted to give the message that if you don't protect your culture, you'll lose it, you'll become like foreigners in your own land. It's like the Singapore Chinese, in Taiwan we call them, to put it impolitely, “Western ghosts.” They don't know their own culture. We have to preserve, or establish our own culture.

I went to Tainan to participate in a workshop on Pingpu culture. I found out 80-90% of the people in Tainan are Pingpu. So a lot of people there look like aborigines, but they're all Sinicized. Like ABCs [American Born Chinese], they look Chinese, but they're thoroughly American inside, in their thinking. [interview with the author]

“A Warrior Cannot Die,” the scene in which Ha Pao dies and Dabaning cuts off his queue, inspired the most intense discussion and identification among Taiwanese viewers:

(Dabaning places his Han-style robe over Ha Pao's shoulders, helps him to his feet)

DABANING: How could this happen?

HA PAO: Dabaning, we aborigines (*hoan-a*) are aborigines. Although you wear Han people's clothes, and speak the Han people's language, you will always be a brave (*mada*) of Ah Gao Sia. You are not a Han person. (Ha Pao hands the robe back to Dabaning)

DABANING (facing audience): We're not enemies. Why did you use the cannon to blast us?

HA PAO: Dabaning, I am dying.

DABANING: You can't die!

HA PAO: After I die, you must take care of your mother, and Ina and Bala. You must be a warrior of Ah Gao Sia, like me. Do you understand? (Dabaning nods) Also, if I die, you must not bury me in the Han people's way. *Alizu* 阿立祖 will protect you.

DABANING: You can't die! You mustn't die! You're a warrior—warriors don't die!

HA PAO: *Alizu* will protect you.

⁸ Like allegories, analogies may work on several levels or inspire multiple linkages. In the program, the lighting director Wang Shixin writes: “At the time [the Qing] the sea restrictions [against unregistered men crossing from Fujian to Taiwan] incited a large number of people to illegally cross over (like today?), the imperial restrictions that immigrants could not bring their families with them (restrictions on mainland spouses coming to Taiwan?), resulted in *lo-han-kha* 羅漢腳 [unmarried young men, toughs] all over, creating the problem of prostitution. Isn't this being reenacted in Taiwan today?” (Wang 2000). In an interview with me, Yang also compared Kokpo and Tek Seng to the soldiers who came from the mainland with Chiang Kaishek after 1945.

DABANING: You can't die! Come on, get up, you're a warrior! (Ha Pao falls down dead) Father! (wails) Why?!

ANG-I (walking in behind Dabaning and viewing the scene): *Alizu* is angry.

DABANING: Why?! Why?! (he grabs a knife and violently cuts off his queue)

Several reviewers compared Dabaning to the younger generation of Taiwanese. One on-line reviewer wrote: "Like Dabaning (played by Lü Xuefeng), he's originally the son of the chief of the Pingpu tribe. He wants to cast off the traditional aboriginal lifestyle and he studies the Han people's culture. . . . This kind of youth is a bit like the 'new new humans' (*xinxin renlei* 新新人類) of today . . . this kind of youth naturally looks down on his own culture of origin, naturally he'll get into conflicts with his conservative father. . . ." (Mu 2000). Yang Xingzhi reported to me that her brother, who had recently finished his graduate degree in the US, wept when he saw this scene. It is primarily through Dabaning that the psychic conflicts of subaltern intellectuals, particularly in situations where the colonial or neo-colonial power engages in explicitly assimilationist policies, are represented. Dabaning is a projection backward of the contemporary stereotype of the "banana," the product of "model minority" status.

India Coral was written at a time of transition in public and government discourse on Taiwanese national identity. The primordialist discourse which opposed assimilation of Taiwanese identity by Chinese identity on the basis of Holo language and culture, which had been characteristic of much Native Soil cultural production and Democratic Progressive Party rhetoric, was giving way to a conception of Taiwan as a "multi-cultural" nation (Chun 2002). The Native Soil discourse of the 1960s to 1990s defined Taiwanese identity primarily in terms of dialect, customs, religious practice, and historical experience. Although descent was an implicit and crucial factor in determining who was Taiwanese in this discourse, there was little in the way of a biological discourse of race. However, race became an important factor in the mid 1990s, with the rise of a movement among some Native Soil activists to reclaim Pingpu identity.⁹ For example, the first chapter of Liu Huanyue et al's *Am I a Pingpu Person? DIY* (2001) tells readers how to determine if they have Pingpu blood by checking their physical features, and provides a nineteenth-century-style illustration marked with descriptions of "typical" eye, mouth, and nose types, as well as proportional length of limbs and torso.

It may seem ironic that a new conception of Taiwanese as a racial category emerged at the same time as a reconceptualization of Taiwan as a multi-

⁹ For a discussion of the troubled relationship between concepts of descent and culture in Pingpu identity politics, see Brown (2004).

cultural nation. Yet I think Yang's citation of ABC, or Chinese-American, identity is telling here. The conflation of "bloodline" and "culture" which runs through *India Coral* is distinctly American; it is precisely the problematic intertwining of biology and culture that has been at the center of twentieth-century US legal and sociological discourse on race and ethnicity. I believe that the need to frame identity in terms of "bloodline" (*xuetong* 血統) is related to the need, arising in the late 1990s, to engage with the American category of ethnicity, with its fraught history, as a way of simultaneously reinforcing racial divisions and rendering them unspeakable (see Omi and Winant 1986; Greenhouse, ed. 1998). This is a need felt by intellectuals, but not, at least in the present, by most working-class Taiwanese.

In terms of both content and style, *India Coral* has much in common with American theater, cinema, and television productions which represent immigrant, Native American, or other "ethnic" characters. One on-line reviewer even wrote that the final scene in *India Coral* reminded her of *Fiddler on the Roof* (Cai 2003). Let me enumerate a few of the stylistic parallels between *India Coral* and American productions that "celebrate" ethnic identity. First among these is the resolution of ethnic conflict through heterosexual romance. The fantasy of inter-ethnic marriage as a utopian model for the management of a society containing multiple indigenous and immigrant groups has been ubiquitous in twentieth-century American popular culture. Examples run from Broadway (*Abie's Irish Rose*, *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*), to television sitcoms (*All in the Family*, *Joanie Loves Chachi*, *Dharma and Greg*), to film (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*). The Disney Corporation's 1995 animated feature, *Pocahontas*, was popular in Taiwan and the parallels between *India Coral* and this film are numerous. Both are national "foundational romances" in which a plucky, proto-feminist, indigenous heroine meets an adventurous boy from the colonizing society, teaches him about her culture, and they fall in love despite the ethnocentric objections of her parents and his superiors . . . etc. (Strong 1996).

American portrayals of cross-cultural romance are quite different from the portrayals of cross-cultural romance which are common in Chinese opera. Scenes in which a Chinese general fights with a "barbarian" warrior princess, and she falls in love with him and forces him to marry her, occur in so many *xiqu* that there is a standard choreography for such scenes. Yet these marriages are portrayed as political, rather than cultural, unions. Inter-ethnic marriages in traditionalist *xiqu* do not create a new, integrated national culture—neither character adjusts their language or dress, no offspring are produced to create a new family. Rather, these alliances promise peaceful relations between political entities which retain their autonomy.

As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (2002) have pointed out, "National heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core [American] national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behavior, a space of pure citizenship" (ibid.:189). The heterosexual family model of citizenship, they argue, is predicated on the exclusion of not only racial conflict, but non-normative sexuality from the critical public sphere. Thus, the new Pingpu-Han Taiwanese family/race represented by Kokpo, Ina, and their child is morally legitimated through the exclusion of Han officialdom, represented in the homosexual dyad of the *Pachong* and Chhun Seng, and by the Paiwan, who are all male.¹⁰

Stylistically, one way in which *India Coral* follows the model of the American inter-ethnic romance is in the use of language. The problem of what language the Pingpu characters should speak/sing is resolved by having them all speak in Holo, but with select Pingpu words inserted. These words are those which have already been absorbed into Holo (such as *khan-chhiu* 牽手, or "clasping hands" for husband and wife), or are recognizable to most Taiwanese people (such as *mada* for "brave," an unmarried man). This is similar to American radio, film, and television productions in which non-Anglo characters usually speak English peppered with a few stereotypical phrases in another language (e.g., "Si, señor!" for Mexicans, "Ah, so," for Japanese, etc.).

Note that this is a very different way of representing the language of ethnic Others from that used in temple festival *koa-a-hi*. In either *go-chhe-hi* or *o-pei-la*, non-Chinese characters speak either in the same dialect as the Chinese characters (that is, in *go-chhe-hi*, a classical form of Holo, or in *o-pei-la*, contemporary informal Holo with some Mandarin, Japanese, and English thrown in) or they speak, as in *Kam Kokpo*, no dialect at all but pure gibberish. The Paiwan's exclusion from the national family in *India Coral* is underlined by the fact that they have no language at all; they are completely silent, expressing themselves only in the pure physicality of modern dance.

The blending of languages in *India Coral* is paralleled by the blending of Pingpu tunes and instruments into the traditional *koa-a-hi* repertoire. Both reflect the discourse in Taiwanese folklore studies which emphasizes *koa-a-hi*'s (and by extension, Taiwanese culture's) absorptive capacity, a discourse which became particularly strong in the late 1990s (see Silvio 2005). Like mainstream American multi-cultural discourse since the 1980s, it models a "mosaic" of cultures in which (sufficiently civilized) ethnic groups

¹⁰ Homosexuality is not seen as necessarily negative in *India Coral*. The character of Chhun Seng is played as "cute." Homosexuality is, however, restricted to the official class.

contribute colorful elements to a “universal” framework whose relationship to the majority ethnic culture is always implicit.

A third way in which *India Coral* follows American models for representing ethnicity is in the casting. Publicity material for the opera makes much of the actress Liu Yuying who plays the role of the *ang-i* by special invitation. Liu Yuying was born into an acting family (her father was a master of *pak-koan* opera), and also “a real Makado Pingpu” (<http://members.tripod.com/meiyun0/blume/a.1.htm>; also author’s interview with Yang). Given that cross-gender, cross-generational, and cross-ethnic role-playing are common, even defining, practices within *koa-a-hi*, it is significant that the alignment of the role that most embodies Pingpu identity with a “real” Pingpu actress should be seen as important. This logic mirrors the impulse behind American protest against blackface, or the portrayal of Asian characters by white actors in greasepaint, a protest grounded in the assumption of a realist aesthetic, rather than the traditional aesthetics of *xiqu*.¹¹

The characters in *India Coral* (anachronistically) speak in the vocabulary of multiculturalism; the lover’s arguments are already phrased as a conflict between “peoples” (*min* 民/*zu* 族) and “cultures” (*wenhua* 文化). The two cultures are defined in terms of their oppositions within a set of anthropological categories: religion, fashion, sexual mores, kinship.

(song)

KOKPO: A mouth full of betel nut, all red, not like a Han lady at all.

INA: Betel nut is refreshing and flavorful, when I eat it my whole body relaxes.

KOKPO: I look at your two big feet, Tang Shan 唐山 beauties have three-inch lotuses.

When they walk down the street, they sway like the clouds crossing the moon, it makes one feel bewitched without being drunk.

INA: A natural body, why do you want to make it twisted and painful?

My big feet are suitable for walking, it’s no problem to climb up the mountain or scramble down to the sea. . . .

KOKPO: Supporting a husband and teaching his children, the three obediences and four virtues you must remember truly.

Not like you, as loose as the willow strand! Only women of chastity leave a beautiful name.

INA: You scold people but never apply it to yourself; it’s you Han men who are “loose as the willow strand,” with your three wives and four concubines. . . .

INA: I worship my *Alizu* 阿立祖, you worship your *Mazu* 媽祖.

¹¹ See Schlossman (2002) and Moy (1993) for discussions of Broadway and Hollywood’s use of white actors to portray Asian characters and Asian-American protests against this practice.

As with contemporary American multi-culturalist discourse, the representation of ethnic culture is confined to a limited range of “acceptable differences.” (See Varenne, Sarat and Berkowitz, Yanow, Chock, and Urcioli in Greenhouse, ed. 1998.) Cultures may differ within a set of fixed anthropological categories, but differences which are too different, which might challenge those categories themselves, or the institutions based on them, are problematic and generally occluded in public discourse. For instance, conflict between matriliney and patriliney in *India Coral* is represented primarily in terms of matriarchy vs. patriarchy, in terms of women having, versus not having, social and political power. Thus Ina’s family seems more “modern” than specifically matrilineal. For instance, it is Dabaning’s father, not his mother’s brother, who is responsible for disciplining and teaching him. Such erasures of certain cultural differences are necessary for the logic of analogy to work, for the new Taiwanese race/family being imagined to correspond to the American family model of multi-cultural citizenship. My main point here is not to point out differences between the stageworld and some “true” Pingpu cultural history, but simply to illustrate the homogenizing effects of any analogical relationship to history.

Conclusion

Despite their obvious differences, in some ways both *Kam Kokpo* and *India Coral* construct moral identities which they offer as potentially inclusive of the performers and their audience. In both cases, this moral identity is bounded by the top and bottom limits of civilization—on the one hand by obtuse officialdom, and on the other hand by the figure of the Savage. Yet the nature of these moral identities, and the way they are constructed through relations between past and present, are quite different.

Allegory, in the mode of *xieyi*, and analogy are both longstanding features of Chinese aesthetics. Yet the relative importance of these rhetorical techniques, the content to which they refer and thereby construct, and their political and aesthetic effects, vary with changing political, economic, and social contexts.

It is an irony inherent in the current global situation that the more Taiwanese intellectuals seek to nativize *koa-a-hi*, the more American it becomes. Rey Chow has written that one aspect of colonial, or neo-colonial, situations is what she calls “coercive mimeticism,” in which “the ethnic person is expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic” (Chow 2002:107). When *koa-a-hi* is nationalized, it risks becoming a form of just such mimeticism. This happens at the level of form as well as content. In the KMT era, remaking

koa-a-hi into “Taiwan’s local opera” was a process of fitting it into the mold of a “folk opera” comparable to other Chinese *xiqu* genres. In the post-KMT era, it is being remade into an “ethnic theater” comparable with other performance genres that represent diverse cultures on and for the world stage. I would argue that transforming history from the space of allegory to the space of analogy is a strategy through which Taiwanese nativist intellectuals seek not only to create their own identities, but to project them onto a global cultural field, a field in which the United States is currently dominant.

Analogy seems to be a common strategy for Chinese intellectuals attempting to construct national imaginaries in periods when “Western” political and economic systems are expanding globally. Rebecca Karl has analyzed an experimental Beijing Opera performance of 1904 which made the following analogy: Poland was to Turkey as China is to Japan and the Western powers (Karl 2002). Such strategies may be almost inevitable, considering that many forms of globalization work precisely by squeezing local entities (political, cultural, economic) into units that are, if not homogenous, structurally substitutable.

Popular opera’s emphasis on allegory reflects the orientation of its performers and audience towards local, rather than global, arenas. These operas are offered to the gods of local religious cults, and the community they address is defined primarily in terms of the neighborhood. In *Kam Kokpo*, working-class Taiwanese also mime stereotypes of themselves. But these stereotypes serve allegorical, rather than analogical, functions, and are linked to a class, rather than ethnic, paradigm. Whereas refined *koa-a-hi* draws on the hermeneutics of global power to valorize (and at the same time, contain) local tradition, popular *koa-a-hi* draws on a traditional Chinese hermeneutics to address distinctly local experiences of globalization.

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從鬧劇到悲劇： 胡撇仔戲與精緻歌仔戲的不同美學與歷史概念

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本文以兩齣歌仔戲做比較，來分析勞工階級與知識份子不同的美學與歷史概念。兩齣戲同樣是以清領時期臺灣的「甘國寶」民間傳說為背景，其中「甘國寶過臺灣」乃一齣外臺胡撇仔戲，而「刺桐花開」則是在國家戲劇院演出的精緻歌仔戲；前者是探討社會階級的鬧劇，後者則是探討族群衝突的悲劇。

外臺戲的美學為寫意 (allegory)。在「甘國寶過臺灣」這齣戲裡，臺上的過去世界將現代社會抽象化、精髓化。清領臺灣「真實的」歷史背景與胡撇仔表演方式的結合，使戲中主角既是道德典範，又同時是現代社會不同的階層地位之刻板印象。因此，這齣戲以古諷今，同時以今諷古；一方面批評當代階層關係，也同時用現代生活的經驗來挑戰傳統倫理。

相反地，「刺桐花開」這齣戲則是以類比 (analogy) 的表現手法來呈現過去和現在的關係——當時平埔族與漢族的文化衝突就如同是現代臺灣人與西方人的衝突。雖然「刺桐花開」的目的在於創造一個獨特的臺灣國族認同，然而，它卻套用了美國的「民族」(ethnicity) 概念來再現臺灣的面貌。

關鍵詞：歌仔戲，寫意，類比，國族主義，階級
