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Living Taiwanese Opera: Improvisation, Performance of Gender, and Selection of Tradition

by

Pattie Katherine Hsu

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Music
in
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Bonnie C. Wade, Chair
Professor Benjamin Brinner
Professor Thomas B. Gold

Spring 2010
Living Taiwanese Opera:
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By

Pattie Katherine Hsu
Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Music

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Professor Bonnie C. Wade, Chair

This dissertation investigates the culture and cultural production of itinerant, professional Taiwanese opera performers in Taipei’s temple circuit. I argue that the community of actors and musicians and their occupational and lifestyle practices constitute a subculture that is central to both maintaining and transforming Taiwanese opera. Drawing on ethnographic research, I characterize the opera subculture’s idiosyncratic and fluid features, examine the major ways in which they are manifested—namely in improvisation, performance of gender, and selection of tradition—and discuss the cultural work they perform.

Full-time, for-profit troupes—the focus of my research—primarily work for temple patrons in privately contracted performances and occasionally in government-sponsored events. Performances in the former venue are improvised or, as the performers describe it, “alive,” whereas the latter type privileges written practices and marginalizes oral conventions. I assert that improvisation, a distinctive and crucial attribute in the temple-contracted context, is an imperative performance skill for producing unscripted stories and a professional strategy for adapting to new circumstances. My analyses of improvisation as a performance skill highlight actor-musician interactions in song performance that shows spontaneous musical processes in opera production. Improvisation, or the ability to be flexible, is a professional strategy with which performers operate enabling them to maintain the appeal of a traditional art in a rapidly changing cosmopolitan society. In particular, I argue that the socioeconomic situation in recent decades and the developing hybrid opera style in the temple context opened a space for an alternative model of gender performance, one that expresses female masculinity. Moreover, improvisation as a professional strategy enables performers to adapt to the demands of recently developed government-sponsored events and participate in a hegemonically-constructed process for selecting a dominant version of the Taiwanese opera tradition. Through three case studies, I posit that the performers’ flexible approach in this process constructs multiple versions of the opera tradition, thereby disrupting authoritative attempts at claiming a singular mode of production.

Through these analyses, I suggest that Taiwanese opera is a living tradition with continually shifting conventions and cultural meanings. The performers rapidly adjust to different and new ways of performance in order to capitalize on opportunities, ensure the cultural relevancy of their creative production, and secure their livelihood.
For my guardian angels,

Huang Chang-chu and Huang Chin-pang
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Note on Language, Romanization, and Translation

The vast majority of my fieldwork was conducted in Taiyu (Taiwanese language that is a variation of the Chinese Minnan language) while the rest was in Mandarin. Although Mandarin is the official national language in Taiwan, Taiyu is the main language most professional Taiwanese opera performers use onstage and offstage. A few performers with whom I worked, particularly those who are younger or affiliated with educational institutions, preferred to converse in Mandarin or, sometimes, a mix of Mandarin and Taiyu.

There are multiple systems for Romanizing Mandarin and Taiyu. In this dissertation, the specific systems I use were selected based on, first, reasons of accessibility to English readers and, second, in deference to the preferred system of the people and culture that I am writing about. For Romanizing Mandarin terms—indicated in the text with “M” preceding the word—I use the Hanyu Pinyin system, which is the most widespread system used in Chinese studies. The exceptions are for names of practitioners, opera troupes, and a few select terms for which I use the Wade-Giles system (in its widespread form that omits apostrophes and tone indications) commonly used in Taiwan. Taiyu Romanization—indicated in the text with “T”—is not nearly as widely known as Mandarin Romanization in Chinese studies and therefore takes a secondary position in the dissertation. I employ the Taiyu Romanization system that has been in long-term usage. The system was established in 1913 and published in the Xiamenyin Xin Zidian, or A Dictionary of the Amoy Vernacular Spoken Throughout the Chinchiu, Chiangchiu, and Formosa (1913).

For most of the terminology in relation to Taiwanese opera, I provide both the Mandarin and Taiyu Romanization when possible. Many words and phrases, however, only exist in Mandarin or Taiyu without commonly-used equivalents in the other language. For non-opera related terms I only provide Mandarin Romanization. I also provide only the Mandarin Romanization for most names of performers and troupes since the Mandarin versions are typically their legal names. For the sake of uniformity and ease of cross-referencing, all Romanization in the Bibliography and references in the text are based on the Hanyu Pinyin system. Chinese characters are provided in the Bibliography and Appendix B: Glossary.

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. All syntactical and written errors are mine in the song texts I transcribed and translated from field recordings.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

A VIGNETTE FROM FIELDWORK

On a side street of the busy Taipei city thoroughfare, Chongqing North Road, a small temple sits among a row of businesses. During the second lunar month in 2008, bright, florid decorations can be seen on the sidewalk and in the street for the month-long celebration in honor of Mazu, the most widely worshiped goddesses in Taiwan, turning an otherwise discreet-looking temple into a flashy presence. As part of the temple’s festivities, patrons sponsor Taiwanese opera performances to show thanks to and provide entertainment for Mazu and other deities worshiped at the temple.

On this particular occasion, the 28th day of the second lunar month, the Shinyingfeng Opera Troupe was scheduled for a performance. Erected for the occasion, a temporary stage faced the temple from the intersecting street of the surprisingly quiet traffic junction. The Shinyingfeng troupe is one of the most reputable and well-established troupes in Taipei and regularly performs in the city’s center. Opera performances in the heart of Taipei are highly coveted because the location’s centrality draws large audiences.

Just before two o’clock in the afternoon on this particular day, I arrived on the street where the temple is located after a short ten-minute walk from the Shuanglian Metro Station. As I approached, I could hear a ritual taking place in the temple. Across the street from it, the temporary stage was easy to spot from a distance, a prominent structure occupying one lane of the two-lane street that created a loud presence in a cosmopolitan city space filled with high-rises. The structure was about sixteen feet tall, twenty-four feet wide, and twenty-four feet deep, with the floor raised four feet above ground. Constructed out of metal and bamboo structural beams, the stage had wood flooring planks and tarp enclosures. Once within visual range, I immediately spotted the colorfully familiar red-white-and-blue strips of the tarp that covered the sides of the stage. My eyes then gravitated toward the neon-colored banners and backdrop separating the front stage and backstage areas. Around the front of the stage, roughly twenty audience members were already waiting on the sidewalk under the trees, or seated in the chairs that had been neatly set up in the street for the day’s show. Along the way, I greeted the familiar faces among them. As I reached the front of the stage and threw up my instrument bag, one musician pointed to the side to let me know the location of the ladder entrance.

Going around to the side, I found a three-rung bamboo ladder built into the structure. I climbed up into the backstage area, a space occupied by the troupe’s female members. Eight actors were busily preparing themselves at their tightly placed stations, which consisted of metallic multifunctional storage crates. Each actor sat on a small crate and used a large crate as a makeshift vanity table, with the lid opened at a ninety-degree angle, mirror propped on the inside of the lid, and a portable light clipped to the top of the lid. The actors were in varying phases of applying their makeup and doing their hair. In the front stage area, separated from the back with a canvas backdrop, the lone Shinyingfeng male actor sat with the rest of troupe’s men:

1I use “actor” to refer to both female and male actors.
three resident musicians, troupe manager, and stagehand. The musicians had already set up their instruments, and I quickly made my own preparations. I unpacked and connected the amplifier and microphone, then tuned and rosin my two bowed lutes. The two stringed instruments that I had with me were the yehu, or gezaixian (T: khak-a-hiân), and the erhu (T: hô-hiân). The yehu, which has a bright and crisp sound, is typically used to accompany pieces that are medium to fast in tempo, and the erhu, which is dimmer and mellower sounding, is typically used for slower and sadder music. In the meantime, the male performer, the Shinyingfeng troupe manager, and the stagehand applied their makeup and put on their costumes to perform in the ritual.\(^2\) As almost always, at 2:30 p.m. the drummer sounded the starting drum cue and we began with the first of three sections—ritual, afternoon, and evening performances—of the day’s show.

**PERSPECTIVES FROM FIELDWORK**

This completed dissertation is unlike the project I proposed in grant applications and in a prospectus prior to fieldwork. My original plan was to study the cultural politics of Taiwanese opera focusing on the significance of the opera as a major component in the nation’s construction of a unique Taiwanese culture. In preparation for the project, I had conducted extensive archival research and preliminary fieldwork, observed opera performances, and conversed with performers at the intended site of research in Taipei, Taiwan. None of the prefieldwork research, however, indicated that intensive fieldwork would change my focus and perspective on the topic. The resulting project, unlike the original plan, is narrower in focus but greater in depth; it centers on performers and their professional and lifestyle practices.

During fieldwork that spanned the academic year 2007–2008, I observed and performed with professional opera troupes based in Taipei. I was a melody-section musician-in-training, learning to accompany performances on the two-string bowed lutes, as well as a researcher of Taiwanese opera. My main activity was following the Shinyingfeng Opera Troupe’s work schedule for the whole year, constantly traveling to different locations, and performing as an unofficial member of the troupe. On days off and before going to performances, I transcribed, practiced, or memorized pieces. Whenever possible, I attended other troupes’ performances and other types of opera events. During the last three to four months of fieldwork, after I became a better accompanist, I was invited to perform with other troupes including the Chenmeiyun, Hongsheng, Suenhua, and Yisin Opera Troupes. On a few occasions, I traveled with the Shinyingfeng and Yisin troupes to distant locations for special performances.

Adapting to the professional troupes’ work schedule meant more than just showing up and performing; it also required adapting to itinerant and outdoor performance conditions. My experiences in those realms were humbling and I went into them unaware of how important they would be for gaining the confidence and trust of the performers.\(^3\) A performance day was a long day and I was typically out for ten to twelve hours, not getting home until 11 p.m. or later. Like the one described above, the performances were outdoors on temporary stages. In Taiwan’s subtropical climate, that meant performing in very humid and oppressive heat through many months of the year. Other rough weather conditions I encountered included (1) intense

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\(^2\)A given troupe’s stagehand is expected to participate in ritual performances. A stagehand typically plays a fixed and non-speaking part involving fixed patterns of movement.

\(^3\)Linda Tuhiwai Smith addresses the significance of humility on the part of the field researcher in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999).
thunderstorms that blew rain into the stage, drenching unprotected equipment and musical instruments; (2) frigid chill to the bones from extended exposure to damp cold air during the short winter; and (3) wild typhoon gales that threatened to rip the stage apart. Traveling to unfamiliar locations while carrying two heavy bags (one for instruments and the other for scores, recording gear, and personal items), transferring between mass transit trains and buses, and walking considerable distances were part of my routine. Performing in noisy and polluted environments and compromising on dietary preferences was the norm. Finding restrooms posed a different kind of challenge. Although the working conditions were intense, immersing myself in this environment and continuing to improve my musical competence were invaluable. The performers accepted me as someone seriously interested in learning about Taiwanese opera. Furthermore, the experiences established a common ground on which the performers could relate to me and I to them. This connection led me to insights on the nature of the professional performers’ community and the community’s cultural and performance practices.

As a result of the full immersion in the opera culture and the connections I formed with practitioners during fieldwork, I write from the perspective of an advocate of the Taiwanese opera profession and the professionals dedicated to it. My position as an advocate is in support of the performers with whom I worked, their colleagues, their work, their work environment, and their audience members, all of which are not typically held in high regard by the general Taiwanese public, government agents, and intellectuals. While there has been a good deal of research on the topic of Taiwanese opera, the particular performance context and network of performers within which I conducted my fieldwork are scarcely written about and remain marginalized. The little that is written is by and large a negative and shallow representation. As an advocate, my perspective is partial to the artistry, creativity, and hard-working mentality of the performers. While in Taipei, sympathetic to the limited resources available, I voluntarily helped troupes and spoke defense of the performers and their profession when critiques of them arose on social occasions.

As I was writing my dissertation after returning to the United States, I drew heavily on my fieldwork experiences as an itinerant Taiwanese opera student performer, an apprentice musician, a fan, and a temporary member of the professional performers’ community. With this dissertation, I aim to counteract the negative representations of the community by offering a performer-centered point of view that will hopefully provide a different understanding of the opera practitioners and their cultural and performance practices.

**CENTRAL THEMES**

The four central themes that run throughout the dissertation are: (1) performativity, (2) selection of tradition, (3) flexibility, and (4) subcultural identity. Performativity is a particularly large and multifaceted theme. I adopt it from Judith Butler’s (1990; 1993) reformulation and extension of the Austinian concept (1961) in which each repetition of an act contributes to reiterating and establishing a norm, and every act has the potential to change the very norm it reifies. Accordingly, Butler (1990; 1993) suggests that the power to maintain or alter a norm, convention, or custom rests in the hands of the agent performing the act and not in some greater or external force. Translating the concept to Taiwanese opera, the performers are purveyors of Taiwanese opera, and as such, they are responsible for maintaining and altering the art. In other words, the performers are the authorities of Taiwanese opera and with every act they perform they posses the power to reiterate or deviate from established conventions.
The performativity theme also appears in a more specific manner in the dissertation. Butler provides another rendition of the concept on the performative nature of the social constructiveness of gender (1990; 1993). She argues that “a true gender is a fantasy” and that gender is not merely innate attributes, but rather, something produced through discourse (1990, 186). In the Taiwanese opera profession, in which female actors dominate in playing both male and female roles, gender is performative at two levels. Socially, female actors affirm their female identity by being actors. In performance, they actively construct an alternative gender identity that challenges cultural expectations.

Although I do not directly engage with selective tradition (Williams 1977) as a theory until later in the dissertation, as a theme it provides a steady pulse from early on. I use “tradition” not in the fixed-in-the-past sense that opposes modernity or change. Rather I evoke tradition as acts or practices that practitioners actively engage with, perform, and continually maintain or transform. Moreover, at any given moment there are multiple versions of the tradition that might or might not be competing for a constructed authoritative version. The theme of selective tradition in the dissertation has to do with choices that performers make regarding opera practices, styles of performance, additions, omissions, transformations, and updates. To understand the Taiwanese opera tradition, one must consider the performers’ roles in the selection process.

Flexibility in sustaining Taiwanese opera as a relevant cultural practice is crucial to the ways in which performers of the past and present have operated. Taiwanese opera does not consist of eternally fixed features or archaic conventions, but rather, of practices that are current and that fall in and out of fashion. Performers approach opera performances with a trained but open mind, improvising onstage and offstage in shaping the tradition. Variability is part of the routine in their work schedule and performance conditions. Staying flexible enables them to incorporate appropriate audience feedback, elements from elsewhere, or personal creativity into their craft.

Subcultural identity relates to the symbols and expressions of the interconnectedness among the professional performers in Taipei, Taiwan. Drawing on Mark Slobin’s *Subcultural Sounds* (1993), I use “subculture” to indicate a small subset of the “superculture,” or the greater population, specifically that of Taipei’s cosmopolitan society. The performers in the opera subculture consist of a relatively limited network of individuals, a network small enough for the majority of performers to know each other by name. Although I do evoke “subculture” in Dick Hebdige’s (1979) sense, in which a visible style (i.e. behavior) of the cultural group are highlighted, that is the extent of my use of Hebdige and subsequent post-subcultural theorists. I view the opera subculture not as an isolated or an outlying group but as one that continually interacts with various groups and individuals within the superculture, such as their family members and friends who are not involved in the Taiwanese opera profession, the temple culture, and offshoot subcultures, particularly the regular opera audience members and fans of individual performers.

Subcultural studies consist of multiple camps, including neo-, post-, anti-, and a wide array of conceptualizations on subcultures (see The Subcultures Reader [1997] and The Post-subcultures Reader [2003] for an overview). As Ben Carrington and Brian Wilson pointed out in *After Subculture* (2004), despite the contentious views within the disintegrated field, all types of (anti-)subcultural studies share the same central analytical questions regarding how to account for group formations. Although I, too, am interested in the sociology of group formation, that is only one aspect in my study and I refrain from applying existing subcultural theories, as each is culturally specific and context-dependent.
Although I discuss the four central themes of the dissertation separately, they are not independent in practice but intermesh at multiple junctures. Subcultural identity, tradition, and gender are all performative. How the performers select tradition, prevail in flexibility, reiterate customs, or transform conventions is solidly grounded in their subcultural practices. Performance practices, conventions, traditions, gender constructions, and subcultural identities are all flexible ideas or elements that transform with individuals acting upon them. Performativity, flexibility in sustaining Taiwanese opera, and subcultural identity are all part of the performers’ process of selecting tradition. The themes collectively characterize the contemporary community of performers and their work in Taiwanese opera, which is the subject of this dissertation. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a concise overview of the past and present states of Taiwanese opera to ground the material presented in subsequent chapters.

**TAIWANESE OPERA IN RETROSPECT**

Taiwanese opera (M: gezaixi, T: koa-á-hì) is a type of Taiwanese and Chinese traditional opera (M: xiqu) that utilizes spoken dialog, sung text, tune types, role types and stylized movements. The features that set Taiwanese opera apart from the 300+ types of traditional Chinese operas are the use of the Taiwanese language, its own musical repertoire, and performance styles. Scholars have traced the formation of Taiwanese opera to the early 1900s in Ilan County, in northeastern Taiwan, with all-male amateur groups that sang and acted with musical accompaniment (Zeng 1988). The Taiwanese people responsible for planting the seeds of the opera were not the indigenous tribal peoples but descendents of the ethnic group that originally emigrated from the Minnan Chinese-speaking areas of southeastern China. Drawing from various types of traditional theater and folk songs, the all-male groups performed impromptu opera-like show segments without stage or costumes, a practice now categorized as “native song and show” (M: bendi gezai). Earliest evidence of Taiwanese opera performed in theaters comes from newspaper articles published in the late 1920s (Hsu 2000). At the time, Taiwan was under Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945), but, unlike the Korean experience, Taiwan’s local folk cultural activities were for the most part permitted by the Japanese colonial government until 1937.

Toward the beginning of WWII in 1937, however, the Japanese colonial government’s ban on all local traditional opera drove most troupes out of business. The few troupes that still performed did so following the protocol of the Japanization conditions, which were enforced until the end of the war. Performers were supposed to use the Japanese language, use modern musical instruments (i.e., Western-originated instruments, such as the saxophone and drum set), and wear Japanese-style clothing. Stories have come to light suggesting that such strict and disruptive protocols were followed only in the presence of the Japanese officials, and performers reverted to their ways when not under surveillance (Chiu 1992).

Scholars argue that the wartime period was influential for postwar development of a new style of Taiwanese opera. During the Japanization process, new elements—Japanese enka songs, Japanese traditional clothing, swords, and sword fighting, and Western instruments—were incorporated into Taiwanese opera performance practices after the opera reemerged in the early 1950s.

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5 “Taiwanese opera” is a common translation that Taiwanese scholars use for gezaixi or koa-á-hì. In the parenthesis, “M” stands for Mandarin transliteration and “T” stands for Taiyu transliteration. See “Note on Language, Romanization, and Translation” for further explanation.

6 The language now called Taiyu is a variant of the Hokkien, Minnan, or Southern Min Chinese.
1950s. The incorporation of these new elements eventually led to the consolidation of a second style of opera known as *opeila*, or hybrid style opera, that is commonly performed in evening temple shows today.

Commercial theater (indoor venue) was the primary venue for Taiwanese opera performances until the early 1960s, a period in which the entertainment industry rapidly grew. Faced with competition from various new forms of entertainment such as movies and new types of theatrical performances, Taiwanese opera was forced out of the theatrical venue. In the early 1960s, performers in over 200 troupes (Lin 2007a) were forced to switch careers or find a different performance context for Taiwanese opera.7

During and after the years of the decline of opera theaters, the temple context became the key venue for Taiwanese opera performances. Taiwanese opera gradually replaced other forms of traditional opera, particularly *beiquan*, in temple celebrations.8 From conversations I had with performers who lived through this period, I learned that the move from theater to outdoor stages was a rough and uncertain transition that previous written histories tended to gloss over. For example, actor Wang Chiu-kuan was working as a young performer in her father’s troupe in south-central Taiwan when it went out of business for a couple of years in the early 1960s.9 Through friends’ connections, her father heard about opportunities in Taipei and formed another troupe specifically for temple shows and moved the troupe north to Taipei.10 Another example comes from actor Chiang Su-lan who also worked in her parents’ opera troupe as a child in the early 1960s.11 Her father supplemented the family income from occasional Taiwanese opera performances by peddling homemade remedies and balms. On such occasions, Chiang’s father drove her and her sister to crowded locations and they sang and danced to her father’s musical accompaniment to attract potential customers. Once a crowd gathered, her father made his sales pitch. In both cases, Taiwanese opera was not a sustainable form of living.

Taiwanese opera was adapted for radio and film in the mid-1950s to the 1960s and for television in the early 1960s to the 1990s. Of the three, the television drama series was the most enduring and influential mass-mediated form of Taiwanese opera. Despite national regulations under Nationalist pro-Mandarin and pro-Chinese culture that limited broadcasting in the Taiyu language to one hour per day from the 1960s up to the 1980s, television Taiwanese opera was still a successful business and artistic venture. For over thirty years, each of the three television stations had its Taiwanese opera troupe, stars, and training programs. Though production of Taiwanese opera drama series ceased in the 1990s, select television stations continue to broadcast reruns. Televised Taiwanese opera made two major contributions: first, the series enabled the creation and widespread fame of the most celebrated and well-known Taiwanese opera performer, Yang Li-hua. Second, new songs written for television series have been

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7 Opera troupes from the 1950s era consisted of many more members than troupes today. On various occasions throughout my fieldwork, actors described troupe sizes from their childhood as consisting of over thirty performers. Assuming that there were thirty members to a troupe, roughly over 6,000 opera performers needed to find new work at that time.

8 *Beiquan* is a type of traditional opera that appears to have been very popular in Taiwan up to the 1950s. Traces of *beiquan*’s former popularity can be heard in the *beiquan* songs that older Taiwanese opera performers still sing today.


10 Many aspiring Taiwanese opera performers moved up to Taipei around that time due to an abundance of temple performances and the possibility of getting into a television opera production.

11 Chiang Su-lan, personal communication, April 26, 2008.
absorbed into the general musical repertoire and they dominate the musical selections used in performances today.

By the early 1970s, Taiwanese opera was one of the main types of entertainment that temples hired. Temples commissioned opera performances primarily for the ritual performances that take place before opera performances. This was a landmark difference between Taiwanese opera’s performance practices of the 1950s to 1960s in commercial theater and the post-1960s temple-contracted performances. In the latter context, troupes added ritual performances to their routine practices for a business reason—to provide a religious function that would get them hired.

Scholars and practitioners consider the 1970s up to the early 1990s to have been the golden age of Taiwanese opera. During this time, Taiwan experienced rapid economic expansion (Gold 1986), which, in turn, spurred the growth of Taiwanese opera. The general widespread prosperity supported a vibrant period for temple opera shows. Lin posits that the surge of temple-patron demand for ritual performances was connected with the large number of people winning the state lottery; these winners then commissioned performances to thank the deities and celebrate their financial successes (Lin 2007a). Thus, the expansion of Taiwanese opera in the temple context was closely connected with the socio-economic environment of the 1970s. The situation is no longer the same today: the majority of the practitioners with whom I worked often lamented the shrinking temple performance market.

In the 1980s a new type of Taiwanese opera emerged in modern theaters (built after the 1970s). Performances in the new context were and continue to be advertised and spoken about as “refined” (M: jingzhi) in relation to the outdoor temple-context performances. The first modern theatrical production was the Minhuayuan Opera Troupe’s The Living Buddha (M: Chikung Huofo) at the National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (M: Kuofu chinienkuan) in 1983 (Chi 2007). The troupe was especially selected for the performance as part of the Wenyiji (Cultural Festival) sponsored by the Council for Cultural Affairs. This type of performance came to be generally known as gongyan (T: kong-ián), or “public performance.” As “public performance” is a very general phrase and all public performances of Taiwanese opera are government-sponsored, I will henceforward refer to them as “government-sponsored performances” to distinguish them from relatively less public temple-contracted performances.

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of government agencies have been sponsoring Taiwanese opera events at various levels from neighborhood, to county, to national events. The growth in state sponsorship has enabled a burst of new development, production, and innovation in Taiwanese opera in recent years. However, the contemporary infusion of public funding in the opera is not universal, but particular to certain types of performances.

**TAIWANESE OPERA IN THE PRESENT DAY**

**Types of Performances**

Unpublished temple-contracted performances. Taiwanese opera performances commissioned by temple patrons for ritual festivals or personal thanksgiving are known as “outdoor stage opera” (M: waitaixi, T: gōa-tāi-hî), “folk opera” (M: minxi, T: bîn-hî), or “wild stage opera” (M: yetaixi, T: iā-tāi-hî). In recent years, “waitaixi” is also used to refer to a new subtype of gongyan performance that imitates the in situ setting of the temple context. In discourse, the “outdoor” (wai) and “folk” (min) in waitaixi and minxi often are used in ways that imply inferiority to government-sponsored performances. For example, minxi is used in
opposition to wenhuachang, or “cultural setting,” which constructs the “folk” as outside of “culture.” The term “yetaixi” has historically been used to marginalize and vulgarize Taiwanese opera as lowbrow and unsophisticated. To distance myself from the confusing or degrading uses of the names and to better capture the nature of the performance context, I refer to the performance type as “unpublicized, temple-contracted performances.”

Temple-contracted performances occur in religious settings, typically commissioned by an individual or a group of individuals, and offered free viewing to the public. These performances take place facing or near a temple as described in the vignette from fieldwork that opened this chapter. In that example, the Shinyingfeng troupe had performed two consecutive days for the particular temple’s annual festivities, and each of the two performances was commissioned by a separate hōe, or organization associated with the temple. Temple-contracted performances can also take place on personal property rather than temple grounds, in which case the deities of a particular temple are temporarily transferred to that location for the event.

Temple-contracted performances are unpublicized, or not advertised, due to the fierce competition for performances among troupes. The regular audience members and fans find out about performance dates and locations by word of mouth. Audiences that a troupe is very familiar with might be given a photocopy of the troupe’s schedule—the same one that the performers of the troupe receive at the end of each month for the coming month. A few troupes post their monthly schedules online without details on the performance locations. To find out about the exact location, a phone number and a name are provided for potential attendees to call and ask for directions. Although it is against conventional practice for a troupe to make its detailed schedule publicly available, I have seen a troupe do so through postings on the Internet. That troupe is also known for its aggressive tactics in lōng-hi, or stealing other troupes’ prearranged performances. The manager of that troupe steals other troupe’s shows by offering temple patrons lower prices for performances. The patrons who want to save money would cancel their contracts with the originally scheduled troupes and hire the cheaper troupe instead.

The temple-contracted performance is distinctive in that the operas are improvised and exist in two substyles. Briefly, the operas are improvised in that they do not have scripts or composed scores: performers spontaneously create the text and select musical pieces from an existing repertoire (see Chapter 3). The two styles of performances are gulu (T: kó-lō), or “classic style,” and opeila (T: ô-phait-á), or “hybrid style.” Generally, afternoon shows are in the classic style and evening shows are in the hybrid style unless the temple patrons designate otherwise.

The words “classic” and “hybrid” that I use to categorize the two substyles of operas are my translations of the Taiyu words kó-lō and ô-phait-á. Rather than using the Romanized words, I choose to use “classic” and “hybrid,” because they encapsulate the fundamental differences between the two styles. “Classic” is a close translation of kó-lō (M: gulu), which literally means old volumes (of books). A kó-lō play is a classic story that has withstood the test of time, is widely known, and is acknowledged as a story worthy to be told and retold time and again. Similarly, classic style performance has also endured historical changes yet retained its cultural significance for close to one hundred years. By classic I also mean to evoke the connection of the opera style to its historical lineage of peoples, legends, myths and performance practices. “Hybrid,” on the other hand, is not a direct translation of ô-phait-á, which literally means to be careless or directionless. To the practitioners, however, ô-phait-á is not a word with negative connotations; rather, it means a specific style of performance. Ô-phait-á is a composite of existing, original, and contemporary ideas and practices that appear to come from incongruous
fields of cultural production. It is a hybrid, a synthesis of elements, and a perpetually emerging style continually undergoing processes of change.

Although the two opera substyles are based on the same fundamental principals of performance, they typically appear and sound vastly different from one another, dissimilar in the type of drama, music, costumes, makeup, and stage effects. In the classic style, stories are largely adapted from a shared repertoire of traditional opera stories set in the Chinese historical past (see Chapter 3 for a more nuanced discussion). Vocal music is drawn from the established standard musical repertoire accompanied in the customary opera fashion. Actors generally wear period clothing designed for the stage and these clothes resemble those from China’s imperial past. With this style of clothing, actors wear standard makeup specific to their role types. Male roles typically wear hats that are appropriate for their characters, and female roles wear the orthodox female opera-style hair. During performance, the bright lights and amplified sound quality do not change throughout.

Hybrid style operas, in contrast, tend to differ in all of the aforementioned elements. Hybrid style stories are not necessarily set in Taiwanese or Chinese culture or in an historical past. Often they are about love and vengeance and not set in any particular time period so that visual and aural presentations are not constricted by historicity. When appropriate, actors wear flamboyant and shiny costumes with glittery makeup accents, and only the old male and female roles dress as they would in a classic style opera. Actors sing a mixture of standard opera repertoire and pop songs—the latter constituting the most salient feature of hybrid style opera. For the lead and select supporting role actors, hairstyles for both male- and female-role types are changed from those of the classic opera presented in the afternoon. Specifically, the male roles often wear wigs of longhair styles to match their character, and female roles accessorize their hair in a different manner. Stage lights are no longer just constantly on; during pop song performances, the bright lights are turned off, replaced by rotating color lights, and reverb is added as an aesthetic.

Publicized government-sponsored performances. What is known today as gongyan, or government-sponsored performances, in Taiwanese opera is a relatively recent phenomenon that differs in terms of context and style from temple-contracted performances. A government-sponsored performance is solely or chiefly funded by a local, regional, or national level government agency. Examples of such agencies include the Community of Sanchong City, Taipei County (local), the City of Taipei (regional), and the National Center for Traditional Arts (national). Troupes interested in specific events or sponsorship are required to apply and compete for limited spots. The performances are publicized through advertisement avenues such as posters, flyer distribution, street banners, press conferences, and guest appearances on talk shows. Performances can take place in theaters or on outdoor temporary stages. The theater venue is a secular setting and typically requires an admission fee through ticket purchase. In government-sponsored outdoor performances, audience members do not have to pay and the venues and stages are larger than those for temple-contracted events.

Government-sponsored performances use the classic style opera of the temple-contracted performances as the take-off point. In government-sponsored performances, the stories, costumes, and music are similar to those of temple-contracted performances, but they differ from the former in that the spoken and sung texts are scripted, memorized, and rehearsed rather than improvised. There is a range in style, however, depending on the budget, participating troupe, and performance context. Government-sponsored performances have become the critical source for innovation, “refinement,” and increase in grandeur of Taiwanese opera in the past twenty
years or so. As such, government-sponsored productions require different sets of skills and specializations than those of temple performances, and troupes typically hire specialists to assist them in their productions.

**Types of Troupes**

Currently there are three types of Taiwanese opera organizations: (1) professional for-profit troupes in the temple context circuit, (2) professional opera companies/troupes that specialize in government-sponsored performances, and (3) amateur clubs. The three types of organizations differ in various ways. Each professional troupe consists of a fixed group of actors, musicians, and, most likely, a stagehand. This is the only type of troupe in which all the members rely on performing Taiwanese opera as their primary form of livelihood. The troupes with which I worked during my fieldwork belong to this category. The main job of a professional troupe is to perform and very little or no time is spent on rehearsals or on the creation of new materials outside of performance. Temple-contracted performances consist of the bulk of their work schedule, but many troupes are increasingly looking to government-sponsored events and programs for additional business. During fieldwork, I heard many performers comment on the shrinking temple performance market; over ten years ago, the very successful troupes performed well over 300 days a year, but currently, many performers consider 200 days of performances a year to be a decent work schedule.

Outside of the Taipei area, one variant of the professional troupes, called the *lio’k-im* (recording) troupe, competes for business with the professional troupes. A *lio’k-im* troupe does not employ musicians. Instead, they use prerecorded soundtracks and the actors lip-sync spoken and sung texts to the recording during performances. Because their actors do not necessarily need to know how to sing, such troupes are not able to survive in Taipei or other urban centers.

The second type of Taiwanese opera organization is the opera company/troupe specializing in government-sponsored performances. This type of organization also comprises professional performers, but the nature of the membership and the work they do is different from that of the professional troupes. Such an opera company consists of a small core of regular members and hires supporting actors, additional cast members, and musicians for specific performances. Outside of a few core performers, the organizations have long-term collaborations with particular lead musicians and supporting actors. This category includes the two most recognized Taiwanese opera troupe names: the Minhuayuan Taiwanese Opera Company and the Holo Taiwanese Opera Troupe. Both rely primarily on government subsidies and sponsored events as their sources of income. They rely secondarily on ticket sales and/or donations for the large-scale events. Two other well-known organizations within this category are the Tangmeiyun and the Hsuyafen Opera Troupes. Each of these four groups has a star performer who attracts a good majority of their audiences; for example, the Minhuayuan troupe features Sun Tsuai-fong, and the Tangmeiyun troupe features Tang Mei-yun herself.

The third type of organization is the amateur Taiwanese opera group, including clubs, school programs, community classes, and so on. A plethora of amateur groups exists with varying degrees of seriousness and diversity in membership. In Taipei, interested community members can sign up for amateur classes at locations such as the Taipei Cultural Center and the Liao Chiung-chih Taiwanese Opera Foundation. The following examples of amateur groups demonstrate the diversity within this category, but do not attempt to encompass all varieties of amateur groups. Two somewhat well-known amateur groups in Taipei that have a relatively consistent membership with established troupe names are the Wenxin Performance Troupe and
the Formosa Zephyr Opera Troupe. Each organization consists of regular members who are serious students and occasionally appear in government-sponsored events. The Wenxin troupe, consisting of interested community members, hires professional performers to teach the members weekly. Some of its members have been learning and practicing Taiwanese opera for over ten years. The Chunfeng troupe is a unique group that is made up of university graduates; the actors and musicians studied Taiwanese opera performance as a subject in college and have continued to study, practice, and perform.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Historically, professional troupes comprised the only institution through which performers could receive training. This system is still used, particularly by troupes from the southern parts of Taiwan. Interested individuals known as o’h-hi-gin-á, typically in their teenage years or younger, enter a troupe with the purpose of learning to become a performer. The type of training that students receive in a troupe is informal and nonstandardized. Students learn from the troupe members through a combination of observation, imitation, verbal instructions for specific assigned stage parts, and individual practice outside of performance. In return for the training, students typically commit a certain number of years to working for the particular troupe.

Taiwanese opera began to be taught as a school subject in 1994 at what is now known as the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts (Guoli Taiwan Xiqu Xueyuan). In 1999 the institution became a two-year college program, and in 2006 it was upgraded to a four-year university program. The number of students who graduated from the program and have become full-time professionals, however, is small. According to a 2009 graduate from the program, she can “count with her fingers the number of performers [who graduated from the same school and are pursuing Taiwanese opera as a profession].” At this college, students learn only to perform from scripts and scores, which makes them eligible for government-sponsored performances only. Those who wish to become professionals in the temple-contracted context have to undergo further training in a troupe according to the older institutional way.

FORESHADOWING THE CHAPTERS

Each chapter in the dissertation focuses on one of the central themes introduced earlier. Chapter 2 approaches the opera subculture at two general levels: the intercultural and intracultural. My main arguments are that the opera subculture is integrated interculturally yet is culturally distinct as a community. Taiwanese opera of the temple-contracted context is closely associated with folk religion, with temples as the loci of rituals. Although temple patrons are essentially the employers of the opera troupes, the patrons are not in total control, as troupes have self-determined routines and artistic preferences. Intraculturally, shared practices make this subculture distinctive in two major ways: the itinerant lifestyle and a shared language laced with jargon. The chapter ends with more detailed consideration of the intracultural dynamics through career profiles of individual members that illustrate similarities and differences among the members.

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13 Ni Fan-lun, personal communication, June 11, 2009.
The dissertation shifts to Taiwanese opera performance practices starting with Chapter 3. I examine interactive improvisation, the fundamental performance practice of the opera culture, as a very particular aspect of the theme of flexibility. I apply Benjamin Brinner’s theory on interaction (1995) to analyze improvised Taiwanese opera performances. A large portion of the analysis is dedicated to the interactive sound structure, one of the four concepts in Brinner’s interaction theory. The chapter also introduces the basic components of an opera performance and includes musical analyses.

Gender performativity, particularly females playing young male roles, is the main topic of Chapter 4. Whereas Chapter 3 takes classic opera style as the basis of analysis, Chapter 4 focuses on hybrid style opera performances. I argue that through hybrid style performances, actors are constructing nondichotomous and nonconventional notions of masculinity and femininity for females. A discussion on the theory of female masculinity opens Chapter 4, after which I consider the socio-historical conditions that contribute to the current demographics of actors and musicians. The second half of the chapter analyzes theatricality, visual construction, and the use of the voice in performing female masculinity in hybrid style operas.

Selective tradition is the central theme of the two final chapters of the dissertation. In Chapter 5, I utilize Williams’ theory as the theoretical framework for investigating government sponsorship of Taiwanese opera. I argue that government sponsorship of Taiwanese opera performances is a component in the state’s construction of a selective tradition. An overview of Taiwan’s sociopolitical history is central to the understanding of state intervention in the arts and the significance of promoting one type of traditional opera over another. I then discuss and analyze a major event sponsored by the National Center for Traditional Arts as a case study. The results of the event illustrate discord between the hegemonically-constructed selective tradition and the realities of performance practice.

In Chapter 6, I explore further the concept of selective tradition and the incongruities between ideology and practice through two case studies. The case studies are taken from fieldwork research conducted with the Yisin and the Shinyingfeng troupes and focus on their respective major events of 2008. The two cases exemplify two types of government sponsorship for new opera productions and contrasting approaches to interpreting elements of the selective tradition.
Chapter 2: Opera Subculture

A VIGNETTE FROM FIELDWORK

In Singapore, the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple celebrated its ninetieth anniversary in 2007. As part of the yearlong celebration, the festivities included opera performances by local and foreign troupes. In December 2007, the Shinyingfeng Opera Troupe was contracted for twenty consecutive evening performances. The composition of the membership for the series of performances in Singapore was different from that of the troupe’s local performances in Taipei. The group of performers that went to Singapore was much larger in size than the Shinyingfeng troupe, comprising twenty-five performers. Members from other troupes supplemented the regular members of the Shinyingfeng troupe for the event. In addition to the twenty-five performers, there were four volunteers, including myself, who also traveled and worked as part of the group. The director for the Singapore trip was the Shinyingfeng troupe’s lead actor, Hsu Su-yun, rather than the troupe’s actual manager, Chen Wen-yi. As the director, Hsu was the travel coordinator, artistic director, and mediator for the temple patron and the performers.

Hsu led the group at the request of the Singaporean patron, but it was her connections in Singapore that made the special twenty-day engagement in Singapore possible. Hsu was able to get the twenty days of performances for two reasons. First, starting a few years ago, Hsu has been receiving sporadic invitations to perform at temples in Singapore. The invitations have been a result of certain Singaporeans who saw a recorded performance of Bailimingyi (The Famed Doctor), in which Hsu was the lead actor. Those Singaporeans enjoyed her performance so much that they traveled to Taiwan and sought her out. Since then, they have been inviting Hsu to Singapore for performances at least once a year. Second, at such a performance Hsu met the friend who became her jiebai sister, or sworn sister. From what Hsu explained to me in casual conversations throughout the trip, her jiebai sister, who is both a close friend and a loyal fan, recommended Hsu to the owner of the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple for the performance opportunity.

Our group of twenty-nine performers and volunteers arrived at the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple a day prior to the beginning of the series of performances. The temple was our workplace and residence for the duration of the trip. The Koo Chye Sheng Hong temple is a multistructural compound on a large piece of land with empty areas for parking and temporary structures. The actual temple where the deities are housed is adjacent to a large office building, kitchen, shop, storage, public facilities, and parking lot. For the opera performances, a large temporary outdoor stage was built on a field of grass. The stage structure included a spacious backstage area and a sizable fenced-in audience seating area, which had several gigantic fans that

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1 A “Sheng Hong” (M: Chenghuang) Temple is a type of temple that is primarily dedicated to the deity Chenghuangye.
2 The performances were from December 10 through December 29, 2007.
3 The commercial DVD of Bailimingyi, an opera written by Liu Nan-fang, was released in 2003.
kept the audience members somewhat cool in the dreadfully humid and stifling tropical climate. Lining the three sides of the backstage were air-conditioned trailers set up for us as dorm-style housing. Upon arrival, all the men in the group automatically settled into one trailer, and the women divided the remaining three trailers among themselves. Once living spaces were claimed and luggage arranged, work began backstage, which involved setting up backdrops and organizing the backstage, ensemble area, sound system, and lighting.

Our daily schedule for the duration of the trip, except for the last day, revolved around getting ready for the improvised performances. Typically the days began at 12:30 p.m. with a meeting. At that time, most people in the group had just gotten out of bed and finished their first meal of the day. The meeting lasted two to three hours and bled into makeup time for the ritual performance, which started at 4 p.m. Ritual performances, familiar routines to all, did not require the same amount of coordination and preparation as the evening opera performances did. The three-hour window between the end of the ritual and start of the evening performance, which was 8 p.m., was utilized for rehearsals of select scenes that involved multiple actors, dinner, and individual preparation. The opera performances ended at 11 p.m. After cleanup, the group relaxed, ate midnight snacks, and socialized very late into the night with the locals and with each other.

The primary purpose of the daily meetings was to prepare for each evening’s opera performance. During the meetings, actors learned the story for the evening opera from the actor telling the story. Actors also received their role assignments during the meetings. Most actors relied solely on their memory to absorb the relevant details. I also observed that a few actors tape-recorded the storytelling process and fewer took notes. The story that the actors heard was only the bare bones of an opera. It was up to each actor to elaborate on her part and improvise spoken and sung texts. Dialogs between two or more actors and monologues were also not prescribed or rehearsed, but rather, improvised.

I attended most of the meetings but was often unable to follow the opera story or comprehend the discussions that occurred pertaining to the opera. It was not until the fourteenth day in the meeting about an opera I had seen the Shinyingfeng troupe perform in the previous month that I was able to understand the content of the meeting. I was very excited with the discovery that my lack of understanding was not due to weak linguistic skills, but rather, to a lack of subcultural knowledge and familiarity with the jargon. It was this lack of knowledge that impeded my initial attempts at understanding the storytelling. My discovery was confirmed through a conversation I had with a young actor in the group, Amy. She had only been an actor for three years and she also found that prior knowledge of an opera was crucial to her understanding the storytelling process. Amy was often lost trying to understand the conversations and she only paid attention to the parts of the storytelling process that concerned her assigned roles.

With hardly any onsite rehearsal, this group of twenty-five performers was able to smoothly deliver twenty three-hour opera performances in the course of twenty days. Rehearsals had not been held before traveling to Singapore. The exact group of performers had never performed together prior to the trip, and other than the regular members of the Shinyingfeng troupe who were eight out of twenty-five performers, the rest of the performers were not familiar with all of the operas on the program. Was this an amazingly coincidental feat, or was this type

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4 In most of the meetings, Hsu told the stories. However, on two other nights, the job was assigned to other actors who had better knowledge of the particular stories.

5 Personal communication, December 25, 2008.
of performance expected of the Taiwanese opera professionals? How did a group of disparate individuals who did not usually work together cohere so well onstage, given the circumstances? What were the personal performance experiences, shared knowledge, and assumptions that allowed them to do what they did? Although these questions initially arose out of my full immersion in a Taiwanese-opera-group experience in Singapore, the conditions of the trip were actually a microlevel, condensed, and intensified variation of the conditions of the opera subculture in Taipei.

In this chapter, I consider the community of professional opera performers in the temple-contracted context through the theoretical perspective of subculture. I then address the questions just stated above through discussions and analyses of three main topics: intercultural interactions, intracultural features, and shared experiences between the individuals. The underlying assumption is that the opera professionals from Taipei comprise a cohesive community with unique cultural practices. I argue that the three main topics I discuss in this chapter are the foundational components of the group’s common knowledge, routine practices, and cultural assumptions. They comprise the shared lifestyle and the common denominators of the Taiwanese opera subculture.

SUBCULTURAL THEORY

My use of “subculture” is adopted from Mark Slobin’s Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West (1993). I choose Slobin’s use of the term because it departs from the idea that subculture is a form of resistance and a counterculture. In the book, Slobin argues that “there is no one experience and knowledge that unifies everyone within a defined ‘cultural’ boundary, or if there is, not the total content of their lives” (11). To answer the question what nonetheless binds members of a cultural group, he proposes three terms that are all modifications of the word “culture”: subculture, superculture, and interculture. Superculture is the overarching concept of the three and represents the dominant culture of a given society. Subculture is “an embedded unit” (12) within the superculture, suggesting that multiple subcultures constitute a given superculture. Interculture refers to the crosscutting aspects between (a) different supercultures, (b) different subcultures, and (c) supercultures and subcultures.

Although the three terms can be discussed as separate theoretical categories, in lived experiences, people do not necessarily distinguish between them. Nevertheless, the theoretical ideas are useful for studying a particular community of people—a community that shares unique cultural attributes and practices. A subculture does not exist in isolation but is embedded within a superculture, in tangent with other subcultures, and influenced by intercultures. I posit that the professional performers of the temple-contracted context in Taipei constitute one such subculture. This opera subculture is very much a part of the dominant cosmopolitan superculture, in interaction with other subcultures—particularly of the temples—and affected by intercultural trends such as popular music and government intervention. Yet the opera subculture remains distinctive as a cultural community in several ways, which I discuss in the current chapter and in Chapters 3 and 4.

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6 I use the term subculture with a sense of hesitation. Subculture is a highly loaded term even outside of the contentious fields of subcultural and post-subcultural studies. Despite the controversy surrounding the use of the term, I still find it a useful concept in relation to my project. I depart from the frequently-critiqued sociological models of subculture by grounding my use of the concept in Slobin’s theoretical model (1993).
Although multiple religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, are practiced in Taiwan, that with the largest number of believers is the *minjian xinyang*, or popular religion.\(^7\) Popular religion is a syncretic and sectarian tradition with influences from Buddhism, Taoism, local legends, and folk beliefs. Temples are the primary centers of religious and ritual activities. Because temples are so important in the culture, there are multiple words for temple in Mandarin, including *miao*, *si*, and *gong*, to differentiate between the different types. Each temple is dedicated to one deity that is physically represented with a statue, but the worship of that deity is not exclusive. Numerous temples are dedicated to the same deity, and a given temple houses multiple deities for worship. The worship of deities is a major component of popular religious activities. There are well over 100 deities in the popular religion; some are common while others are esoteric. The best-known deity is Mazu, also known as Tianhou, or the Queen of Heaven, whose birthday—the 23rd day of the third lunar month—is the most celebrated religious date.

Temple patrons hire opera troupes for reasons that can be divided into two categories—communal and personal. One of the most common communal reasons to commission opera performances is for the celebration of a deity’s birthday.\(^8\) Another communal reason is to observe the two religiously significant days—the 1st and 15th day—of every lunar month. Funds to hire opera troupes typically come from the temple’s collections and donations from community or temple members. Personal reasons to hire an opera troupe include giving thanks to a deity for particular reasons or giving back to a deity who has granted a believer’s wish. One individual pays, or several individuals share the cost of hiring an opera troupe. This individual or group of individuals is affiliated with a particular temple and is likely to know the hired troupe.

The main purpose of an opera troupe’s performance is the *banxian* (T: *pān-sian*), or ritual performance, even though it is the opera performances that take up the bulk of a troupe’s workday.\(^9\) Banxian literally translates to “playing the deities.” A ritual performance takes place before a day’s opera performances. During such performances, actors play known deities and enact fixed patterns of movements to accompanying music. Ritual performances are typically coordinated in time with specific rituals that take place in the temple. For example, during a ritual performance, patrons would say a prayer, burn incense, or make offerings. Some temple patrons also request that the rituals be performed at specific auspicious times. Whatever the reason for temple patrons to hire opera troupes, troupes seek out such performance opportunities from multiple temples in order to fill their work schedules.

Temple subcultures are rather complex and typically consist of numerous networks of practitioners and copious amounts of practices and rituals, which is a topic beyond the scope of

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\(^7\) See Cai and Wu (2001) and Jordan and Overmyer (1986) for more on the topic.

\(^8\) “Birthday” is often used figuratively and can refer to the date of death or another significant date in a given deity’s life.

\(^9\) Currently, Taiwanese opera troupe is not the only type of xiqu troupes able to fulfill the function of opera performances for temples. Patrons also have the option of hiring hand puppet troupes (M: *budaixi*, T: *pò-tē-hì*). A budaixi troupe also performs a ritual that precedes two xiqu performances. Certain temples hire only budaixi troupes, some temples hire both, and others only hire Taiwanese opera troupes. Opera troupes can compete with budaixi troupes for patronage even though the two are different in artistic form and cost of hire.
my project. But temple subcultures are vitally significant for Taiwanese opera because their patronage has sustained the opera subculture for well over forty years. Based on my observations from fieldwork, it appears that each temple is a locus for affiliated subcultures and most people who interact with Taiwanese opera troupe managers and performers regarding business are members of certain temples. Temple subcultures shape opera practices in the following ways: scheduling, formation and nature of business relationships, and performance conditions.

THE LUNAR CALENDAR AND TROUPE WORK SCHEDULE

In Taiwan there are two calendrical systems—the official national calendar and the lunar calendar—that are hierarchical in status. The official calendar is a hybrid with two subsystems for dating years: the international standard Gregorian calendar and the local minguo system. For example, the year 2009 is also “Minguo 98.” The lunar calendar is acknowledged but holds a subordinate status to that of the Gregorian calendar. The lunar calendar, once important to the island’s agrarian society, is now considered by many urbanites to be out-of-date and nearly irrelevant to modern lifestyles. The only occasions for which the lunar calendar is widely observed are for particular holidays, such as the New Year’s and the Midautumn Festival. The hierarchical relationship of the two calendars is symbolically represented in print. Most calendars sold in Taiwan have a lunar date printed in a smaller font underneath each Gregorian date. For example, in the 2008 planner I purchased and used during my fieldwork, underneath Friday, April 4, it reads “nung (lunar) 2.28” in a font that is 50% smaller.

Whereas the dominant culture runs on the Gregorian calendar, the situation in the opera subculture is the exact opposite; the subsidiary calendar of the dominant culture is the subculture’s principal calendar. Since temple festivities are determined by and scheduled according to the lunar calendar, it is also the primary framework within which opera troupes and their members function. During my fieldwork, I observed that performers always referred to their troupes’ work schedules (M: xilu, T: hi-lō) in the lunar calendrical system. Furthermore, whenever a performer mentioned a date, whether work related or not, it was also assumed to be a date on the lunar calendar. All regular members of professional troupes in Taipei are full-time performers and they all use the lunar calendar for work and in their daily lives. Within the opera subculture, days of the week are practically irrelevant and remain unobserved, particularly during the months when troupes perform consecutively with only a few randomly scattered days off. The exception for noting the days of the week is, for example, when one needs to know a doctor’s office hours in order to seek medical care.

Each of the twelve months on the lunar calendar consists a different number of days for ritualistic observations. The twelve lunar calendar months are categorized by busy-season and light-season months, which are known as “big months” (M: dayue, T: tōa-go’eh) and “small months” (M: xiaoyue, T: sió-go’eh). The busy-season months, in the order of the busiest to the least busy, are the 8th, 9th, 10th, 2nd, 1st and 3rd lunar months. The light-season months, from busiest to least busy, are the 6th, 7th, 4th, 11th, 5th and 12th lunar months. The actual number of days each troupe works every month varies from troupe to troupe and year to year. In a busy month, such as January of 2008, the Shinyingfeng troupe performed twenty-eight days out of thirty. During the lightest month, such as December 2007, the troupe only had four days of

10 See Cai and Wu (2001) for an overview on the topic.
11 This order is according to a troupe schedule survey conducted by Lin Heyi (2007a) in 1998.
performances in Taipei, which is the reason why the troupe scheduled their Singapore performances—mentioned in the opening vignette—that month. Thus, a troupe’s monthly schedule varies according to the frequency of temple celebrations and level of temple patronage.

While working in the Shinyingfeng troupe, I noticed that the duo calendar systems occasionally caused confusion in the intersections of the dominant culture with the opera subculture. For example, a miscommunication of dates occurred between the troupe’s manager and a volunteer administrative assistant who was a non-subcultural member. The two individuals did not clarify which calendrical system each was using in their correspondences. As a result, three of the Shinyingfeng troupe’s major government-sponsored performances were scheduled within two weeks’ time in May of 2008.12

The incongruities that an opera subcultural member can experience in interaction with the dominant culture highlights the fact that even though the opera subculture functions on a subsidiary calendrical system, it is not isolated from the dominant society. The potential confusion of the concurrent use of the lunar and Gregorian calendars for interactions between the subculture and the dominant culture amplify the paradox of the opera culture’s distinctiveness and embeddedness within the dominant culture.

BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS
An opera troupe’s business interactions with particular temple patrons are based on individual-to-individual relationships. By an individual-to-individual relationship, I mean that temples do not publicly advertise performance opportunities, but rather, they seek out troupes based on direct and indirect personal connections. Newly formed troupes that are still in the stages of establishing patronage relationships, or experienced troupes searching for more business, actively pursue potential temple patrons. Once a patronage relationship is formed, the opera troupe’s individual is expected to maintain the tie and secure future performance opportunities at the particular temple. The type of individual that can represent a troupe in establishing business relationships can be the troupe’s manager, a mediator who is a friend of a troupe member, or an actor in the troupe.

Like most troupes, the Shinyingfeng troupe regards the manager as the most important person for establishing, maintaining, and seeking business relations. In general, each troupe manager has established long-term working relationships with various temple patrons from different temples. The performance opportunities those patrons provide make up the majority of that troupe’s work schedule. In a conversation I had with musician Kao Le-fu, from the Chenmeiyun Opera Troupe, Kao commented that the Shinyingfeng troupe’s manager is excellent at the job and that, despite his age (early seventies at the time), he is able to maintain one of the top five busiest troupe schedules in Taipei.13 Chen Wen-yi, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s manager, told me on multiple occasions throughout my fieldwork that on his days off and sometimes on the troupe’s workdays, he goes to X temples to talk to Y about the schedule for Z months.

In addition to a troupe manager’s efforts, it is not uncommon for a troupe to gain additional work through mediators who establish business relationships for a troupe with temples with which they are familiar. Usually, a mediator is a close friend of the troupe manager or one of the troupe’s key actors. For example, during my fieldwork, I observed that the Shinyingfeng

12 The troupe’s performers were rather upset with the tight scheduling once the performers realized the scheduling mistake two months prior to the first of the three performances. The time between the performances was not enough for the preparation that the troupe needed.
13 Kao Le-fu, personal communication, July 7, 2008
troupe benefited from two of their mediators. The troupe manager’s long-term friend, You Wen-jing, who lives in Sanhsia, a suburb on the southern border of the Taipei County, is an active member in Sanhsia’s local-temple subcultures. He knew most of the temple owners in Sanhsia, and through those connections, he obtained multiple performances for the troupe throughout the year. The second example of a mediator is an amateur musician, A-lung, who occasionally performs with the troupe. He convinced his neighborhood temple in Tienmu, of which he is a member, to hire the Shinyingfeng opera troupe rather than a budaixi troupe for a performance.

A mediator can be important for a troupe in another financial manner as well. The cost for hiring a troupe can vary greatly depending on the particular relationship between patrons and troupe individuals, temple location, and performance date. In the example just described, A-lung also negotiated a relatively high price for the troupe’s performance. A typical price to hire the Shinyingfeng troupe for a day is $28,000 Taiwanese dollars (approximately US$850), and the price A-lung negotiated was $30,000 Taiwanese dollars (approximately US$1,000). In addition, the temple patrons honored the troupe manager with a cash award and bought dinner and cold drinks for every troupe member—an unusual act of generosity, as performers are expected to provide their own food.

Unlike the two types of behind-the-scenes business relationships discussed above, temple-actor relationships can be made explicit and public. Certain temple patrons hire a particular troupe because of an established relationship with a particular actor in that troupe. This relationship can be put on display when the temple patron chooses to honor the actor publicly. For example, Hsu Yu-hua, the supporting male-role actor of the Shinyingfeng troupe, acquired a performance for the troupe on the 11th day of the 5th lunar month in 2008, at a small temple in Hsinchuang, a city in Taipei County. For the evening’s performance, the particular opera was selected according to the patron’s preference, which was to see Hsu play a comical role. During Hsu’s first scene in the performance, the patron interrupted and presented Hsu with a freshly uncapped 600 ml bottle of beer and two $1,000 Taiwanese dollar bills (roughly equivalent to US$65). Upon accepting the gift, the actor asked the patron for permission to share the beer with others and explained that she still had to act. In response, the patron answered, jokingly, that it would be okay with him for her to act while drunk. Although this interaction was not typical of patron-actor relationship for the Shinyingfeng troupe, the example illustrates one extreme of what can occur in a business relationship.

**TRoupe Routine AS Terms for Negotiation**

Every troupe works for multiple patrons, and for each patron, conditions of performance may vary. Troupes have a default routine that they negotiate, but occasionally certain patrons or temples make special requests. The typical aspects of a day’s performance that are negotiated include the type of ritual performance, the timing of the ritual performance, and the style of the evening opera performance.

Two types of ritual performances are currently used in northern Taiwan. The more commonly performed of the two is the “Meeting of the Three Great Deities” (M: Sanxianhui, T: Sam-sian-hoe). This is the default type of ritual performance for an opera troupe. Temple patrons might request a second type of ritual, known as “The Eight Drunken Immortals” (M: Zuibaxian, T: Chüi-pat-sian). This ritual is longer in duration, more complex, and only performed at a patron’s request. Patrons who request this ritual have to prepare additional

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14 The date on the Gregorian calendar was June 14, 2008.
materials to be used in the ritual—namely floor mats, candy, and alcohol—and pay a higher fee for the performance.\textsuperscript{15}

The second aspect of negotiation between temple patrons and troupes is the length and timing of performances. In Taipei, as part of opera troupes’ routine, a day’s performance starts at 2:30 p.m. with the ritual performance. The afternoon show runs from about 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., and the evening show runs from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.\textsuperscript{16} Troupes follow this routine schedule under most circumstances.

Due to the centrality of the ritual performance to a temple’s celebrations, the timing of the ritual performance can change the routine schedule. The first way is when a patron requests the ritual, “The Eight Drunken Immortals,” which lasts about one hour. Following the ritual, the afternoon opera is shortened but still ends at 5 p.m. A second way is when a patron specifies a time for the ritual performance, which has to do with the temples’ beliefs and rituals for the day. For example, a ritual performance can be scheduled for 10 a.m. If that is the case, performers usually have to wait until the usual time, 3 p.m., to start the afternoon show. A third way is when a temple patron requests a ritual performance at an indeterminate time; the exact time of the ritual depends upon the progression of events on the day of the temple’s celebration. I describe an example from my fieldwork to illustrate how a ritual performance with an unspecified time dictated a day’s performance schedule.

The Shinyingfeng troupe’s performance on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} day of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} lunar month, in a Banqiao temple revolved around waiting for the appropriate time for the ritual performance.\textsuperscript{17} As part of the temple and community celebration of Mazu’s birthday, a big parade was held starting in the early afternoon. The parade consisted of various performance groups typical of temple festivities, and most importantly, it included the deities (in the form of statues) of this particular temple. Since the statues of the deities were being paraded around town, the troupe was told by the temple patron to wait for the deities’ return rather than start the ritual at 2:30 p.m. A little after 3 p.m., the temple patron requested for the afternoon show to start and told the troupe that the day’s parade might not return to the temple until sometime in the early evening. In anticipation of performing the ritual during the dinner hour, the actors ended the afternoon performance at 4:30 p.m., rather than at the usual 5 p.m.; this allowed time for rest and food prior to the ritual and evening performances. As it turned out, the parade did not return to the temple until after 8:30 p.m., well after the evening show had begun. The evening show was stopped short when the deities arrived and the troupe immediately shifted to ritual performance, which ended the troupe’s workday.

The third aspect of a troupe’s routine is performing contrasting styles of opera for afternoon and evening shows. All patrons accept the classic style of opera that troupes perform for afternoon shows, but some patrons discriminate against the hybrid style of opera for evening performances due to musical and dramatic content. In one particular case I observed during my fieldwork, a temple patron refused to listen to pop songs and watch sword fights, both typical components in the hybrid style opera. The patron asked the Shinyingfeng troupe to perform a classic style opera for the evening instead. After some discussion between the actors regarding the remote location and the hybrid style opera’s audience appeal, an actor negotiated with that temple’s patron and explained to the patron that the troupe needed to perform at least a few pop

\textsuperscript{15}See Wang Songshan (1988) for more information on ritual performances.
\textsuperscript{16}Towards the end of my fieldwork in Taiwan, the Yisin Troupe started negotiating with new patrons shorter evening opera performances ending at 9:30 p.m.
\textsuperscript{17}The date on the Gregorian calendar was April 28, 2008.
songs to make the performance livelier. The two parties compromised on doing a hybrid style opera with a reduced number of pop songs and without sword fights. This example illustrates that when provided with a space for dialogue, performers make a case for their artistic preferences and aesthetic values.

**INTRACULTURAL FEATURES**

**The Lifestyle of Itinerant Performers**

Since professional Taiwanese opera troupes’ work schedules consist of performances for different patrons at different locations, troupes are itinerant or itinerant-like. By itinerant-like, I mean that the troupes move from location to location to perform, but when the performances are within reasonable commuting distances, everyone (except for the stagehand) returns to their homes to sleep at the end of the day. Troupes that have more out-of-town performances operate with a fully itinerant lifestyle in which performers spend their nights sleeping on stages, in cars, or at friends’ houses. Although the itinerant-informed lifestyle of the opera subculture ranges from itinerant-like to fully itinerant depending on the troupe, most of the opera performers have experienced the range throughout their careers.

Troupe members travel varying distances from their homes to the performance sites, depending on the locations of their residences and of the day’s work. For locations that are within reasonable distances, performers are responsible for getting to the places on their own. Typically they reach the sites by riding scooters—the preferred method of travel in Taipei—because they are affordable and easy to park. Some performers drive or get rides from friends. When performances are located far away, ride share is the common form of travel and often arranged with the help of the troupe manager. For the Shiningfeng troupe, remote performances are few, which is rather unusual for a professional troupe, but on days when the members have to travel farther than usual, the two car-owning members of the troupe—the keyboardist and the drummer—provide rides for some of the members, while other members get rides from family members or friends. The Yisin troupe, on the other hand, has enough car capacity among the troupe members to give everyone in the troupe a ride. The troupe also has a higher ratio of out-of-town performances. The troupe manager drives an eight-passenger van, and two members also own cars. Hence, the Yisin troupe is far more mobile than the Shiningfeng troupe and, in this regard, is a more typical troupe in this itinerant profession.

The Shiningfeng troupe is more typical than the Yisin troupe, though, in how the troupes’ and performers’ possessions are moved from site to site. Most of the Taipei area troupes have stagehands that move all the equipment, company crates, and personal crates (M: xixiang, T: hì-láng) with the help of a truck driver. For every new site, the move and setup happen the night before a performance. Typically, late in the night, the stagehand arrives at an empty stage structure, moves and arranges all the crates according to the specifics arrangements of that troupe, hangs the banners and the backdrop, sets up the wood panels that divide ensemble sections from the rest of the stage, sets up lighting, and connects the electricity. The stagehand is also the watchman once the stage is set up; he often sleeps overnight on the stage. Though the stagehand has other duties during performances, his practically single-handed role in moving all the heavy metal crates and stage parts makes his job indispensable. With this invaluable contribution, the rest of the troupe members have comfortable and manual-labor-free transitions from location to location.
Although by the time performers arrive for a performance, the stage—front and back—is arranged and ready for performance, each person is responsible for setting up and cleaning up the area around her crates. Performers rely on metal crates for storage, spatial organization, and furniture. Each actor has her own crates that she delivers to the troupe when she joins; the privately-owned crates stay with the company and are moved and stored with the company crates as long as the actor is in the troupe. The more important the actor is in the troupe, the more crates she owns; the Shinyingfeng troupe’s lead actor owns four large crates and one small crate all of which are filled with her costumes and accessories. In contrast, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s actor who gets the least amount of stage time has only one little crate and usually wears company-owned costumes. Each of the other actors in the troupe owns at least one large crate that acts as the vanity table/wardrobe, and one small crate that she sits on while backstage.

The Shinyingfeng troupe’s musicians tend not to rely on the crates for storage as much as the actors do except for the large, heavy, and unbreakable items. The musicians generally carry their valuable items with them from location to location. The drummer will carry the smaller and most significant components of the traditional drum-set with him in a tote bag, and the gong- and-cymbal player carries all his metallic surfaces with him. The keyboardist leaves his amplifier with the company crates and personally transports his keyboard to each performance.

**Subcultural Rhythm of Life**

Despite the lack of stability in the itinerant lifestyle, the opera subculture has established its own distinct sense of rhythm on an annual, biannual, and daily basis. If temple patrons are satisfied with a troupe’s performance and a stable business relationship has been established between a temple and a troupe, then that troupe returns to the same places to perform each year and sometimes several times a year, depending on the needs of the temple. An opera troupe is similar to a flock of migratory birds in that the troupe returns to the same spots at the same times of the year. A troupe’s migrational pattern is far denser than that of birds, however, as a troupe can return to over 200 locations a year. Long-term troupe members are familiar with their troupe’s performance locations that they have been to in past years. For example, on the Shinyingfeng troupe’s schedules, which were distributed at the beginning of each month during the period in which I worked with them, the locations of performances were often indicated with a mere street name (without the number address) or a colloquial temple name. This technique provided enough information to remind troupe members of the locations but not information specific enough for potential competitors to know the exact whereabouts of the temples. Thus, the temples at which a troupe performs are the troupe’s territory, established over reoccurring performance at that particular location.

The biannual pattern in the opera subculture’s rhythm is the conceptualization of the year as two halves, called “front half” (T: chêng-póâⁿ-nî) and “back half” (T: āu- póâⁿ-nî). The dates on the lunar calendar that mark the divisions of the year are June 24 (birthday of Tianduyuanshuai, the opera deity) and December 16 (folk-ritual date dedicated to the deity, Tudigong). The first half of the year begins on December 16 and the second half begins on June 24. The two dates framing the two halves of the year also function as troupe membership contract deadlines. It is customary for performers to enter or leave a given troupe only on those particular dates. I found that members of the subculture are so accustomed to conceptualizing a year in two chunks rather than as a single unit that the division of the year in half tended to provide a false sense of distance between the two halves of the year. I often heard performers

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18Potential competitors can be any other professional opera troupe.
say, “That’s the business of the second half of the year” as a way to suggest, “Let’s not worry about it for now.” The “second half of the year” can be the next month or in six months, but both scenarios were treated as if they were equally far off because of the half-year time-block conceptualization.

The daily rhythm in the opera subculture has to do with the routine in a day’s work. A performance day is a long day; typically performers arrive at the stage around 1:30 p.m. for makeup and preparation, and they leave after 10:30 p.m. once they finish post-performance cleanup. The nine hours spent onstage plus the commuting time amount to ten- to eleven-hour-long workdays. Ritual performance starts at 2:30 p.m. and lasts between thirty and sixty minutes depending on a troupe’s performance practices and ritual type. The Shinyingfeng troupe performs the most common type of ritual in roughly thirty-five minutes and a classic drama in 110 minutes, from 3:10 p.m. to 5 p.m. The evening performance begins at 7:10 p.m. for the troupe and ends at 10 p.m. (some other troupes have slight variations to this timing).

Performance also structures the two-hour time period between the afternoon and evening operas for each actor. Depending on the role that an actor has been assigned for the evening, she will start getting ready as early or as late as need be. Musicians also need to be vigilant of the time to allot for personal preparations prior to sitting down for the entire duration of a performance. This daily performance schedule is so ingrained within the opera subculture that even the audience members follow it; audience members start to pack up just a little before 5 p.m. or 10 p.m. and some leave a performance at 5 p.m. or 10 p.m. sharp, whether a performance has ended or not.

While the instability in the amount of work and income earned per month are generally accepted as the norm within the opera subculture. Particular performers do find ways to compensate for their fluctuating opera incomes and generate financial security. Substituting for performances in other troupes on days off is the most common form of earning extra cash, but there are other ways. Actor Hsieh Jih-chu, for instance, has been singing and acting in Taiwanese opera troupes for over forty years (since her early teens). Out of personal interest and the desire to have a personal business, she makes stage costumes for other opera actors, her side business for the last twenty to twenty-five years. Backstage, when time allows, she is often stringing beads and sewing decorative pieces for the costumes.

The next two cases are both male professionals who have expressed to me the pressure they feel in taking on the responsibilities as the heads of their households and the need to have a steady income. A relatively young actor, Lin Shih-chen, left the Taiwanese opera profession after five years in order to find a stable job with a regular wage. He now works in the restaurant business and has secured a morning shift with flexible hours, which has enabled him to return to Taiwanese opera as a freelance actor. Lin accepts as many opera jobs as he can manage as long as he is provided with enough advance notice.19

The third individual case is that of He Yu-kuang, a keyboard player who has been in the opera profession for about fifteen years. Prior to entering the Yisin troupe, he worked as a professional musician at piano bars. He kept his piano bar job for over ten years after joining the Yisin Opera Troupe, which meant he had to rush off to that job on days of opera performances. Those were stressful days because he had to find another musician to cover him at the piano bar until he arrived, in addition to working late into the night. He could not support his family of

four just by being a keyboardist in the Yisin troupe.\textsuperscript{20} He now works regularly for other opera troupes, in addition to the Yisin troupe, thereby making his Taiwanese opera career a sole sustainable source of income. The common theme that ties these three peoples’ cases together is the performers’ willingness to work hard and to find other work that does not interfere with the schedule of opera jobs in order to provide some stability in their income.

\textit{LANGUAGE}

Language is another element in what makes the opera community a subculture. The language situation in Taiwan is a multifarious issue compounded by a multicultural population and a history of “foreign” dominations that promoted nonnative languages as national languages, namely Japanese and Mandarin. The island’s population consists of four major ethnic subgroups: the indigenous peoples (1.8%), the Taiwanese (73.2%), the Hakka (12%) and, the post-WWII Chinese immigrants and their descendants (13%).\textsuperscript{21} The indigenous group actually includes ten linguistically and ethnically distinct peoples, of their ten languages, however, only four have a good chance of survival (Huang 2000). The language of the Taiwanese, whose ancestors are from the Fujian province in China, is Taiyu.\textsuperscript{22} It is a variant of the Minnan spoken in mainly in southeastern China and some areas in South East Asia. In Taiwan, as a result of differences in geographical, political, and cultural processes of the two locations, Minnan developed into Taiyu, a dialect unique to Taiwan (Kubler 1985). The Hakka ethnic group’s native language is Hakka, which is a Chinese dialect with multiple variants and also spoken in various parts of China. The post-WWII Chinese immigrants and their descendants predominantly speak Mandarin. Today, most Taiwanese people speak or understand Mandarin primarily due to the strict enforcement of language policies from the late 1940s to the late 1980s.

Taiyu is the language of Taiwanese opera and the professional full-time performers. Unlike the majority of the population that speaks both Taiyu and Mandarin, the professionals of the temple-contracted context speak primarily in Taiyu. (Other Taiwanese opera performers—those who specialize in the publicized context, and amateur performers—in general do not use Taiyu as their primary language.) Furthermore, the professionals also speak Taiyu in a culturally specific way that is loaded with subcultural knowledge and jargon. Thus, a non-Taiwanese opera professional who is completely fluent in Taiyu would initially find it alienating to be exposed to conversations among professional opera performers. Moreover, such a listener would find the conversations incomprehensible, particularly when the discussions are deeply rooted in professional practices of Taiwanese opera.

In this section, I discuss two topics that contextualize and establish the cultural significance and the exclusivity of the opera subculture’s language. The topics are (1) the history of language policies in Taiwan and (2) the significance of the choice and use of language in the opera subculture.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{20}He Yu-kuang, personal communication, May through July 2008.
\textsuperscript{21}A growing number of laborer from certain Southeast Asian countries are living and working in Taiwan. However, their effect on the long-term demographic changes has yet to be determined.
\textsuperscript{22}For the sake of clarity in my reference to the language, rather than to people or culture, I use “Taiyu” to refer to the Taiwan-specific variant of the Minnan language that is used in Taiwan today.
THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Language, power, and identity are inextricably linked and entangled. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) has noted that “official language is bound up with the state” and an official language does not preexist prior to a state (45). An official language is associated with the “language ideology” of the dominant ethnic group of people within a state. Furthermore, the promotion of an official language is often a political tool to assert the position of one ethnic group over another. Thus, the claim of an official language of a state is also a symbolic assertion of the official status of an ethnic group and its culture, relegating other ethnic groups and cultures to “minority” statuses. Within the official-language ideology, the speakers of a “dialect” are identified as a member of that dialect-speaking ethnic minority group. Similar to how an official language is a symbol that imaginatively unifies a nation, a linguistic dialect also provides an identifiable marker for ethnic identity.

Prior to Chinese settlements on the island of Taiwan, Chinese languages were absent; the languages of the indigenous peoples are related to the Austronesian ethnic groups such as the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. By the end of the seventeenth century, with the steady influx of Chinese immigrants and their settlements on the island, both Minnan and Hakka languages were firmly established as the vernacular languages in Taiwan. In the late nineteenth century, Taiwan was considered a frontier to the Qing imperial Chinese rule, a regime that did not institute a universal national language.

During the Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945), the Japanese government instituted a unified compulsory education system that added another language into the mix. One of the goals of the colonial government’s universal education was to gradually introduce the Japanese language as the official language in Taiwan. Initially, Japanese was taught alongside Chinese in schools. In 1903 the colonial government banned the importation of Chinese printed material including school texts, and in 1922 Japanese replaced Chinese as the language of education in all schools (Kubler 1985). When Japan entered WWII in 1937, Japanese was the only language permitted in public and families were even urged to use Japanese in the confines of their own homes (ibid.). Colonial Japanese education was considered successful in teaching the Japanese language to the Taiwanese people. At the end of Japanese rule about 70% of the population was literate in the Japanese language (Mendel 1970). In fact, Taiwan had the highest school enrollment rate for elementary school children in Asia—81.17% (Yang 1990, 33).

Taiwan retroceded to the Republic of China (ROC) from Japan in 1945 and the ROC government officially moved to Taiwan in 1949. At the time, most people on the island spoke only Taiyu or Hakka with some Japanese, and virtually no one understood or spoke Mandarin with the exception of a minute portion of the population that studied the language abroad (Kubler 1985). Many of the ROC elites were from the Shanghai region (with knowledge of another Chinese dialect), and the common language of the ROC and its followers was Mandarin. To assert the primacy of their power position politically, culturally, and linguistically in Taiwan and to re-Sinicize the population, the Nationalists instituted the National Language Movement for Mandarin in 1946. The move was to make the language of a minority—Mandarin—into the language of the majority. Unlike the gradual transition of languages instituted by the Japanese government, under the Nationalist rule, “The national language—required in schools,

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23 A-chin Hsieh uses “language ideology” to refer to “a cluster of beliefs held by a group about the usage of language in a society” (1997, 304).
government offices, businesses, and any public place—changed overnight from Japanese . . . to Mandarin Chinese” (Brown 2004, 59). During the forty-plus years of authoritarian rule that heavily supported Mandarin, the regulative measures for Mandarin promotion ranged from the Radio and Television Law of 1976 (that limited the hours of non-Mandarin broadcast on radio to less than 45% and on television less than 30%) to fining individuals caught speaking Taiyu in public places. 

Simultaneously with the elevation of Mandarin’s importance as the national language, Taiyu was reduced to “regional dialect” status. Instruction on reading in Taiyu, which existed until the Japanese replaced Chinese as the language of education in schools, continued to be neglected. Regular use of Taiyu was for the most part limited to daily-affair situations and that ultimately led to a diminishing vocabulary (Hung 1985). Furthermore, the authoritarian government denounced Taiyu as crass, stating that it was the language of the uneducated. Emblematic of this propaganda and widely assumed to be true were television broadcasts that portrayed humiliating images of Taiyu speakers and represented the language as a marker of backwardness, vulgarity, and ignorance (Hsiau 1997, 308). Not only was Taiyu represented as lower class, the pronunciation of Mandarin with a Taiyu accent (which should be expected for speakers of Mandarin as a second language) was also a source of ridicule and considered unsophisticated (Guy 2005, 76).

With growing concerns for native identity and in part to counter the years of Mandarin dominance, the rise of former president Lee Teng-hui signaled a shift on the issue of Taiyu. The Taiyu Language Movement emerged in the late 1980s after the authoritarian rule of the Nationalists was dismantled. The three general goals of the Taiyu Language Movement were to reevaluate the cultural significance of Taiyu, to advocate bilingual education, and to establish a Taiyu writing system (Hsiau 1997). Although Mandarin remains the official language to date, Taiyu has risen in cultural status nationwide and is recognized as the native language of the majority. Evidence of the newly established importance of Taiyu can be found in the Ministry of Education’s report on what the ministry achieved from 2000 to 2008. The ministry had announced a Taiyu Language Romanization system to “unify Taiyu language's pronunciation” and certified “the ability to use Taiyu in order to raise the quality of the teaching of the Taiyu language.”

Both Mandarin and Taiyu are now commonly used in politics, businesses, and homes today. An individual’s language choice often depends on age; in general, elders are more fluent in Taiyu, and the younger generations are more comfortable in Mandarin (Wei 2008). The Taiyu and Mandarin spoken in contemporary Taiwan are both considered different from the related dialects, Chinese Minnan and Beijing Mandarin. Unlike their Chinese variants, the lexicons of Taiyu and Mandarin have borrowed components from each other as well as words from Japanese and English. One example that illustrates this point is the Taiyu word for the hybrid style Taiwanese opera, ö-phait-á. Scholars assert that ö-phait-á is the Taiwanese transliteration of the Japanese word, opela (オペラ), which, in turn, is the Japanized version of the imported word “opera.” There is no true Mandarin word for ö-phait-á in writing. When the word is written in texts, which are read in Mandarin (the normal practice for printed material in Taiwan), it is written in a non-Mandarin way (胡撇仔) that signals to native readers that the word should be pronounced in Taiyu. In other words, the Taiyu word ö-phait-á has been adopted

26 See Cornelius Kubler’s language study (1985) on the transformations of Mandarin in Taiwan due to influences chiefly from Taiyu, and secondarily, classical Chinese, Japanese, and foreign languages.
directly into Mandarin. Furthermore, the word ô-phait-á is not only known to Taiwanese opera scholars, performers, and audience members in Taiwan, but it is also known to those in China and Singapore, rendering this word part of transregional knowledge.

**LANGUAGE AND TAIWANESE OPERA**

Language is treated as one of the major points of distinction between the 300+ types of traditional operas in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. In xiqu studies, the main areas that scholars have considered include the politics of language, stage speech, and linguistic tones in relation to melodic contour. The most relevant types of studies for my project are the first two of those. My study contributes to this scholarship not only by adding another case study that elaborates upon the two areas, but also by highlighting another area of interest—the language of professional performers as a subcultural practice. Specifically, I discuss the lexicon unique to the opera subculture through discussions on alternate names (from legal and official names) and professional jargon unique to the opera subculture.

The significance of the language choice of Taiwanese opera professionals needs to be contextualized in relation to Mandarin and national-language policies. In the postwar period under Martial Law, unlike most other aspects in Taiwanese life that were conducted only in Mandarin for over forty years, temple culture retained Taiyu as the language of worship. Buddhist and Taoist temples are “one of the few important institutions into which Mandarin has been able to make little inroad” (Kubler 1985, 196). It seems that due to the association of the opera subculture with temple practices, the intense promotion of Mandarin after WWII and up to the late 1980s did not bar or modify Taiyu as the language of choice in the opera subculture. However, Taiwanese opera on the whole did not escape this influence and broadcast Taiwanese opera was “often very heavily influenced by Mandarin” (Kubler 1985, 198). Radio and television Taiwanese opera scripts were written in Mandarin but read in Taiyu. The scripts were written with “Mandarin directly translated into Taiwanese” that did not sound like Taiyu and lacked “Taiwanese flavor” (Lin 2006, 278). It was up to the actors to translate the Mandarin into Taiyu on the spot or while memorizing the script (Liu 2003, 152). The only reason that actors had such strong linguistic skill was that the great majority of them had been trained in Taiyu as their main language.

**Stage speech.** In Taiwanese opera, similar to other types of traditional opera, stage speech consists of language levels. In the study of Beijing opera language levels, Elizabeth Wichmann provides a representative and comprehensive analysis of stage speech (1991). For the purposes of my project, I only point to the two similarities between Beijing opera and Taiwanese opera stage speech. First, as Wichmann explains, the two general levels of speech are the classical and the vernacular. Second, within both levels, further distinctions can be made with sublevels. The lowest level of speech is regional dialects, which are primarily used by the comic role type (ibid., 212).

Taiwanese opera stage speech also consists of two levels—classical and vernacular. In the classic style opera, in which the stories are based on historical legends and characters, all of the serious and socially higher-ranked role types use classical speech. Unlike Beijing opera, in Taiwanese opera, the “classical stage speech” closely resembles the everyday language, rendering it sonically intelligible to those who are fluent in Taiyu. The common folk and less serious characters speak in the same style as that of everyday Taiwanese. In the hybrid style opera—dramas with timeless themes without historically based characters—stage speech for most characters is almost exclusively in the latter style. Therefore, in Taiwanese opera, the
differences between the stage speech levels and between stage speech and everyday Taiyu are relatively small.

Turning back to the previously referenced point regarding Beijing opera’s lowest language level, I contend that in Taiwanese opera, Mandarin is used as the lowest language level. Where as in Beijing opera, the lowest stage-speech level consists of regional dialects that are used primarily by the comic-role types in humorous ways, in Taiwanese opera, comic role types use isolated Mandarin words or phrases for comic effect. (The only exception when Mandarin is treated with equal respect is in pop song performance; actors sing both Taiyu and Mandarin pop songs.) Similar to the language levels of Beijing opera, the comic-role type language level in Taiwanese opera is categorized as the lowest in social hierarchy and in seriousness. Thus, Mandarin in Taiwanese opera stage speech is lower in status than Taiyu and relegated to the category of a “regional dialect.” Historically speaking, this is an ironic reversal of the cultural status of the two languages.

Regional dialects in traditional opera can be used in humorous ways not only because jokes are told in the dialect but also because of the effect of a regional dialect in juxtaposition with heightened stage speech that renders the dialect folksy and unsophisticated. In Taiwanese opera, Mandarin can be used for comic effect through means such as mispronunciation, mistranslation, and misusage. To illustrate this point, I analyze an example of a mispronounced Mandarin word in an opera. In Hanlei Mudan (The Weeping Peony), actor Hsu Yu-hua played a servant character, which was a comic-male-role type. During one of the scenes, the servant prepared a delicacy known as yanwo, or the “swallow’s nest,” for his master. When he presented the dish to his master, he mispronounced yanwo. Instead of saying “yan-wo,” the servant said, “en-uuu-oooo.” The master did not comprehend initially and Hsu repeated the word with the incorrect pronunciation. Upon understanding his servant, the master reprimanded him for mispronouncing the word. This little act has broader societal implications and is funny on a greater level because it refers to the previously-mentioned issue of Taiyu-accented Mandarin. A considerable portion of Taiwan’s population learned Mandarin as a second language; therefore, many people speak Mandarin with an accent. To speak in the “Taiwanese accented Mandarin” (Taiwan guoyu) used to be frowned upon and was considered crude, but now it is a style accepted and embraced by many. In other words, Hsu not only made fun of her own character’s lower status, but she also took a jab at others who have a hard time with Mandarin pronunciation. In today’s sociopolitical environment, Hsu’s performance was an assertion of a cultural position deeply rooted in Taiwanese pride and an appropriation of “Taiwanese-accented Mandarin” as a positive-identity marker.

Subcultural names. The lexicon subset of names, the third characteristic feature of Taiwanese opera language, includes personal and troupe names, and alternate names for tune types and songs. In the opera subculture, which is predominantly oral, troupe names that are printed on each troupe’s banners are generally not used. Instead, the troupe manager’s alternate name is used to refer to the person and the troupe. For example, amongst opera professionals and regular audience members, the troupe name “Shinyingfeng” (T: Sin-eng-hông) is hardly uttered. Instead, the troupe manager’s nickname, Li-á-phe, is used to refer to the troupe and the person (his legal name is Chen Wen-yi). Another example is the nickname for the troupe Chenmeiyun (T: Tân-bí-hûn), which is also the troupe manager’s legal name. She and her troupe are colloquially known as Bi-hûn-á. Although these names are commonly used in the subculture, they do not appear in print. Specifically, when professional troupes participate in publicized performances, their registered names are used for advertisements and official postings. The dual
existence of colloquial and formal names is a function of the double worlds that the professionals live in; to communicate with each other, they defer to their colloquial names, reserving the formal names for interaction with people with whom they are not already familiar. I posit that the use of colloquial names provides a sense of intimacy and informality among the opera subcultural practitioners.

Other alternative names include names of tune types and of other types of traditional opera, which the following examples illustrate. During performance, actors often ask for “song” (T: koa-ā) and “composed song” (M: biandiao, T: piān-tiāu-ā). When an actor asks for “song,” she is referring to the single most important tune type in Taiwanese opera, the seven-syllable tune type called “Qizidia” in Mandarin, but “Chhit-lī-ā tiāu” in Taiyu. The “koa-ā” and “Chhit-lī-ā tiāu” are used in the opera subculture, but outside of it, the Mandarin version is the only name used. As for a “composed song,” professional performers use the word “piān-tiāu-ā” consistently to refer to the composed song category. However, outside of the opera culture, it can also be known as “television tunes” (M: dianshidiao, T: tiān-sī tiāu) or “new tunes” (M: shindiao, T: sin-tiāu). Professional performers also have alternate words to refer to the three other types of traditional opera incorporated into Taiwanese opera performances—Beijing opera (M: pingju or jingju), beiquan, and nanquan. Beijing opera is known as “outside of the river” (T: gōa-kang), which is indicative of the imported nature of Beijing opera in Taiwan. Beiquan and nanquan are simply designated as “hok-ā,” “se-ā,” and “lâm-ā,” with the former two referring to the two subcategories of beiquan. While “hok-ā” does not have a literal meaning, “se-ā,” and “lâm-ā” could mean “western” and “southern” to someone outside of the subculture. These four designations (including the designation for Beijing opera) are generally used to refer to tune types that come from their respective opera traditions. Actors often do not say the exact names of the songs but simply refer to them with these general opera style labels.

**Professional jargon.** The fourth and most unusual aspect of the opera cultural language is the copious jargon that performers often use. Three examples serve to illustrate the linguistic uniqueness of the subculture. The first word, which I mentioned earlier in the chapter, is hi-láng, or “show crates.” What has not been explained is that this term has two meanings: it refers to the actual metallic crates as well as to the fans of particular actors. An actor’s fans are “show crates” metaphorically because they go where their favorite actor goes, just like the actor’s crates. Additionally, the fans are loyal to one actor and, like the real show crates, they also “belong” to the actor. The second example is o’ah-hi, which literally means, “live show” or “show that is alive.” Actor Wang Chiu-kuan explained to me that this word refers to the liveliness of Taiwanese opera on two levels: to improvise dialog and song text in the moment and to change scene order or song type for particular operas.

The third example refers to the practice of a performer substituting for other performers in other troupes. On her day off, a member of a troupe can be called to another troupe to substitute for an absent actor; this practice is known as phah-phòa-löh, literally meaning, “breaking the gong.” The word demonstrates not only a specific act in the professional subculture but also the cuteness of some Taiyu expressions. For an actor to say, “I broke the gong” while subbing in another troupe is self-deprecating and an expression of humility. It is a metaphor for not being able to act at the standard of the person who is being substituted. Actor Sun Shih-yong elucidated another aspect of the expression to me. She enjoys “breaking the gong” because when she acts in another troupe, she does not have the pressure of being the lead

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27 The gong can be physically be broken or cracked easily by not hitting right in the center of the instrument. It is a frequent occurrence for inexperienced musicians to break their gongs.
performer and takes on whatever secondary role that has been assigned to her for the day.\textsuperscript{28} In other words, the expression also implies a sense of relaxation and pleasure in working for another troupe on one’s “day off.”

**INDIVIDUAL HISTORIES**

The common ground of the opera subculture—the same type of work schedule, lifestyle, and language—is the assumed and unofficial conformity requirements for all members just entering the culture. Membership of the opera subculture, however, is not homogenous and every individual experience with Taiwanese opera is different. Rather than constructing sweeping generalizations to characterize membership of the opera subculture, I profile three actors and one musician to spotlight each individual’s personal history, diversity across the membership, and common threads that tie their experiences together.

**PROFILE: WANG CHIU-KUAN (FEMALE ACTOR, MID FIFTIES)**

Wang Chiu-kuan is a well-respected actor with diverse experience in playing multiple role types and working in different contexts. Within the Taiwanese opera culture, she is widely known as “Number Two” (T: lǎo-jī), her family’s nickname for her because she was born the second daughter of the family. Her father was a melody-section musician and her mother was an actor who specialized in the lead young female-role type, xiaodan. Her father owned and managed his own opera troupe in which most of the core performers in the troupe consisted of family members.

Wang told me that she has been in the Taiwanese opera profession for almost fifty years, having started when she was a child in the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{29} Before she reached school age, her parents had frequently dressed her up and put her on stage to sing and perform sword fights with her brother (also a child actor). She reminisced that the act she did with her brother was highly popular and that the audience loved it mainly because of their young age. When she was old enough to attend elementary school, her father did not send her to school. It was common practice for itinerant performers, who historically traveled continuously with the troupe and did not have a permanent home, to send their children to live with relatives in order for the children to attend school. Wang explained that although she really wanted a formal education, her father refused to “waste any more money” on educating his daughters at the time because her older sister had just quit school after a short time. “Only the boys will go to school; the girls do not need education and will act in my troupe” was her father’s final decision.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, her acting career continued in her father’s troupe with her older and younger sisters, whereas her brothers were sent to school when they reached the proper age.

During the theater era of Taiwanese opera (prior to 1960s), when troupes performed on indoor commercial stages, the theaters had a rotating schedule of troupe performances. Opera troupes traveled from theater to theater for ten or more consecutive days of performances at each location. Wang said she did not take advantage of the opportunity at the time to seriously study the art of acting because she was not interested in the profession at all. Other than asking to be sent to school, she also asked her father to teach her musical instruments but received a similar

\textsuperscript{28}Sun Shih-yong, interview, August 11, 2008.
\textsuperscript{29}Wang Chiu-kuan, interview, April 14 and June 27, 2008.
\textsuperscript{30}Wang Chiu-kuan quoting her father, interview, April 14 and June 27, 2008.
answer—that girls have no business learning music. Wang admitted that in defiance of her father, she refused to become an obliging student in acting, but she still had to participate in the family troupe. On the rare occasions that she was assigned a speaking and singing part, a mentor coached her prior to her scenes and fed her lines from backstage during performances. She explained that the backdrops were made of cloth and as long as she stayed close to the back portion of the stage, she could hear what her mentor said. That was the manner in which Wang started learning stage speech and rhyming phrases. Over time, she became more interested in acting and often asked her mentor and the troupe musicians to teach her new lines and songs when her father was away.

Wang’s professional experience is diverse with respect to the types of Taiwanese opera performances in which she has worked. Her father’s theater troupe went out of business in the early 1960s and when a new family troupe was formed two years later for temple-contracted performances, the three sisters became the featured stars of the troupe. Wang explained that when they moved up to Taipei from southeastern Taiwan, their troupe was the largest in size of all troupes in the area, with seventeen actors and six musicians. Her family’s troupe, the “Minkuang Three Wang Sisters” (Minkuang Wangjia Sanjiemei), had a very busy schedule. In the 1970s, not only did Wang perform in the unpublicized events and competitions (see Chapter 5), she also acted in television Taiwanese opera series. When filming was in session, Wang rushed to the filming locations in the morning and rushed back to the family troupe in time for evening performances. Work was especially difficult on days she was sick, she explained. She was not given time to rest because the family troupe needed her. On many occasions, she was still assigned lead roles even when she did not have a voice to sing. After her father passed away, her older sister took over the business as the troupe manager. The family troupe disbanded in 2002 after her older sister passed away. Since then, Wang has worked consistently in the Shinyingfeng troupe, occasionally in other troupes, and sporadically for publicized government-sponsored performances.

She explained that while she prefers to take on the supporting male roles, she accepted all role assignments and thus has gained the experience and capability to play any role type. Her attitude is unlike that of many well-known male-role actors who will only play the lead and the good-hearted protagonist role. Wang told me she started to become known for playing villains during her work in a television series produced years ago for which she was initially assigned to play the good-natured scholarly character in the opera. Due to negotiations initiated by an actor who did not want to play the evil character, Wang consented to trade roles with her. To the surprise of the cast, Wang’s fame began to spread because of her amazing ability to portray villainous characteristics. Over the years, Wang has established a reputation for playing villains. To this day, she often plays evil characters in the Shinyingfeng troupe’s performances.

**Profile: Hsu Su-yun (Female Actor, Early Fifties)**

Hsu Su-yun is the lead male-role actor of the Shinyingfeng Opera Troupe, a position she has held for over ten years. In recent years she has also taken on the role of director for the troupe’s government-sponsored performances. Like Wang, Hsu was born to parents who were both Taiwanese opera professionals in southeastern Taiwan. Her father was a musician and her mother was a female-role actor. But unlike Wang, Hsu’s family did not manage an opera troupe; rather, her parents and her sisters worked in troupes owned by others. In her early teens, Hsu began her training as a Taiwanese opera actor in an outmoded fashion—as a pa’i-hi-gin-â, or a contract child-apprentice, which was an agreement made between a troupe manager and the
parents who received a payment for allowing their child to work in the troupe for a minimum of two years. While serving out the terms of the contract, the child stayed and traveled with the troupe; her food and training were provided, and in return she followed the rigorous troupe schedule packed with training sessions and performances. Hsu’s father contracted her and her two sisters to the Chiuyue Opera Troupe, which was a well-known children’s opera troupe in Taipei. When I asked Hsu why her father contracted her to a troupe at such a young age, she told me sheepishly that her father was in debt from gambling. In order to earn money for the parents, Hsu and her two sisters were sent away from southeastern to northern Taiwan to join the Chiuyue troupe. At the time, Hsu’s older sister had just finished sixth grade and she had finished fourth grade, but their educations ended abruptly. Their younger sister had even fewer years of education. As a result, her young sister and she never finished elementary school.

In the Chiuyue troupe, the young apprentices received strict training for basic stylized movements and elaborate show tricks. In performances, most of them were usually assigned auxiliary parts, without singing or speaking, and that was also the case for Hsu and her sisters. Typically only the children whose parents made special arrangements with the manager were assigned the lead and supporting roles. After she finished the terms of her contract, she and her older sister stayed in Taipei and continued to work in other Taiwanese opera troupes, while their youngest sister chose a different career path. It was in the subsequent troupes Hsu joined that she truly learned to act in male-role types. She began in smaller roles and worked her way up the ranks. A number of years after Hsu joined the Shinyingfeng troupe, an opportunity opened up for her to take the lead role in the troupe, which is her position today.

Since 2001, the Shinyingfeng troupe has been an active participant in many of the government-sponsored events with Hsu as the lead actor and director. Such events require additional duties and resources that are not typical in the unpublicized temple-performance context. When I asked Hsu how she became the director, she said, “I was forced into the position.” In preparation for the publicized performances, which are larger in scale and require more actors than do those of the unpublicized performances, a director is necessary to coordinate the scenes, determine how the scenes will be carried out, and direct the rehearsals. Hsu explained that the troupe manager was unable to hire directors for those performances because he did not have the funds to do so, and thus, the responsibility fell on her.

PROFILE: SUN SHIH-YONG (FEMALE ACTOR, EARLY THIRTIES)

Sun is the lead young-male-role actor in the Yisin Opera Troupe and has been a professional actor in Taiwanese opera for over twenty years. Born into a large opera family, she occupies a less advantageous position in her immediate family’s structure. She is the second daughter of the second wife of actor, director, and musician Sun Jung-hui. Sun Jung-hui, Sun Shih-yong’s father, is the oldest sibling of eight, and took over the responsibilities of raising his siblings as a young adult. Prior to starting his own troupe, Yisin, in 1989, he had worked simultaneously and consecutively in multiple jobs in Taiwanese opera, Beijing opera, and the film industry in order provide for his siblings, and later for his own wives and children.

31 I have met many actors in Taipei who started their careers in this troupe. Actor He Hsiu-li explained that currently there are about thirty actors in the Taipei area who came out of the Chiuyue Troupe.

32 In older family structures, it is not uncommon for a man with ability to take multiple wives who all lived in the same household. Although this practice has fallen out of fashion over time and became unlawful, it has not completely disappeared particularly in the opera subculture, considered by many to be a more old-fashioned way of life.
Sun Shih-yong has been actively involved in her father’s troupe since childhood. Like most actors, she began playing auxiliary nonspeaking roles. During school holidays and after school let out, she worked in the troupe. On important temple festival days, she missed school in order to help out in her father’s troupe. Over time, her participation in the troupe became a family obligation that then grew into her full-time profession. Sun remembers a time when her mother, also an opera actor, could not afford to buy her a choir uniform for a school program. She was still too young to understand that her mother simply could not afford to do so and naively knelt outside of her mother’s bedroom for hours to plead for the uniform. Due to the financial circumstances of her family, contribution to family finances became a priority over completing elementary school. She and her younger sister, who both showed talent for acting, did not have the luxury of completing elementary school before becoming full-time actors, unlike her half-siblings from her father’s first wife.

Sun learned to act and sing through stage experience, observation, and accepting advice from the more experienced actors, and from her own mistakes, for which she was reprimanded. Her initial specialization was in the young-female role; she has since switched to the young-male role in order to fill an empty position in the troupe. Her father has been an important acting coach for her throughout her career. He also has had high expectations of her. In addition to the pressure she feels from him, she also has to fulfill the duties of a resident young-male role, and together, these two responsibilities pose a heavy burden on her.

In relation to her own opera-learning experience in the 1980s, Sun commented that “kids” learning Taiwanese opera today have it really easy; they do not get yelled at or beaten for mistakes and are handed opportunities. This idea that younger generations of professionals “have it easy” is one that reverberated among performers who started their training prior to the 1990s. For example, performers who started their career in the Chiuyue troupe have commented that they were beaten for mistakes they made onstage. Plus, young actors today get to take lessons in acting, singing, and acrobatics. Sun continues to improve her craft through self-study activities such as reading old poems, learning lyrical rhymes, and studying classic stories. Once in a while, she checks in with her voice teacher, who has been an important resource in retraining her voice after her two throat surgeries. As a result of her hard work, she is one of the youngest lead-role actors in Taiwan and has the acting agility to handle unexpected situations.

Over the years, Sun has gained a large and loyal fan base and established important friendships through her profession. She is the most important actor in the troupe, in both temple and government-sponsored performances, and takes her job very seriously, though it weighs heavily on her health. Outside of the Yisin troupe on her days off, she regularly helps her aunt’s opera troupe, the Hsiehhsin Opera Troupe, by playing any role that she is assigned. She enjoys acting in other troupes in which she is happy to play supporting roles, without the pressure of the lead role and away from her father’s watchful eyes.

PROFILE: CHOU HUANG-HSIANG (MALE MUSICIAN, LATE TWENTIES)

Chou Huang-hsiang has been a melody-section multi-instrumentalist for over ten years. He is often recognized as the “youngest old master” of professional Taiwanese opera melody-section musicians. Chou started learning Taiwanese opera with a teacher when he was seventeen and initially only performed alongside his teacher, but soon he was sent out to perform on his own.
Chou’s decision to become an opera musician was based on finding a line of work that was compatible with the schedule and lifestyle of his parents’ career. His parents run a company that specializes in funeral processional music. Chou is also one of the musicians in the family’s company and plays the keyboard in processions. Chou told me that the family business had done well until recent years. The decrease in the numbers of engagements has to do with urbanization, government noise-reduction efforts, and a new law regarding storage of the deceased. The law restricts the length of time a body can be kept at a morgue, thus forcing families to quickly bury their dead. This is a large contrast to the older days, when families could store bodies for a longer period, thereby enabling them to have ample time for planning extravagant funerals with festive processions and loud commemorations. Noise has also become a problem in urban spaces, and all of the jobs that his parents’ company received in recent years were far away from city centers, located on the outskirts of towns. After finishing eight years of school, Chou took a break from compulsory education and chose to enter the Taiwanese opera profession because of the financial need to help support his family and the long work hours.

Chou’s two younger brothers, who are also Taiwanese opera musicians, selected this path due to Chou’s career choice. His younger brothers worked in other careers after they graduated from junior high school; they also did not continue their educations in order to help support their family. Previously, the brothers both found jobs in companies (not opera related) with a conventional work schedule and regular paychecks. Their decision to switch careers was based on advice their mother gave them: keep the family together by having similar work schedules—that of their brother in Taiwanese opera and their parents in funeral processional music. The three Chou brothers are well respected for their mastery in string instruments and the keyboard.

Chou’s experience as a musician is diverse. Within Taiwanese opera, he has worked with multiple troupes and everyone knows him or knows of him. His schedule is filled with government-sponsored performances that he prefers because of the higher pay; in between, he accepts temple-contracted shows. For government-sponsored performances, he is often hired not just as another performer but as the lead musician of the melody section and occasionally as the music designer. Outside of Taiwanese opera, Chou also performs with Hakka opera troupes that have recently received a boost of funding from government agencies. With the Hakka opera troupes, he has participated in making recordings and film soundtracks and has performed in temple shows and theater productions.

From 2004 – 2008, Chou was a work-study student performing Taiwanese opera on weekends and during school holidays while he attended high school. He paid his own way through high school and, as a returning adult student, he was by far the oldest in the entire school. After graduating, Chou was planning on applying for universities the next year. However, he missed the deadline to apply in 2008 because he was working abroad in Singapore. Although Chou’s brothers thought his decision to go back to get his high school degree was crazy and a waste of time and money, he believes that the education will provide him with more career options in the future.

**Shared Culture**

The shared aspects in the experiences of the four individuals I profiled are fundamental to the community’s group identity. By this, I am not suggesting that membership is homogenous,

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33 Chou Huang-hsiang, personal communication, August 13, 2008.
but that the common threads tying the four individuals’ histories together are also prominent aspects among the experiences of other members in the opera subculture.

Chou, Hsu, Sun, and Wang all started their careers in Taiwanese opera at a young age and not completely by choice. They all came from working-class families. When their families struggled to make ends meet, each of them was expected to contribute to family finances despite their young age. In all four cases, putting food on the table was more important than going to school. (That was true for the girls more than for the boys, which I return to in Chapter 4.) Because they have chosen to stay in Taiwanese opera and work for a living as performers, they have long accepted that the Taiwanese opera profession is hard work. Despite the facts that the work conditions are harsh, the hours are long, and the pay is low, they all seem to enjoy their line of work. The long hours that they spend on stage (including the time they spend backstage) is not just a job; it is also their lifestyle.

Although there is compulsory education in Taiwan, three of the four performers I profiled did not have the luxury of finishing the nationally-required years of education. The three actors can read with difficulty and they can barely write. And yet, they are still more literate than some of the other subcultural members; I met a few performers during my fieldwork who could read numbers but not words. This is a surprising fact for some outside of the subculture, considering that Taiwan’s adult literacy rate is high—at 97.78% in 2008. The fact that the majority of performers in the opera subculture did not finish compulsory education is an indicator that the subculture, at least in the areas of education and literacy level, is outside of the dominant cultural expectations.

In the opera subculture, many performers are hereditary actors. Hsu, Sun, and Wang are all second- or third-generation xiqu performers. Related to this point, most contemporary performers have siblings or family members who are also in the same profession and subculture. For example, Hsu’s sister and husband are both Taiwanese opera actors. Sun’s parents, four sisters, and multiple aunts and uncles are also opera actors as are Wang’s two younger sisters. Chou’s brothers are musicians like him, and his partner is an opera actor.

Although for the previous generations of actors, following in the footsteps of parents into acting was not uncommon, there appears to be a new trend. Actors who have children—Hsu and Wang for example—have not encouraged their children to become actors but instead are encouraging them to concentrate on academics. This trend is also true for most of the actors with children whom I met during my fieldwork, which suggests that the nature of subcultural membership will be profoundly different in the future. For now, however, family kinship remains the foundation for the close connections between the subculture’s members.

**CONCLUSION**

Although subculture as a theoretical concept is fraught with baggage and many scholars have distanced themselves from it, in lived experiences subcultures are very much alive and integral to supercultures. The Taiwanese opera subculture is one such sociocultural formation characterized by the factors discussed in this chapter: intercultural interactions with temple subcultures and intracultural features—itinerant performer lifestyle, linguistic distinctiveness, and common cultural experiences. These factors bind the performers together as a professional and cultural entity. Simultaneously, the tightly knit cultural network and the nature of the

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profession inadvertently ostracize interested individuals, particularly the institutionally-trained opera performers, from entering the subculture. At the same time that the opera subculture welcomes new members, the process of learning and adapting to its ways are deterrents for perspectives. Thus, the opera subculture remains a subsidiary community with localized practices customary only to its members.
Chapter 3: Improvisation in Living Opera

INTRODUCTION

Professionals describe performing operas in the temple-contracted context as “chò o’ah-hì,” or “doing a live show.” The English equivalent for “doing a live show” is “to improvise an opera.” During fieldwork, I heard performers explain the idea of chò o’ah-hì in a variety of ways. It means to participate in an opera performance that has no written script or fixed textual and musical components. It is about flexibility, acting in the moment, and performing collaboratively. Taiwanese opera is also o’ah-e, or alive, in the sense that a given story can be modified when necessary in order to fit the group of available actors and particular performance contexts. In a live show, the performers do not know the exact details of what will happen and what one will say, sing, or play until the moments they occur. A given song and a given opera are never performed the same way twice.

Improvisation is not only the key performance characteristic of the opera, it is also the fundamental means of operation for the performers of the temple-contracted context. Improvisation enables a single opera troupe to perform two operas a day, over fifty operas a month, and 500+ operas a year. Improvisation is what continues to make performances interesting and challenging for performers, particularly those who have been in the profession for most of their lives. Improvisation also allows performers to connect more directly with audience members in an outdoor performance context in which the conditions of performance can be dynamic and unpredictable. For example, performers can spontaneously incorporate remarks on the sweltering humid heat that are at once dramatically relevant to both the performers’ and audience members’ experiences.

Although improvisation is the most important aspect of temple-contracted performances, it remains under-researched. The only scholarly works that engage with the topic are three recently published articles by xiqu scholar Lin Heyi (2007b; 2007c; 2007d). Lin focuses on the improvisatory construction of Taiwanese opera stories based on interviews with actors. Her articles do not actually elucidate how the process of improvisation works in performance or how musicians and actors interact to spontaneously create an opera on stage.

Having observed and actively participated in numerous improvised operas during field research, I found that actors cannot deliver an effective performance without the contribution and cooperation of musicians, and the key to understanding the improvisational process is to analyze the interaction between actors and musicians. I only scratch the surface of this topic, as it is not the main focus of my project and can be its own dissertation-length work. The current chapter is focused on song performance, which explores only a fraction of the process of interactive improvisation in Taiwanese opera.

INTERACTIVE IMPROVISATION

To comprehend how performers interactively improvise an opera, I adopt Benjamin Brinner’s (1995) theoretical concepts on interaction in musical contexts. Brinner proposes
studying interaction in musical practices from four approaches that he calls interactive network, interactive system, interactive sound structure, and interactive motivation. The four concepts distill the complex process of interaction into four aspects—social, mechanistic, sonic, and causal.

*Interactive network* comprises the roles assumed by performers and the relationships or links between them, *interactive system* refers to the means and meaning of communication and coordination, and *interactive sound structure* is . . . associated with the constraints and possibilities inherent in the ways that sounds are put together . . . The “why” of interaction, the goals, rewards, pitfalls, and sanctions . . . may be subsumed under the rubric *interactive motivation* (169).

Interactions in a given performance are the junctures in which details pertaining to the material of a single performance are determined. Brinner accounts for inherent improvisation and spontaneity in the interactive process as located at these junctures in which performers respond to each other and act in the moment.

Before delving into the details and examples of musical interaction and improvisation from my fieldwork, I begin by introducing the components of the Taiwanese operatic genre in the temple-contracted context. I devote the second half of the chapter to analyzing interactive improvisation by applying Brinner’s four theoretical concepts.

**COMPONENTS OF TAIWANESE OPERA IN TEMPLE-CONTRACTED CONTEXT**

**THE OPERA STORIES**

A great majority of the opera stories performed today is shared by multiple troupes and exists in multiple versions. The shared stories come from a variety of sources. Many of which have been passed down from the premodern theater era (the 1950s – 1960s), were adapted from historical legends. Such stories are reduced in length and number of characters from multiday series down to one or two days and to accommodate smaller groups of actors in today’s performance conditions. Other stories have been adapted from movies, novels, and television shows. In general, the stories that are in circulation today are not new works or exclusively owned by particular troupes, but rather, they already exist in another medium, are already performed by other troupes, or are reincarnated versions of existing stories.1 Although a given story is performed differently by every troupe, the names of the operas remained unchanged.2

For temple-contracted opera performances, the stories are orally transmitted and stored in the living memories of the performers. Operas are remembered either in their entirety or in fragments. Actors who are very familiar with certain opera stories have memorized them in their entirety and are able to convey the stories to other performers. Actors who are less familiar with certain stories only know them in fragments. Particularly, they know the parts that they have performed. Ideally within a troupe, each performer knows all the opera stories that the troupe performs regularly in their entirety. The same performers might know other opera stories or parts of them from acting in other troupes.

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1During fieldwork, I heard that one particular troupe in Taipei has created new operas to get away from only performing the same stories that other troupes also perform. However, this is not a common practice, as most troupes today do not have the resources to do it.

2Some opera stories have more than one title and it appears that experienced performers are familiar with the variations.
A troupe learns a story that is “new” (to the troupe) through a process called jiangxi (T: kóng-hi), or story telling, which requires a storyteller who is typically an actor. The storyteller of a given occasion can be someone from within the troupe or hired from another troupe. More often than not, the storyteller is the latter, since regular members of a particular troupe would most likely have shared all the suitable stories they know. The storyteller relays the skeletal structure and scene order of a given story that he or she knows.³ Story telling typically happens right before a performance and every actor in the performance is expected to be present, listen to the overall story progression, and pay close attention to her role assignment and scenes. Each actor is told her character’s name, the character’s family background, and a general synopsis of scenes the character is in. It is then up to the individual actor to develop her character more fully and fill in the details of the character’s scenes. The storyteller also takes on the role of a director during the performance to ensure that scene transitions are smooth and that important elements are not left out. If a troupe finds a new opera agreeable after its first performance, the troupe will likely incorporate the story into its opera repertoire.

An opera in a troupe’s repertoire can be performed a few times a year or, less frequently, once every year or two. Each performance of a given opera can vary infinitely in details but the overall story and structure typically remain the same. In repeated performances of a given opera, each actor in a troupe plays the same character every time.

Actors are responsible for remembering their parts in a story, but the exact text that they speak and the songs that they sing can vary from performance to performance. Performers tend not to memorize the details within scenes from one performance to the next but leave them to spontaneous creativity. Musicians are also expected to remember the stories; at the very least, they are expected to know the scene order and distinctive musical moments. The infinite variables from performance to performance of a given opera are not the result of deliberate alteration but rather the function of improvised opera.

Each troupe’s dramatic repertoire consists of two categories of operas that I translate as classic (M: gulu, T: kó-lô) and hybrid (opeila or ó-phait-á).⁴ To reiterate, classic stories are typically used for afternoon and occasionally for evening performances while hybrid style stories are used for evening performances. Professional performers further divide both types of stories into subcategories (table 3.1).⁵

Table 3.1. Opera style categories and subcategories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classic Style Opera (guluxi)</th>
<th>Hybrid Style Opera (opeila)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil (wenxi)</td>
<td>Real (cháī)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial (wuxi)</td>
<td>Half (pòa)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to professional performers, classic style stories are further divided into two subcategories—civil (M: wen, T: bûn) opera and martial (M: wu, T: bû) opera. Civil operas

³See Lin Heyi (2007b; 2007c; 2007d) for more on the topic.
⁴See Chapter 4 for explanation on translation matters on classic and hybrid operas. As for “opeila” and “ó-phait-á,” they are pronounced the same but spelled using different systems of Romanization (see Chapter 2).
⁵Scholars have divided classic and hybrid stories into more subcategories, but professional performers tend not to think or speak in such ways. One recent example is from Lin Heyi with the classic opera categories of historical tales, metaphysical miracle stories and legends, and hybrid opera categories of love and vengeance, swordsmen (wuxia) and traditional tales (2007, 145-147).
emphasize the chhiù-liām, or singing and text recitation, while martial operas provide opportunities for actors to display martial skills. In civil operas, characters illustrate literary cultivation and social refinement through speaking poetically and singing rhyming verses. On the other hand, martial operas focus on action and exhibit florid movements, weapon handling, and skilled fighting of the martial characters. There is a common saying that reflects how the two opera subcategories are valued differently: “bûn-hi-kim, bû-hi-thô” (M: wenxì jin, wuxì tu), or “civil opera is gold, martial opera is dirt.” Performers consider civil operas harder to master and more worthwhile to learn, because actors can speak and sing well into their retirement age, while the majority of them cannot twirl weapons or perform agile movements in impressive ways beyond a certain age.

Hybrid style stories can also be divided into subcategories even though the division is not systematically used. Gleaned from communication with performers, the two subcategories are chai opeila (real hybrid style) and pòa opeila (half-hybrid style). A real hybrid style story, to reiterate, is set in a fictional time space, features themes about love and vengeance, and is comprised of scenarios not used in the classic style stories, such as sword fighting adapted from Japanese chanbara (stylized sword fighting). A half hybrid style story includes some of the real hybrid style elements and historical components that are used in the classic style opera. On a daily basis, the subcategorization of hybrid style operas does not actually matter and is not used as a criterion for selection. In circumstances when patrons reject certain aspects of hybrid style operas, the division is then consciously applied, and the half-hybrid style opera stories are the more likely candidates for such performances. Half-hybrid style stories can be easily performed to resemble a classic style opera yet they still allow performers to include some hybrid style elements. The creation of hybrid and half-hybrid styles are further, large-scale manifestations of the flexibility and improvisatory abilities of opera performers.

**Role Types**

Like other types of xiqu (most prominently Beijing and Kun operas), Taiwanese opera uses role types or stock-character types that are differentiated by gender, age group, and select traits. Scholars have described the three main role types used in Taiwanese opera—(1) sheng (T: seng), or male characters, (2) dan (T: töa′), or female characters, and (3) chou, or comic characters. The sheng and dan are further subdivided first by age, into young, middle-aged, and old, and second by social attribute, into wen (civil) and wu (martial). Comic-role types are typically divided into male and female comic roles, known as sanhua (T: sa′-hoe) and sanba (T: sam-pat). Each role-type subcategory is also associated with a certain cultural status, code of conduct, and style of speech. For example, a civil-young-male character is educated, has an extensive knowledge of the classic literature, speaks in a refined manner, and is physically weak. A martial young male character, on the other hand, speaks with a warrior’s confidence and gusto, is not literarily educated, and is physically strong and skilled in fighting.

An actor is expected to have a role type specialization. The process of specializing in a role type typically begins early in an actor’s career when she is typecasted for male, female, or comic roles. Typecasting can be based on a combination of factors that include facial features, physical build, height, personality, and vocal quality. After typecasting, however, actors still

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6 Certain patrons do not consider hybrid style opera or certain components of hybrid style opera as “traditional.” One reason for the rejection is that the relatively new components in hybrid style opera are viewed as contaminants. It appears that long-term patrons with memories of a time when pop songs and other “contaminants” did not take center stage, have a fixed idea from the not-so-distant-past of what Taiwanese opera should be.
have the freedom to change role-type specialization later in their careers. For example, many of the leading young-male-role actors today started their careers in the male-comic-role type.\(^7\)

Even though most actors typically play characters of their role type specialization in routine performances, under certain circumstances they play characters outside of their specialization. For example, for the Shinyingfeng troupe’s special occasion performances of *Linqian Huimu (Meeting at the Shrine)*, actor Hsu Yu-hua’s role assignment is different from her role-type specialization. In the troupe, Hsu typically plays young-male roles, but in this opera, she plays an old-female character. The unusual role assignment has to do with the fact that Hsu is one of the troupe’s main actors and, as such, she is expected to play one of the supporting roles in any performance. Hsu is also an experienced female-role actor—her former role-type specialization is a dan. Therefore, role type specialization is flexible; many actors occasionally play role types outside of their current specialization when necessary.

The actors in a troupe comprise a particular configuration of role types. Typically, every troupe has at least two pairs of young-male and young-female roles known as the zheng- (T: *chià*), or primary, and fu- (T: *hù*), or secondary, sheng and dan. Each troupe also has one or two sheng or dan actors who specialize in villain roles known as caihua (T: *chhái-hoe*), or male villain, and caidan (T: *chhái-tòa*), or female villain.\(^8\) A troupe will also employ one or a pair of comic-role types. Lastly, a troupe also has one or two other actors who play old-male or old-female roles. Based on the descriptions above, the minimum number of actors in a given troupe is seven, which is just enough to perform the few operas with a minimum cast. More typically, operas have more than seven characters and most troupes have more than seven actors.

**Music**

*Instrumentation.* The musical ensemble in an opera troupe consists of the melody and percussion sections, which are known as wenchang (T: *bûn-tiû*\(^9\)) and wuchang (T: *bú-tiû*\(^9\)), or civil and martial sections. Most of today’s troupes in the Taipei area typically employ two musicians for each section, though I have observed performances with only one musician in each section. As the names of the ensemble sections suggest, the “civil section” is important for civil operas, particularly for accompanying singing; the “martial section” plays a bigger role in martial operas, especially for accompanying actors’ movements. However, in current practices of some troupes, the two sections are more or less equally involved as accompanists in both types of the classic style opera.

According to older practices, the melody section is the main accompaniment in song performance and the percussion section is the only accompaniment in action scenes, but it appears that both practices are changing. Historically in song performance, percussion accompaniment is minimal in that the drummer only taps on the main beats during vocal phrases. It appears that most of the younger drummers today play additional rhythmic accompaniment on the drum set during song performance, which tends toward the accompaniment style for pop songs. In recent years, instrumental accompaniment during non-singing sections of operas has become an important component, most of the contemporary keyboardists play melodic

\(^7\)Two such examples are Hsu Su-yun in the Shinyingfeng troupe and Sun Shih-pei in the Yisin troupe.

\(^8\)Another name for caihua is fansheng (T: *hóan-seng*).

\(^9\)In that performance, the percussionist played an electronic drum pad and the melodist played a keyboard and used a sound effects machine. That particular troupe typically performs with three musicians, but the second melody section musician was absent for the occasion.
accompaniment during action scenes to create a lurid soundtrack and heighten the intensity of fighting sequences.

Instrumentation in a troupe’s ensemble follows an ideal standard configuration. A percussion section typically includes clappers, traditional opera drums, Western drum set, cymbals, and gongs. (The drummer plays the clappers and all the drums, while a second musician plays the cymbals and gongs.) The ideal configuration of instruments in a melody section includes a keyboard (synthesizer), suona (double reed wind instrument), and bowed lutes (the latter two types of instruments are typically played by one musician). The most commonly used bowed lutes are the yehu (T: khok-á-hián) or coconut shell lute, and erhu (T: hô-hián). Occasionally, other types of two-stringed bowed lutes varying in size, shape, pitch range, and sound quality are also included, such as gaohu (for Beijing opera tunes), liujiaoxian (similar function as an erhu but twangy in sound), and zhongguangxian (folk music instrument for the “Zanian” tune type or for sad songs).

The instrumentation, size of the ensemble, and level of importance of particular instruments are, like many other aspects of Taiwanese opera, undergoing a continual state of change. The most prominent trend in recent years is the increasing importance of the keyboard that is now the main melody section instrument for Taipei area troupes. The first time a musician used a keyboard in a Taiwanese opera troupe dates back to approximately thirty years ago. The keyboard appears to have replaced a mix of instruments no long regularly used in the temple-contracted context, particularly the hammered dulcimer (M: yangqin, T: iông-khîm), three-string plucked lute (M: sanxian, T: sam-hián), saxophone, trumpet, clarinet, and electric guitar. Furthermore, in the temple context, the keyboardist also appears to be replacing the string melodist as the lead instrumentalist as the former is the more economically and sonically efficient option. Throughout my fieldwork, many performers advised me to learn the keyboard in addition to or in place of the bowed lutes; they explained that if I wanted to make a living as a Taiwanese opera musician, the keyboard is the most lucrative instrument to play. Despite the increasing importance and use of the keyboard, many of today’s performers still consider the yehu to be the signature and ideal lead accompaniment sound of Taiwanese opera. This sentiment illustrates an effect of the rapidly changing conditions: the disparity between stylistic preferences and the economic reality and practicality of hiring keyboardists.

Repertoire. Taiwanese opera’s music is like a bowl of cha’p-chhái-mî—a common noodle dish made of a hodgepodge of ingredients depending on what is available. During my fieldwork, I often heard musicians use this analogy to describe the contents of the opera’s musical repertoire, which consists of music absorbed from various sources, including beiquan, nanquan, Beijing opera, additional types of xiqu, folk music, pop music, movie theme songs, and guoyue (Chinese orchestral music).

There is not a standardized system of repertoire categorization. Xu Lisha in her masters’ thesis (1987) categorizes opera songs based on their origins. Xu’s system is genealogically

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10 Through personal communication with musicians from different troupes, it became clear that the earliest incorporation of keyboardists in professional Taiwanese opera troupes dates back to the early 1980s. There are musicians who think that Kao Le-fu and his peer A-tián, who have both been professional musicians for about twenty years, were the first musicians to play the keyboard in Taiwanese opera. When I asked Kao about this, he revealed that his father and two other musicians of his father’s generation were the first.

11 Prior to the reduction to two musicians per instrumental section, the melody section included three to four musicians and each of those musicians was able to play more than one instrument, switching between them in performance.
oriented and different from the way contemporary performers speak about the musical repertoire. For the purpose of this chapter I categorize the music based on how temple-context performers speak about it, which is similar to how Huang Huihu describes the musical repertoire of the Minchuan Opera Troupe (2000). The main categories that I use are vocal and instrumental music.

**Vocal music.** Taiwanese opera’s vocal music consists of four subcategories: (1) tune types/core tunes, (2) composed songs, (3) songs from other types of xiqu, and (4) popular music. These subcategories are delineated based on my observations. Performers can select pieces from the first three subcategories of music to sing in any opera as long as the pieces are dramatically appropriate. Pop songs are typically only used in the hybrid style opera (see Chapter 4).

Of the four subcategories of vocal music, performers consider the “tune types/core tunes” as the most important musical component in Taiwanese opera. A tune type is a piece with a loosely prescribed structure or certain fixed ideas. However, the exact melodic contour of the vocal line changes in every performance to inflect the linguistic tones of the text. There are only three tune types in Taiwanese opera—(1) “Ozidiao” (T: “Chhit-li-a tiâu”), or seven-syllable tune type, (2) “Dumadiao” (T: “To-má tiâu”), and (3) “Zaniandiao” (T: “Cháp-liâm-a tiâu”). This subcategory also includes a few core tunes. The core tunes are the older opera songs in the repertoire, which have fixed melodies. Two examples are “Peisi” (T: “Pöe-su-a”) and “Jindiezii” (T: “Kin-thiap-a”). The tune types/core tunes subcategory is a relatively small subcategory of music, but the pieces are among the most frequently used. According to performers, the songs in this subcategory constitute the signature sounds of Taiwanese opera.

The subcategory of composed songs (biandiao) is the largest group of vocal music (and still growing). “Composed songs” is my translation of three Chinese words that are used to refer to this subcategory of music: biandiao (changed tunes; T: pián-tiâu), dienshihdiao (television tunes; T: tânh-sí-tiâu), and xindiao (new tunes; T: sin-tiâu). The majority of the composed songs are from Taiwanese opera television drama series produced from the 1960s to the 1990s. At the time, producers invested in enlarging the opera’s musical repertoire with new songs commissioned to compete for viewers. The songs were either adapted from existing tunes (such as older pop songs and popular movie themes) or newly composed pieces. Most of the songs in this subcategory are relatively short; they were written so that multiple songs could be performed during the thirty-minute-long episodes for television series. Today, new songs are still commissioned for certain types of government-sponsored performances though not at the same rate.

The third subcategory, songs from other types of xiqu, consists of pieces that were historically popularized by other types of xiqu, and later absorbed into the Taiwanese opera repertoire. Two of such pieces that are still relatively common in Taiwanese opera today are “Liushui” (T: “Liû-súi”) and “Jingzongman” (T: “Tióng-bån-a”). Generally, only the older generations of performers (those in their 40s and above) still regularly use pieces from other types of xiqu, because the songs are from the popular music of their younger years.

**Instrumental music.** Instrumental music consists of four subcategories: (1) accompaniment for ritual performance, (2) instrumental songs (M: chuan, T: chhòan), (3) suona motifs (M: gupai), and (4) fixed rhythmic patterns (T: kó-kài). The first subcategory, pieces that are used to accompany ritual performances, was absorbed from beiquan when Taiwanese opera moved into the temple context in the 1960s and replaced the ritual function of beiquan troupes.

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12 For more on the biandiao subcategory of music see Ke Ming-feng’s masters’ thesis (2005).
Most of the instrumental accompaniment for ritual performances is prescribed, but musicians do have some flexibility in song choice within certain sections. The second subcategory, instrumental songs, consists of pieces absorbed from folk music and guoyue. The songs are used as background music to accompany dramatic events, monologues, and dialogues. The function and amount of instrumental music used in performance can differ greatly from troupe to troupe. The third subcategory, suona motifs, consists of short melodic patterns that accompany fixed types of dramatic moments. In performances without a suona player, the keyboardist plays the motifs. The fixed rhythmic patterns in the fourth subcategory are used as accompaniment to certain types of movements, as percussive signals for songs, and as a part of instrumental interludes in songs.

Music notation and theory. In the temple-contracted context, professional musicians typically play from memory rather than from scores. In many cases, no notation exists for what is performed. Particularly, there is no notation for percussion-section musicians in the temple-contracted context. Percussionists aurally internalize all the rhythmic patterns. Melody-section musicians have the option of playing from scores, but scores are only available for some categories of the repertoire’s music. Published scores are available for most of the composed songs and pop songs, but not for the other subcategories of vocal music or instrumental music. The scores are written in cipher notation, a system that indicates only relative pitch and tempo. In performance, it is up to performers to set the tempo and the lead melody-section musicians to select appropriate keys for singing.

The two scales that are commonly used in the music of Taiwanese opera are the pentatonic and diatonic scales. A pentatonic scale is constructed like a diatonic scale in the major mode. Songs in the pentatonic scale have main melodies that do not contain scale degrees 4 and 7, but musicians are not precluded from using ornaments that contain those two scale degrees for accompaniment. Conversely, many pieces notated in the diatonic scale emphasize scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 and in performance the pieces tend to sound more pentatonic than diatonic.

In both scales, major or minor mode tendencies can be expressed, though the major mode is far more common. In scores, the tonic of songs in the minor mode is notated with scale degree 6. Songs that use either of the scales and modes are tonal in the sense that the tonic and dominant carry more weight than other scale degrees.

Musicians also use the concept of musical keys, which is similar to those of Western tonal music theory. Opera musicians have their own terminology for referring to the keys (table 3.2). For example, musicians call the key of F “si-kho,” which literally means “four dollars.” The pitches in the si-kho scale are the same as those in the F Major scale. Musicians expect each song in the opera’s repertoire to be performed in one of the two keys associated with that piece. For example for performances in the temple-contracted context, musicians expect the dumia tune type to be performed in the key of F and occasionally in the key of G. However, they

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13 During fieldwork, I observed that multiple keyboardists were in the process of learning to play the suona (historically played by the string player). This is a sign that they are gradually taking over the duties that once belonged to string players.
14 Because percussion section music is a purely oral tradition, many versions of “fixed” rhythmic patterns exist. In the case of variations, there is not an authoritative right or wrong version, and particular musicians have different styles.
15 During fieldwork, I heard a couple of musicians refer to major as changdiao and minor as duandiao, but it appeared that only some musicians differentiated the two theoretically.
are not the only keys used; during my fieldwork, I heard a performer sing the tune type in E-flat. She also sang other pieces in keys lower than what are typically used for those pieces. The individual actor’s voice range and her vocal condition on that day determine the tonic of a song.

Table 3.2. Commonly used keys in Taiwanese opera.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of keys in Taiyu</th>
<th>Equivalent Western keys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ch’-kho</td>
<td>C Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nn–g-kho</td>
<td>D Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sa”-kho-pōa”</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si-kho</td>
<td>F Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gō-kho</td>
<td>G Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la’k-kho-pōa”</td>
<td>A-flat Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chhit-kho-pōa”</td>
<td>B-flat Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance Structure

Over the course of fieldwork, I often heard practitioners comment that each troupe has its own performance style, yet after observing multiple troupes and numerous performances, I found that despite the differences in style, improvised opera performances are similar across the board in terms of some structural elements. In the Minchuan troupe’s operas that have the sanhua (comic-male role) as the xiaosheng’s (young-male role) sidekick, for example, the sanhua actor’s part is small; the actor sings at most one or two songs, if any. On the other hand, in some of the Shinyingfeng troupe’s operas that have the sanhua as the xiaosheng’s sidekick, the part is relatively large for the role type; the actor who plays the part often sings multiple songs. Despite the contrast in how big the sanhua role is, the two troupes’ performances are similar in that they both use the sanhua role as the xiaosheng’s sidekick.

The similarity in different troupes’ operas is what I term “performance structure,” or the mechanical parts in a performance. I posit that performance structure consists of three aspects: (1) length of time allotted for performance, (2) scenes as chunks of an opera story, and (3) a stockpile of dramatic motifs, which are small building blocks that performers use to construct scenes. The three aspects of the performance structure provide the framework within which performers improvise.

The length of the allotted time for a performance is crucial for structuring the content of an improvised opera. Typically, actors are responsible for pacing a performance and need to be constantly aware of the time during the progression of a given performance. For this reason, every professional troupe hangs a clock on stage, usually on the melody-section side where the actors can read the time before they enter the stage. Actors also tend to subtly glance at the clock while onstage to help them make spontaneous decisions. Some actors wear watches and have a small clock at their vanity stations backstage for the same purpose.

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16Improvisation in Taiwanese opera and in the Javanese wayang wong functions similarly. In “Improvisation in Wayang Wong Panggung: Creativity within Cultural Constraints,” Hardja Susilo (1987) describes the constraints of place, time, story, language, character, music and dramatic structure that control an improvised performance, which is a system uncannily parallel to that of Taiwanese opera.
With possible changes to schedules from day to day, experienced actors have learned to spontaneously speed up or fill in a story as time demands. In Taipei, typical performances are roughly two hours (3:10 p.m. to 5 p.m.) for afternoon and three hours (7:10 p.m. to 10 p.m.) for evening operas. However, as illustrated in Chapter 2, the timing can vary depending on temple celebrations and patron demands. Individual actors and their levels of competence can also affect time variability. Improvising an opera within the set time frame requires years of experience and collaborative effort. During fieldwork, I was constantly astounded by how punctually the Shinyingfeng troupe consistently ended their performances. I also saw another troupe, which predominantly consisted of younger and less experienced performers, ended shows twenty minutes late, because many of the performers were not as skilled in gauging time and adjusting their parts accordingly. Moreover, on a rare occasion, I saw an experienced troupe arrive at the ending scene of an opera with twenty minutes left on the clock and the actors spontaneously fill in the remaining time with relevant content.

Scenes, the second aspect of performance structure, comprise the fundamental unit that builds the operatic structure and guides the progression of an opera. Scene changes are particularly important in an improvised opera; they introduce a given opera’s characters and allow time for costume changes between each actor’s scenes. Scenes are also used to alternate between simultaneous plot developments and to quickly advance time in stories. In general, an improvised opera is comprised of a relatively high number of scenes in comparison with a scripted opera for a government-sponsored event. The number and length of scenes per opera can vary greatly. For example, the classic style opera, *Jigong Zhan Nanbeidou (Jigong Challenges the Deities of Life and Death)*, performed by the Shinyingfeng troupe, consists of seventeen scenes (table 3.3). For the February 25, 2008 performance of this opera, the shortest scene lasted two minutes and the longest scene lasted nineteen minutes.

Table 3.3. Scenes and scene lengths in *Jigong Zhan Nanbeidou*, February 25, 2008 performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length in minutes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third aspect of performance structure consists of a shared stockpile of dramatic motifs. These dramatic motifs are used in different operas and are shared by different troupes. I use “dramatic motif” to refer to a short duration within a scene that consists of a particular combination of thematic material, music, and action. One example of a dramatic motif is an emperor’s introduction scene. The emperor’s grand entry onto stage is a processional led by eunuchs, the emperor’s right-hand men. The emperor follows the eunuchs onto the stage while

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17 The lengths of opera performances are localized customs. Generally speaking, outside of Taipei County performance times are about thirty minutes shorter for both afternoon and evening performances. When the Shinyingfeng troupe performed outside of Taipei County, it shortened operas to match local timing. However, the southern troupes I observed in Taipei did not lengthen their operas, but performed according to their local timing.

18 Lin (2007c) also discusses the use of dramatic motifs, which she calls *xushichengshi* (narration program), in the story telling process.
walking with an air of grandeur to “Wanshuowujiang” (T: “Bān sīū bū kiong”), the typical instrumental accompaniment piece for the occasion. In general, a series of dramatic motifs occurring in consecutive order comprises a scene and a series of these scenes make up an opera. The order and combination of the dramatic motifs is specific to each opera. Most operas draw on the stockpile of existing dramatic motifs for similar types of dramatic moments and expressions.

One type of dramatic motif is to sing a song at a conventionalized dramatic moment. Typical dramatic moments for singing include 1) the opening or ending of a scene that introduces or reintroduces a character, 2) after a character receives some form of shock, such as the reception of bad news, 3) waking after fainting, and 4) after giving birth. One example of a song performance after a character receives shock comes from the opera Jigong Challenges the Deities of Life and Death. In the February 25, 2008 performance of the opera, the Jigong character saw a bad spirit trailing behind the emperor as the emperor left his temple. Right after he witnessed the incident, which was a terrible omen, Jigong sang the song, “Wangyueci,” to express his shock. An actor can also choose not to sing in any of the above-mentioned moments for song. For example, in a scene in which an actor wakes from fainting, the actor can choose to sing by starting a song herself or not sing by saying “sū sūi” (“who is it”) instead. Thus, a dramatic motif is not completely fixed; performers continually make spontaneous decisions within established conventions.

Pak-lāi (Competence)

Performers who are able to improvise with ease and quickly respond to each other on stage attribute the ability to having “pak-lāi.” Pak-lāi literally translates to the “belly’s innards” or “inside the belly,” and means competence. To have pak-lāi refers to an actor who has years of stage experience and who can spontaneously draw on that experience for improvisation.

As discussed through individual histories in Chapter 2, actors learn to improvise through personal stage experience, rather than learning it through a training program or some standardized method. Although the National Taiwanese College of the Performing Arts hosts the only institutionalized training program for Taiwanese opera, improvisation is not taught at the school. The college teaches basic techniques and scripted performances. Students who graduate from the program and wish to pursue a career in Taiwanese opera in the temple-contracted context must undergo further training outside of the program. An actor starts to accumulate stage experience through playing auxiliary and nonspeaking roles. When occasional opportunities arise, she might be assigned a small speaking role. In such a situation, she is most likely to be coached on what to say and how to move. Over time an actor, if proven capable, is given bigger role assignments that enable her to further build her pak-lāi. Throughout fieldwork, I observed many instances in which experienced performers continue to learn new material and observe their seniors in action. Many performers explained to me that Taiwanese opera is a lifelong endeavor with endless knowledge and experience that one can accumulate to improve on one’s improvisational skills.

Another form of training through which a performer builds competence is through apprenticeship. An apprenticeship is established when a performer formally accepts an interested student. The student is expected to learn exclusively from his or her teacher and, in the case of musicians, the student performs alongside the teacher on stage. Before an apprentice musician can keep up in performance though, he must make a concerted effort at memorizing the commonly used pieces and honing his basic skills on his chosen instrument.

The most important aspect of a musician’s training, like an actor’s, is still stage experience. An apprentice would start gaining stage experience by following his teacher, a
process the practitioners refer to as “thoa,” or to be pulled. Through imitation, the apprentice musician begins to acquire competence through embodying musical knowledge, performance practices, and quick reaction to cues from the drummer and actors. The high value placed on stage experience above all else is the reason that I, a Taiwanese opera musician-in-training, was able to perform with professional troupes. The Shinyingfeng troupe’s acceptance of a beginner onstage was because of their conviction that the best way to learn Taiwanese opera is through stage experience even though I had negligible knowledge of the repertoire and of the performance practices in the beginning. They also accepted me because the troupe only employs one melodist and having another person on stage made the ensemble look more formidable. Once I gained some experience, musicians in other troupes also welcomed me to perform with them and explained that since I knew the basics, the next step was to widen my stage experience and learn to work with a wider array of musicians and actors.

**INTERACTIVE NETWORK AND SYSTEM**

Despite the fact that actors are the focal points in a given performance, musicians carry the heavier workload and occupy the more advantageous social position. Performers have a saying that explains the distribution of labor between the actors and musicians: “san fen qian chang qi fen hou chang” (T: sān hún chêng tiû chhit hun àu tiû), or “30% front section, 70% back section.” “Front section” refers to the actors and “back section” denotes the musicians. According to the saying, even though the actors are the visual focal points in a given performance, they require the musicians to back them up. Musicians’ importance over that of the actors is also reflected in the amounts of daily wage paid to the performers. In a given troupe, the two lead musicians (one from each section of the instrumental ensemble) are typically the highest paid members; they are responsible for making and executing most of the musical decisions for all the actors in the troupe while actors are only responsible for their own parts. Furthermore, the higher social position of musicians over actors is further subdivided between the percussionists and melodists. Melody-section musicians are held in a higher regard for their comprehensive knowledge of the repertoire and musicianship, particularly their ability to read scores.

The spatial configuration on the front stage allows for musicians to have a clear view of actors and of each other. Troupes maintain this configuration when they move from stage to stage for temple-contracted performances. The musicians, physically split into percussion and melody sections, are positioned on the two sides of the stage flanking the center stage where the actors perform.

Even though the musicians sit on stage in line with the center stage, they are not meant to be a part of the visual spectacle for the audience. In actuality, however, the musicians’ invisibility or visibility depends on their troupe’s stage set. For example, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s stage set exposes the musicians with folding screens that are only waist-high (fig. 3.1a). Alternatively, the Minchuan troupe has tall screens that hide musicians from the audience point of view (fig. 3.1b). In both cases, musicians are figuratively hidden from the audience, but they still have a full view of the stage and of each other.
Fig. 3.1a. The Shinyingfeng troupe’s stage setup. Behind the waist-high barriers on the two sides of the stage, the three musicians’ upper bodies are visible to audience members.

Fig. 3.1b. The Minchuan troupe’s stage setup. The high barriers, which are behind the two audio speakers in front of the stage, shield the musicians from the audience point of view.

The positioning of the percussion section on the left and the melody section on the right sides of the stage is based on each section’s specific functions and type of interactions with
actors. The percussion section is situated on the stage side that actors use to enter the stage. That position enables communication between the actors and the drummer. During a performance, before an actor enters the stage, she waits behind the percussion section until it is her turn. When the time comes, she signals to the drummer to let him know how she will be entering the stage. The actor needs to be close to the drummer in order for the drummer to hear her nonamplified sonic cues or see her hand cues before she steps onto the stage. Depending on how the actor enters the stage, the drummer and the gong-and-cymbal player accompany the actor’s actions rhythmically. As important as the entrance, the drummer also needs to be able to see an actor’s exit to time his percussive accompaniment for exiting.

The melody section is situated directly across the side on which the actors enter the stage. Melody-section musicians have a full view of the place where actors wait to enter the stage (fig. 3.2), which is just behind the gong-and-cymbal player and out of the view of audience members and the percussion-section musicians. By knowing who the actor is before a scene begins, the lead melodist gains time for his required decision processes—song selection and key determination—if the actor decides to sing. For example, in figure 3.2, the waiting actor played a eunuch character. Seeing the eunuch, the melody-section musicians knew that the emperor, played by actor Hsu Su-yun, was the main character in the next scene. The musician then had time to anticipate instrumental accompaniment for the emperor’s entry and possible song performance. If Hsu decided to sing after the entry procession, the songs that could have fit the occasion are were “Xiansiyng” (T: “Sit⁸-su-in”) and the seven-syllable tune type. In the performance, the lead melody-section musician set the processional instrumental piece in the key of E-flat appropriate for both of the possible song choices for Hsu.

Fig. 3.2. View from the melody section of actors onstage. An actor standing to the right of the gong-and-cymbal player waited for the next scene, while two seated actors performed.
The two sections of the ensemble also need to be able to see each other in order to facilitate impromptu communication. Although the drummer typically uses conventionalized rhythmic cues to signal the melody section, occasionally he may need to verbally tell the melody section what he wants. The lead melody-section musician might also need to communicate with the drummer occasionally, but there are no standardized cues for that communication. The only option the lead melody-section musician has is to directly say or mouth to the drummer what needs to be communicated. An example of this is when a melodist needs to relay an actor’s song request made directly to him rather than to the drummer. The close proximity and visual line of sight are crucial for musicians of the two sections to communicate certain spontaneous decisions that conventionalized cues are not sufficient to convey.

Similar to the forms of communication between musicians, actors and musicians also communicate with each other through a mix of standardized and nonstandardized cues as well as through verbal communication. Despite the multiple and mixed ways of cueing and communicating, most interaction processes for song performance follow a certain pathway. The actor typically begins interactions, and these interactions can be systematically categorized into two types—drummer-mediated interaction and direct interaction.

In a drummer-mediated interaction, the chain of action in the song performance is channeled through the drummer (fig. 3.3a). Typical vocal cues that an actor uses to signal the drummer include “ahhh,” “châu-ahhh,” and sighing, at the beginning of a scene, and a heightened and prolonged pronunciation of a word ending mid-scene. Upon receiving an actor’s vocal cue, such as at the beginning of a scene, the drummer starts the appropriate rhythmic cue. Some rhythmic cues indicate a specific piece to the melody section, while a generic cue signals a composed song (fig. 3.3b). During a rhythmic cue, the lead melodist typically has a few seconds to finalize his decision on the song choice while the percussionists perform the cue. The actor can also directly select the song by telling the lead melody-section musician the song choice before her scene. In such a case, the melodist has to inform the drummer of the name or type of the piece and wait for the drummer to play the appropriate rhythmic cue before the melodist can start the song.

![Diagram](https://example.com/diagram.png)

Fig. 3.3a. Drummer-mediated interaction.

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19See Wang and Lu (2000) for transcribed fixed rhythmic patterns. There is more than one way to cue a given song. The specific rhythmic pattern a drummer uses varies depending on the performance and dramatic contexts.
A direct interaction usually occurs mid-scene at formulaic moments in which an actor can choose whether to sing or not (fig. 3.4). In a direct interaction, the actor begins her chosen song a cappella often without an obvious grounding pitch from the melodic section. Starting a song cold is difficult to do and only experienced actors are able to do so. During fieldwork, I observed several instances when a melody-section musician, who anticipated the singing, subtly provided the actor with a grounding pitch veiled as a sound effect that instrumentally augmented the dramatic moment. With or without the help of the musicians, I have also observed experienced actors consistently start a particular song in the same key every time, showing the accuracy of their pitch memory.

When an actor starts a song in a direct interaction, it is expected that the melody-section musicians will immediately join in to accompany the singing. Similar to the ways in which an actor is expected to identify a song that the lead melodist has selected during the song’s instrumental introduction, melody-section musicians are expected to recognize a song in just a few notes. In a situation in which the actor does not start a song in the expected key, the musicians must quickly identify the key and accompany the actor in her key.

Although the actor initiates interactions and the drummer cues the melodists, no one particular party consistently holds the position of the leader through the duration of a song performance. Who leads and when to lead in a song performance varies depending on the type of song or tune type, the manner that it is performed, and particular details in a song. Depending on the situation, an individual can lead, follow, or switch between leading and following.
INTERACTIVE SOUND STRUCTURE

Of the different levels of sound structure—the largest is at the level of the opera and the smaller levels relate to individual parts—I focus on individual and group song performance in this section. In an improvised song performance, the issues that I explore in the following three examples include the types of sonic interactions between the actor and musicians, interactions among the musicians, the degree of flexibility in the song or tune type melody, and improvisation at the individual level. For this section, I selected three examples with varying degrees of fixed material—precomposed melody, variably composed melody, and absence of precomposed melody—to consider interactive sound structure. All three examples are excerpted from the Shinyingfeng troupe’s performance of Khit-chia’h Chhi Choi-chong-gohan (Beggar Rears a Top Candidate), which is a classic style civil opera.20

PRECOMPOSED MELODY: COMPOSED SONG “BAODAODIAO”

The “Baodaodiao” in Beggar Rears a Top Candidate opera is representative of a typical composed song performance and routine performance practices. The top-candidate character (Hsu Yu-hua) performed the song at the beginning of his introduction scene. Typical for an introduction scene and for a composed song, the song performance was a drummer-mediated interaction. In the opera, Hsu sang “Baodaodiao” twice with two verses of text. The entire performance lasted just over one minute, but involved multiple steps and a few spontaneous decisions. The sequence of events is charted in figure 3.5. The choices of song, sung text, and melodic ornamentations were all spontaneous decisions in this performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in seconds</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(- :05)</td>
<td>previous scene comes to an end as the actor starts to exit the stage accompanied by the percussion section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>percussion section finishes the rhythmic pattern a couple of seconds after the stage clears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:01</td>
<td>actor Hsu Yu-hua gives vocal cue “ahhh” then steps on stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:02 – 0:06</td>
<td>percussion section plays rhythmic cue for a composed song (lead melodist selects a specific composed song upon hearing the signal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:06 – 0:13</td>
<td>melody section plays instrumental introduction of “Baodaodiao”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:13 – 0:37</td>
<td>actor sings the song with melody accompaniment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:38 – 0:43</td>
<td>percussion section joins melody section in instrumental introduction to repeat the song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:43 – 1:08</td>
<td>actor sings the song again with a second verse of text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3.5. Sequence of events for a performance of composed song “Baodaodiao.”

20 Performed on May 1, 2008 in Taipei city.
In the performance, the sequence of events contained multiple junctures that required different performers to act in a timely manner, creating a seamless sound structure. The percussionists were responsible for the transition from the previous scene to the next by escorting the previous actor off stage with rhythmic accompaniment and ending the pattern only after the actor exited. The scene’s actor, Hsu Yu-hua, who had waited briefly for her turn in the assigned spot, ensured a smooth connection into the current scene with her cue to the drummer as soon as the percussion section ended the exit accompaniment. Hsu’s vocal cue also signaled to the musicians that she wanted to sing, which cued the drummer to play the rhythmic cue for a composed song. The lead melody-section musician started his selected song at the end of the rhythmic cue with very little time for making decisions (about ten seconds from the moment Hsu appeared in the waiting spot to the end of the rhythmic cue to select a song). The actor also quickly reacted in recognizing the song during the short duration of the instrumental introduction. Even though a composed song performance is a conventionalized routine, the timing in each performance can differ and each performer is responsible for the proper timing to collaboratively create a seamless performance.

The precomposed melody of “Baodaodiao” (fig. 3.6) provides the foundation for melodic realization in performance. The realization process for each performer differs depending on his or her responsibilities and capabilities. The actor’s priority is to improvise texts with rhyming phrases that fit the existing musical structure. She also has to avoid a situation called daozi, which is when the melodic contour of the precomposed melody and linguistic tones of her text are incongruent. She can avoid the situation through careful word selection or by altering the precomposed melody. In the performance of “Baodaodiao,” Wang Chin-hung the keyboardist (lead melodist), Masa the main strings and suona player (contract hire for the day), and I (on the erhu), were responsible for performing the melody along with the actor and filling in the spaces between vocal phrases. The keyboardist had an additional job of providing a bass line, which he achieved with a bass sound quality and single-note part that added density to the overall sound. The precomposed melody (fig. 3.6) is thus a simplified representation of what actually happened in performance.

Fig. 3.6. “Baodaodiao” in a collection of printed scores, Gezaixi Qudiao Xuanji, transcribed and self-published by Liu Wen-liang.

\[
\begin{align*}
(5 & : 3 \ 23 \ \ | \ 5 & : 6 \ 153 \ | \ 2321 \ \ 76 \ | \ 51 \ - ) \ | \ 5 & : 3 \ | \ 2 \ : \ 3 \ 2165 \ | \ 1 & : 6 \ 1612 \ | \ 3 & - | \ 5 & : 3 \ | \ 2 \ : \ 3 \\
2165 & \ | \ 61 \ | \ 633 \ | \ 5 & - | \ 12 \ | \ 232 \ | \ 21 \ | \ 2 & - | \ 3 \ 2321 \ | \ 6121 \ | \ 5 & - | \ 6 \ 32 \ | \ 1 & - \\
\end{align*}
\]

Prior to the addition of the keyboard, this function was filled by electric guitar, guitar, or the sanxian when available.
V (vocal)

I (instrumental)* 5·3 23 | 5·6 153 | 232 | 7167 | 51 56 |

B (bass) 5 — | 5 1 | 5 1 | 51 5 |

S (score)** (5·3 23 | 5·6 153 | 232 | 76 | 51 ) |

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(A) Seⁿ chiū Chheng hûn góc a góc-e miā  (B) chòe hai góc m’ bat khoa-tuí a-tia

V 5 | 53 | 2·3 2165 | 1·6 12 | 3 0 | 5 | 33 | 2·3 2165 | 61 653 | 5 0

I 5·6 | 53 | 2·3 2165 | 1·6 | 1612 | 31 | 6535 | 5 3 | 2·3 2165 | 61 653 | 56 16

B 5 | 55 | 55 | 55 | 1 5 | 1 5 | 1 5 | 2 5 | 1 6 | 1 5 | 5 25

S 5 | 53 | 2·3 2165 | 1·6 1612 | 3 — | 5 3 | 2·3 2165 | 61 653 | 5 —

---------------

(C) chí ú niú-a chhin kah góc chi a  (D) thiaⁿ kâng làm-iú a chin-a-e hô gia’h

V 16 5 | 1·2 3 | 323 | 21 | 2 0 | 3 | 21 | 61 5 | 665 | 32 | 1 — |

I 116 56 | 1·2 3 | 323 | 21 | 2 212 | 3 | 2321 | 6121 5 | 65 | 32 | 1 — |

B 1 5 | 1 5 | 1 55 | 2 1 | 30 0 | 60 0 | 5 2 | 15 1 |

S 116 56 | 1·2 3 | 323 | 21 | 2 — | 3 2321 | 6121 5 | 65 | 32 | 1 — |

*The transcribed instrumental melody is, for the most part, the main string player’s performance as he was the most audible in the recording. The transcription is also representative of how the other two musicians performed the piece as they did so in a very similar manner.

**For comparison purposes, I included the melody as it appears in the printed score.

Fig. 3.7. Transcription of a performance of “Baodaodiao” sung by Hsu Yu-hua.

Comparison of the performed melodies (fig. 3.7) with the printed version shows that musicians and actor followed the precomposed melody for the most part. The sung melody is slightly simpler while the instrumental melody is more ornate. Since the tempo of the

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22In the transcription, I only notated notes that I could hear as distinctive pitches and omitted slides (on the string instruments) and other subtle ways of ornamentation.
“Baodaodiao” performance was fast (80 beats per minute), there was little time for performers to insert ornamental notes.

Hsu sang the melody in a simplified manner at the beginning of the third (C) and fourth (D) phrases (fig. 3.7) to fit tonal inflections of the words in the text. In the third phrase, eliminating scale degree 6 in the second beat of the measure was necessary to avoid daozi (incongruous melodic contour between the precomposed melody and linguistic tones). Although there is an existing phrase length that restricts the length of the text lines, Hsu was able to fit phrases of nine and eleven syllables with minimal changes to the melody itself. She also added a couple of notes in the second (B) and fourth (D) phrases. In the second phrase, she added a scale degree 3 and in the fourth phrase she added an extra scale degree 6 (below the tonic); both notes were added to fit the syllables of her sung phrase to the precomposed melodic phrase lengths.

The melody-section musicians performed the melody in a more ornate manner especially between vocal phrases. In general, playing ornately while the actor is not singing is expected of the musicians as they fill in space and take over the sonic focus while the actor catches her breath. In the performance, the main string player performed the melody with idiosyncratic ornaments that were particular to the techniques of the instrument, such as slides and trills, which I did not include in the transcription. The keyboardists added a bass line not in any standardized way but based on his musical training and personal style. In the example, Wang did not play functional chords but just simple harmonic single-note support oscillating between scale degrees 1 and 5. He also provided rhythmic momentum with the bass line at the beginning of the first and fourth vocal phrases with eighth notes. As this example shows, performers generally follow the precomposed melody, but there is room for flexibility to allow clear textual expression and space for melodic embellishment.

**Variatoly Composed Melody: Seven-syllable Tune Type Example**

The seven-syllable tune type is the most important musical component in Taiwanese opera. Practitioners expect a given performance of the tune type to sound a certain way and follow a certain phrase structure. The idea of what a seven-syllable tune type should sound like is based on one particular version of the tune type. This seven-syllable tune type is an aria in *Wangbaochuan*, which is one of the four classic stories in Taiwanese opera that most performers learn early in their training.23 Most practitioners can recite the first few words of this tune’s text, which is “sim khià pe’h bé” (I ride a white horse). The text of this particular aria is also a model for the tune type’s phrase structure—four rhyming lines of text and seven words per line (fig. 3.8a). However, the tune type does not have a fixed vocal melody. The melody varies between actors and the different texts to which the tune type is set.24 In performance, the instrumental introduction, ending, and interludes after the phrases two, three and four can be inserted or omitted (fig. 3.8b). Moreover, the tune type can be performed at any tempo. At a fast tempo, the text setting is syllabic, and at a slow tempo, it is melismatic.

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23 Recordings of the aria are commercially available. One widely distributed copy is Ilan County, Department of Cultural Affairs. “Seven-syllable tune type” in *Gezaixi qudiao kala-ok*. The Lan-yang Opera Troupe. GPN 4209006679.

24 See Yu (2003) for more on the topic.
The seven-syllable tune type is also very versatile in dramatic function. It can be used for almost all dramatic occasions as a default tune type. An opera performance in the classic style will most likely include multiple performances of the seven-syllable tune type, which will most likely be the only tune type or song that is performed repeatedly.

The seven-syllable tune type example that I discuss below is one of the seven instances the tune type was performed during the May 1, 2008 performance of *Beggar Rears a Top Candidate*. I selected this particular rendition because it illustrates the flexibility performers have in performing the tune type. In the performance, three actors—Hsu Su-yun, Chiang Su-lan, and Wang Chiu-kuan—participated in singing the song. Dramatically, the song was used at a crucial turning point in the story when one character threatened to kill two others. The servants (Hsu and Chiang) who had dishonored the household asked for forgiveness from their boss (Wang), who chased them with a knife up to the point the song began. Hsu started the tune type with a direct interaction. The other actors subsequently took turns in singing the tune type. Hsu and Chiang sang the first verse slowly (60 beats per minute) while Wang followed with a second verse in a fast tempo (120 beats per minute). Figure 3.9 provides a detailed breakdown of the sequence of events.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in seconds</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Hsu and Chiang kneels as Hsu says “hold on”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:02</td>
<td>Hsu starts to sing a slow seven-syllable tune type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:07</td>
<td>musicians join in with first instrumental interlude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:19</td>
<td>Hsu sings second vocal phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:40</td>
<td>instrumental interlude during which Hsu (in character) indicated to Chiang it was her turn to speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:50</td>
<td>Chiang sings third phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:01</td>
<td>instrumental interlude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:13</td>
<td>Chiang sings fourth and last phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:26</td>
<td>Wang begins a fast seven-syllable tune type by singing in a dramatically faster tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:55</td>
<td>singing ends and melodic-section immediately switched to playing a conventionalized instrumental motif specific for the seven-syllable tune type for time suspension while actors spoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:09</td>
<td>drummer signals musicians to stop as dialog between actors continued</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3.9. Sequence of events for a performance of the seven-syllable tune type.

Although this song performance was unrehearsed, the switch between the performers and the change in tempo followed established conventions. In general, in a given song performance that involves multiple actors, it is typical for each character to take a turn singing one or two phrases in one verse or complete verses (four phrases). In the performance of the selected example, Hsu signaled for Chiang to sing next by tugging on her shirt and signing her to help in convincing their boss, which was also a part of the dramatic action. Once Chiang took over the song, the Shinyingfeng performers onstage also expected Wang to sing in a different tempo. This switch in tempo was necessary to contrast Wang’s character’s emotional state to that of Hsu and Chiang. The boss was extremely angry while the two servants were in a remorseful state.

One aspect in the song performance that could not have been anticipated was the number of times the actors repeated the tune type. The manner in which Wang ended the song at time point 1:55 indicated that the performers were uncertain whether the singing would continue or not. Ideally, an actor ends a seven-syllable tune type by repeating the second half of the last phrase of the text (or the last three words), a procedure called *shouwei* (*T: siu-bôte*) or “put the tail away” (see fig. 3.8a). The extra half phrase functions as a cue for the musicians to end the piece formally with a fixed instrumental coda. In the performance of the selected example, Wang did not shou-wei, but left the option to continue to sing for Hsu and Chiang. As it turned out, neither of them sang another verse.

As soon as Wang finished singing Hsu started speaking, which the musicians took as a cue to switch to a fixed holding pattern (fig. 3.10) typically used when the singing is suspended momentarily during the performance of the tune type. The musicians still kept the option open for singing by playing the instrumental motif, but the drummer decided to end the piece after he saw that the actors were done with their singing; he stopped the song by leading the melody section to a gradual stop. The uncertainties in the ending of the tune type in the example demonstrate that the performance was completely spontaneous and the actors did not prearrange...
it with each other or with the musicians. Although this is not the formal way to end a seven-syllable tune type, it is a frequently used method in improvised operas, particularly when multiple actors are involved. Freeform endings of the tune type, as in this example, are products of spontaneity in improvised operas and the high degree of flexibility of the tune type.

Fig. 3.10. Holding pattern used in seven-syllable tune type performance to accompany spoken text.

Although an actor changes the vocal melody according to the text in different performances of the tune type, a musician tends to play the same melody in different performances. For example, in my own learning process, I have encountered and attempted to learn multiple versions and variations of the seven-syllable tune type. I eventually settled on a version that was mostly based on a printed score given to me by Ke Ming-feng (see “I1” in fig. 3.11a), a renowned Taiwanese opera musician. Over time, I departed from certain sections of the score to better complement the Shinyingfeng troupe’s lead melody-section musician’s version, the troupe’s actors’ singing styles, and to satisfy my personal aesthetic. The main string player in the selected example of the seven-syllable tune type played a similar version. In performance, despite the melodic variations between performers, the instrumental and vocal melodies came together in a heterophonic texture.

1 = E-flat
I1 = bowed lute, I2 = keyboard (bass not included)

(A) Ya wen xiang lâng khòai-kín e siang a kha

V:  5 5 3 23 3 3 6 | 2 12 3 | (rest)
I1:  (rest)  0 6762 | 3 5 212 | 635 6762 | 1276 5365 |
I2:  (rest)  212 335 | 3 3 2317 | 6 3 32 | 2161 5165 |

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(B) Ya hi-bâng ló-iâ-e góan-a liông

V:  | 0 06 | 6 5 2 2 | 3 | 0 05 | 3 6 1 61 | 66 1 |
I1:  3 6 5321 | 6 2 1235 | 63 212 | 3 2 1612 | 3561 5612 | 635 36 | 26 3532 |
I2:  3 2 1235 | 6 6 535 | 635 612 | 35 3512 | 3561 5612 | 6 | 212 3532 |
Fig. 3.11a. Transcription of a seven-syllable tune type performance sung by Hsu Su-yun and Chiang Su-lan and played by Wang Chin-hung and Masa.
(A) The two of us quickly drop to our knees,
(B) In hope of your forgiveness,
(C) Our behavior crossed the line,
(D) And we kneel in repentance.

Fig. 3.11b. Translation of the sung text in figure 3.11a.

Although the vocal, bowed lute, and keyboard melodies vary from one another, the three appear to consistently correspond with each other at important places throughout the performance. In general, the most important structural points in the tune type are at the beginning and end of each textual phrase. They are places where musicians have to pay extra attention to the singer and listen for their next move to determine if they will pause for an instrumental interlude. In the performance, the three melodic parts began and ended each textual phrase on the same notes, with the vocal melody trailing the instrumental melodies at entries and instrumental melodies trailing the vocal at phrase endings. Another similarity between the melodic lines in the example include the tonal centers that the melodies are woven around—scale degrees 5, 6, and 3. The tendency to move through neighboring tones to get to the tune type’s tonal centers and a focus on pentatonicism and minor mode construct a characteristic sound that is unique to the tune type.

Although there is a high degree of flexibility in the structure, melodic contour, and the dramatic function of the seven-syllable tune type, the frequency with which the tune type is used renders the tune type performance more stable than spontaneous. For a group of professionals like the Shinyingfeng troupe that performs the tune type very frequently and at times repeatedly in one scene, I posit that the spontaneous aspects become established options, and some of those become part of a troupe’s routine over recurring incidences. The known options and routines, however, can change at any time. Even though the example (fig. 3.11a) is representative of what a seven-syllable tune type sounds like for the troupe, it is only one of many versions and variations that they perform.

Absence of a Precomposed Vocal Melody: Duma Tune Type Example

The duma tune type is more structurally and melodically fluid than the seven-syllable tune type. Unlike the seven-syllable tune type, there is no model version for the duma tune-type that informs variations. The only musical components that all duma tune type performances share are a precomposed instrumental introduction (fig. 3.12a) and the precomposed instrumental interludes (fig. 3.12b). The tune type also has a precomposed coda (fig. 3.12c) that is not used regularly. The improvised aspects in a duma tune type include the sung text, vocal melody, placement of the precomposed instrumental interludes (inserted between vocal phrases), and instrumental accompaniment. In a given performance, the actor and accompanying musicians simultaneously improvise their parts. The actor spontaneously composes the text and the vocal melody to inflect linguistic tones. The musicians compose their accompanying melodies to complement the vocal melody.

In practice, the precomposed components of the duma tune type (fig. 3.12a – c) exist in multiple variations. The tune type’s instrumental introduction shown in figure 3.12a is not the only version. However, it is the most commonly used version that is applied to an array of
medium tempo performances of the tune type. The instrumental introduction changes when the tempo of a performance is drastically slower or faster. For very slow duma tune type performances, the instrumental introduction is a shortened version of what is written in fig. 3.12a. (The shorter version includes only the pitches of the first one-and-a-half measures). For very fast duma tune performances, the precomposed version is simplified to accommodate the speed and mood. Furthermore, musicians tend to play the precomposed components slightly differently from one another, depending on how the musicians learned the melody and how they add ornaments (see below).

Instrumental interludes are used to separate vocal phrases and allow time for actors to catch a breath, pause for dramatic effect, or to think of the next phrase. The use of instrumental interludes follows an established convention. The ending pitch of a vocal phrase determines the particular instrumental interlude that follows it. Vocal phrases can end on scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, each cueing a specific interlude (fig. 3.12b) that musicians play to follow the vocal phrases. In practice, an instrumental interlude can be shorter when cut off by the actor, or longer when musicians add extensions (see below). The interludes can also be omitted when an actor does not pause between phrases.

Fig. 3.12a. Instrumental introduction for the duma tune type in medium tempo.

![Fig. 3.12a. Instrumental introduction for the duma tune type in medium tempo.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>scale degree vocal phrase ends on</th>
<th>subsequent instrumental interlude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15  612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>52  6535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3432  12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6725  3217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3.12b. Instrumental interludes for the duma tune type.

![Fig. 3.12b. Instrumental interludes for the duma tune type.](image)

Fig. 3.12c. Coda for the duma tune type.

![Fig. 3.12c. Coda for the duma tune type.](image)
In the performance of *Beggar Rears a Top Candidate*, the beggar (Hsu Su-yun) began a reintroduction scene by singing the duma tune type in which he expressed his inner emotions and thoughts—the most common dramatic function for this tune type. This example was a drummer-mediated interaction (fig. 3.11). Once Hsu gave her vocal cue, the percussion section played the fixed rhythmic cue for the duma tune type (fig. 3.13). The drummer watched the lead melodist intently while playing the rarely used rhythmic cue to ensure that the lead melodist understood the cue. The melodists hesitated briefly after the rhythmic cue ended and the drummer filled the gap with a two-tap generic cue. The addition two-tap cue was also a way for the drummer to tell the melodists that it was time to start playing.

![Diagram of drum, small gong, cymbals, and large gong rhythms]

Note: “Drum” part is a composite rhythmic transcription of the clappers and various types of drum sounds.

Fig. 3.13. Rhythmic cue for the duma tune type.

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25The more typical way that the Shinyingfeng troupe performed the duma tune type for the drummer to cue the melody section with a two-tap generic cue midscene.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time in seconds</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(-0:06)</td>
<td>previous character walks off stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>stage cleared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:01</td>
<td>actor sighs into the microphone as her vocal cue then steps on stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:02 – 0:08</td>
<td>rhythmic cue for the duma tune type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:09</td>
<td>drummer give two taps as melodists began the instrumental introduction to the tune type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:10 – 0:19</td>
<td>instrumental introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:20</td>
<td>actor begins singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:28</td>
<td>actor sings in free rhythm for next thirty seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>slips back into rhythm again with instrumental interlude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:15</td>
<td>actor ends a sung phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:29</td>
<td>actor speaks rather than sings and musicians immediately switch to a holding pattern for this tune type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:55</td>
<td>drummer tries to get lead melodist’s attention and when he finally succeeds, tells him to switch to an accompaniment piece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3.14. Sequence of events for a performance of the duma tune type.

To consider the interactive sound structure in the duma tune in greater detail, I have selected to focus on the beginning (fig. 3.15a), up to 1:48 into the song, and on the free rhythm segment excerpted from later on in the song performance (fig. 3.16a). I omitted twenty measures in between the two excerpts. The first excerpt represents a typical progression and the second segment represents an unusual interaction for this tune type. As my focus is on the interaction between the actor and melody-section musicians as a group, the transcriptions only include one instrumental melody, performed by the lead string player (with finer ornamentation omitted).

\[ V = \text{vocal melody, } I = \text{instrumental melody} \]

\[
\begin{align*}
V & \quad I \quad 51 \quad 6123 \quad | \quad 5 \quad 3235 \quad | \quad 2321 \quad 76 \quad | \quad 51 \quad 6123 \quad | \quad 5 \quad — \quad | \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
1= F \\
V & \quad 1 \quad 5 \quad 53 \quad 21 \quad 65 \quad 5 \quad 321 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 1 \quad 12 \quad 32 \quad 3 \quad 2 \quad 07 \\
I & \quad \text{(rest)} \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad | \quad 52 \quad 6535 \quad | \quad 2-3 \quad 76 \quad | \\
\end{align*}
\]

(A) Ya cha’p kú ní lāi m’bat tî’t chiap sī lāi khoa^n kiā^n a

(B) Gòa

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64
Fig. 3.15a. Partial transcription of a duma tune type performance sung by Hsu Su-yun and played by Masa, excerpt 1.

(A) Close to twenty years now, I have not been home for the purpose of visiting my son,
(B) Each time I returned home, I waited until the sun sets,
(C) I became a beggar in order to raise my son,
(D) I hope that my son will become an important government official,
(E) Although my life is wretched,
(F) Full of compromises and suffering, . . .

Fig. 3.15b. Translation of the sung text in figure 3.15a.
Fig. 3.16a. Partial transcription of a duma tune type performance sung by Hsu Su-yun and played by Masa, excerpt 2.

J1) He hired someone to give me a beating, I was beaten until my whole body ached,
J2) I had to drag myself back to the beggars’ colony

Fig. 3.16b. Translation of the sung text in figure 3.16a.

In this partially transcribed performance, like in a typical duma tune type performance, the instrumental interludes varied in melody and in length from the precomposed versions. The precomposed interludes presented in figure 3.12b are what I consider the “textbook” versions. In practice, as mentioned above, many variations with varying degrees of resemblance to those versions exist, such as the interludes in this particular performance. To compare how one particular precomposed interlude can vary in length, I look at those that follow phrases B, C, and D, which all ended on scale degree 6. Although the instrumental interludes all started the same after each of those vocal phrases, the instrumental interludes were not the same in length. After phrase B, musicians played the interlude in its entirety and overlapped its ending with the beginning of the next vocal phrase, phrase C. The musicians cut off the instrumental interlude after phrase C, because Hsu started the next vocal phrase D early. Following this, the musicians performed a longer version of the interlude by tagging on the instrumental introduction (starting with its second measure), a conventional way for elongating an instrumental interlude. During the performance, the musicians watched the actor’s movements to determine how long the instrumental interludes needed to be. At the end of phrase D, unlike that of B and C, Hsu slowly moved her handheld microphone away from her mouth as the interlude approached its end, at which time the musicians knew to continue the instrumental interlude by playing the long version. Although the instrumental interludes are fixed in function and in lengths, the exact timing to begin, continue, and end an interlude depends on the interaction between the actor and melody-section musicians in performance.

Despite the lack of restriction on vocal phrase length in the duma tune type, in the example, Hsu’s phrase length did not vary greatly. Other than phrases in free rhythm (A, J1, and J2), the other five (phrases B to F) are eleven to fifteen syllables that she sang within three to four measures of music. Interestingly, the number of syllables in the text did not necessarily
correlate with the musical phrase length in performance. For example, both phrases C and F consisted of eleven syllables each, yet Hsu sang the former in three measures and the latter in four measures. The small degree of length variances demonstrate that actors have some degree of freedom to work with the vocal phrasing of their improvised text.

Instrumental accompaniment in general follows the vocal line heterophonically. Musicians have to listen intently to the actor and can either trail or simultaneously play the same notes by predicting the melodic progression. For example in phrase D, the musicians trailed in getting to scale degrees 7 and 6 towards the beginning of the phrase, but they simultaneously played the ending of the phrase with the singer. By listening to the textual syntax, the musicians were able to deduce that the vocal phrase was going to end on scale degree 6. Therefore, they performed a typical ending for arriving at scale degree 6 in the exact timing that the actor sang it.

The free rhythm excerpt in the duma tune type’s performance illustrates a different level of improvisatory collaboration between the actor and musicians. Hsu started the phrase in a typical way, but she held the third syllable longer than usual and sang the rest of the phrase in free rhythm. This was an atypical shift that Hsu made, but not completely surprising because the free rhythm style of singing is becoming a convention for accentuating dramatic moments. In the performance of the duma tune type example, the melodic-section musicians did not attempt to trail Hsu’s singing note by note but only filled in the gap between the vocal phrases.

In this excerpt, a disagreement between the drummer and melody-section musicians is lost in the transcription. After the phrase J1, the drummer signaled to the melody-section musicians that they should play the instrumental interlude for a vocal phrase ending in scale degree 5. The drummer did so by playing steady beats on the clappers and humming the interlude. However, the melody-section musicians ignored the cue, which rarely happens; to the musicians, Hsu looked like she was only taking a breath. The musicians continued to sparsely accompany Hsu until she finished the phrase J2. Hsu ended the phrase J2 by stressing a steady pulse with the five syllables she sang and with a slight head nod. The exchange illustrates that in a non-standardized interaction, neither the drummer nor the lead melody section has authority over the other, rather who leads depend on the exact situation.

**INTERACTIVE MOTIVATION**

Although personal motivations for actors and musicians to carry out their duties can vary, in onstage interactions, they are the same. The greatest personal motivation is for monetary reasons, as professional actors and musicians perform to earn a living. A secondary motivation concerns the nature of their duties. In an operatic performance, the actors command the visual and aural focus, and because of that, they are also the individuals within a troupe likely to receive widespread public recognition. Actors are motivated by potential for acquiring fame, their love for performing opera, and their desire to give their best in performance. Musicians are additionally motivated by their contribution in ensuring the consistent quality of their troupe’s performance in accompanying actors. In performance, the mutual objective for both actors and musicians is to make certain that the actors’ musical performance is smooth and graceful, particularly in improvised operas in which minor mishaps happen all the time.

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26 The source of the convention’s emergence is a style often used in government-sponsored performances that hire music-designers.
CONCLUSION

Taiwanese opera in the temple-contracted context is built upon fluid components and performance practices. Every component and performance practice discussed in this chapter is flexible in its own way. The stories and role type specializations can be changed to fit new circumstances. Music repertoire and ensemble instrumentation are in a continual state of transformation and influenced by greater musical trends and technological advancements. Performance structure provides the pieces for opera performances to progress in infinite number of ways. Performers persistently seek to build on their competence, never satisfied with stasis of knowledge. Spontaneity characterizes interactive improvisation that works within systems, conventions, and routines. Therefore, the multifaceted flexibility built into the Taiwanese opera practices and the ways in which the performers approach performance are what enable them to continually adapt the opera for contemporary consumption, sustain their profession, and make the o’ah (living) opera a resilient and relevant cultural practice of interest.
Chapter 4: Female Masculinity in Young-Male Role Performance

A VIGNETTE FROM FIELDWORK

At a temple-contracted performance by the Chenmeiyun Opera Troupe in the heart of Taipei, Edna, with whom I had spoken at several performances, noticed that I was standing close to where she was seated. She waved me over, invited me to sit next to her and proceeded to chat. During the conversation I asked her why the audience size was so small. Edna replied that the Hsiuchin Opera Troupe, which is a troupe from the southern city of Tainan, a roughly four-hour car ride away, was performing at a temple “across the street” and it was the troupe’s last day of a five-day engagement. In other words, the majority of the regular opera audience members were at the other performance. Edna herself planned on attending the Hsiuchin troupe’s performance that evening. She offered to show me the other temple’s location after the opera performance that we were watching ended.

The visiting Hsiuchin Opera Troupe is so popular that the chairs for the troupe’s shows sell out quickly and often in advance. Throughout fieldwork, I did not observe or hear about a Taipei troupe that was able to do the same. The more popular troupes in Taipei, such as the Chenmeiyun troupe, can gather considerable crowds that are beyond the number of chairs available and certain fans even reserve chairs from chair hawkers in advance, but anticipation for local troupes does not seem to run as high. The Hsiuchin troupe’s infrequent appearance might contribute partially to its high degree of popularity amongst Taipei area audience members. Nevertheless, I was still taken aback by the strength of the Hsiuchin troupe’s appeal over the Chenmeiyun troupe, one of the most respected local troupes and one that had once dominated Taipei’s opera culture.

When the Chenmeiyun troupe’s afternoon show ended, Edna led the way on a ten-minute stroll over to the Hsiuchin troupe’s performance site that was buried in a small alley’s smaller alley. Edna assured me that she had procured extra seats and paid the chair hawker for them earlier in the day. When I returned to the temple around 6:30 p.m. after a quick bite to eat, I found the narrow alley bustling with activity and crowded with people: temple workers were in the process of setting up tables for the evening outdoor banquet (for the temple guests, not for the opera audience members), caterers were cooking up a feast out in the open, and a crowd of anxious audience members was gathering around the front-stage area and looking at the still-folded chairs. I spotted Edna with a friend and joined them. As we waited for the space to become organized, I found out that Edna’s friend had recently become a fan of Chang Hsiu-chin, the lead xiaosheng (young-male role) actor of the Hsiuchin troupe. She told me that she had

Chair hawkers are independent vendors and opportunistic entrepreneurs. See Lin (2007) for more on the topic. Regular audience members like Edna frequently procure or save extra seats for high-attendance performances. I benefited from this common practice on more than one occasion. Audience members with whom I had become acquainted offered me seats at multiple crowded performances that I probably would have had to watch from afar and standing.
never seen Taiwanese opera prior to one of the Hsiuchin troupe’s shows. She still had no interest in Taiwanese opera but was there just to watch the actor Chang, by whom she had been enthralled since her first encounter. By 7 p.m. we were seated and an even larger crowd had gathered; all the chairs were occupied and a large mob stood behind and around the rows of chairs. At 7:40 p.m., thirty minutes past the usual time that Taipei area troupes start their evening performances but typical of a southern troupe, the Hsiuchin troupe began its show. There was a buzz of excitement in the air as the audience members, mostly female, waited excitedly to see their favorite (female) idol, Chang Hsiu-chin, in a male role.

Typical of a hybrid style opera, the minor characters in the story appeared first, reserving later scenes for the more important characters played by the more important actors. After the first few minor characters were introduced, eager audience members perked up with each scene’s ending, hoping that Chang would make her entrance next. As soon as an actor—not Chang—appeared or reappeared for a new scene, audience members made audible sounds of disappointment. Such sounds grew louder with each Chang-less scene and by 8:30 p.m. the displeasure started to turn into frustration. By 9 p.m., restless from waiting, rowdy audience members were chatting loudly with each other and making comments such as “Why hasn’t Hsiuchin appeared yet? It’s already nine o’clock.”

A new scene started shortly after nine in a more spectacular manner than all the previous ones: the lights dimmed, the smoke machine hissed, and a dramatic pause in the action on stage momentarily prolonged the audience member’s anticipation and intensified their uncontainable eagerness. Finally, the moment everyone had been waiting for: Chang made her grand entry of the evening, stepping onstage in a flamboyant and shimmering orange male-character costume augmented with a matching color turban-shaped, plume-adorned hat (figure 4.1), catalyzing a warm round of applause and screaming from the crowd.

![Chang Hsiu-chin](image)

Fig. 4.1. Chang Hsiu-chin plays a young-male character in a hybrid style opera.
The frustration that had filled the space just moments earlier instantaneously dissipated as audience members tuned their unwavering attention to the stage, fixing their eyes on the handsomely clad actor, and their ears on the pop song that she was about to sing.

FEMALE MASCULINITY

Chang is one of the many female sheng actors featured as the lead actor of their respective troupes. In fact, every troupe’s name and fame is coupled with a xiaosheng actor’s name. The lead actor is endowed with the title “resident young-male role,” or dangjia xiaosheng. Nearly all of the resident young-male-role actors are female and so is the majority of supporting male-role actors (one to three per troupe). Of the roughly fifteen regularly active professional troupes in Taipei, the number of male actors approximately totals ten in contrast to over one hundred female actors.³ A troupe might have none, one, or (unlikely) two male actors and eight to ten female actors. In the female-actor-dominated profession, women play both male and female roles, while men typically do not partake in cross-dressing performance.

Taiwanese opera practitioners and scholars most often identify stylized movements and gestures as the primary feature for differentiating female- and male-role types. It appears that through the kinesthetically coded construction, gender is mapped onto the surface of bodies, with the assumption that the actor’s corporal body does not matter. Expressions of femininity and masculinity become idealized as disembodied acts, and the carnality of the body can be transcended through art. Such an assumption renders gender expression a façade and the performer a clean slate, neutral in gender, and ready to fulfill the designated role. Accordingly, all actors playing a particular subcategory of role type should closely resemble each other in the way they move.

Although I acknowledge the significance of movements and gestures in performance of gender roles, I contest its underlying assumption. In my field experience, I came across multiple incidences in which gender arose as a source of trouble. One such example is included in the vignette above. Edna’s friend (who is by far not alone) deliberately attended the opera performance just to watch a particular female person play a male role. It was striking to me that she (and fans like her) did not attend operas to watch opera, a woman perform as a woman, or characters played by gender “correct” actors, but something else. The “something else,” actively constructed by performers and fervently received by fans, does not fit within the normative gender construct or presentation of classic style opera, and is what I grapple with in what follows.

In her seminal work, Gender Trouble (1990), Judith Butler challenges cultural assumptions of conventional discourse on gender and sex, thereby opening up a space for alternatives. She argues that gender is a fabrication and that the “truth of gender” is only produced through the “effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (186). Gender dichotomy is, hence, a hegemonically regulated and constructed “truth” and does not represent the full spectrum of possibilities of gender expressions in society. Furthermore, gender construction is performative and performativity enables possibilities for the reification or reconstruction of gender. I take Butler’s critiques of normative gender categorizations as my

³My estimation of the number of troupes and male actors is based on personal observation and communication with practitioners during field research. The last formal survey conducted on Taipei area troupes dates back more than fifteen years, the results of which are included in Lin (2007a). The survey taker counted twenty-six troupes, but more than half of the troupes no longer exist or perform with any regularity.
theoretical point of departure to consider and analyze gender performance in Taiwanese opera. Although in name only two role-type genders exist in the opera tradition, I argue that through transforming performance practices, contemporary actors are constructing a new mode of gender expression onstage, which I call “female masculinity” after Judith Halberstam (1998), with implications for alternative ways of lived experience offstage.

In this chapter, I consider the phenomenon of female actors playing young-male-role types as a social process and a transgressive performance practice. My interest is as much in female bodies in male roles as in the appeal they hold for female audiences. Departing from the mode of xiqu scholarship that disregards the sex of actors in relation to role types the actors play, I explore the space that is opened up by the ways in which contemporary female actors perform young-male roles and in which audience reception intersects with production. In that space, actors negotiate gender performance through simultaneously engaging with long-established customs of opera role types, social norms, personal artistic preferences, and transformations of conventions. As such, the young-male-role type is an unconventional construction in relation to the normative gender stylization. A female-produced young-male character is “not simply the opposite of female femininity, nor is it a female version of male masculinity” (Halberstam 1998, 29). Cross-dressed Taiwanese opera actors create an alternative model of gender variant, which is what Halberstam posits for female bodies performing masculinity that is “far from being an imitation of maleness” (ibid., 1), but rather, a female masculinity constructed by the unity of femaleness and masculinity.

Studies on gender transgressions in the various types of traditional opera are scant. Scholars who do address the subject of gender in Chinese opera tend to focus on social history or on historical or textual analysis (Cheng 1996; Chou 1997; Li 2003; Tian 2000). Specifically on Taiwanese opera, Teri Silvio’s article that examines the connection between lesbianism and Taiwanese opera submits “Taiwanese lesbians and [Taiwanese opera] actresses have paid remarkably little attention to each other” (1999, 586). Silvio addresses why there is a lack of connection between the two subcultures but does not consider performance practices or the gender work that actors perform onstage. Another work that highlights the contemporary Taiwanese opera professionals is Wu Meng-fang’s master’s thesis, in which she looks at the culture of male-role female actors (2002). Her work consists of a series of sociological hypotheses regarding the formation and effects of an almost all-female-actor culture, but lacks the support of empirical evidence. Furthermore, Wu uses androgyny as her theoretical lens on gender construction, which suggests to me that the choice was also unsubstantiated by fieldwork. In my fieldwork experience, to call an actor’s performance of male or female roles androgynous is a severe insult.

I begin this chapter by culturally and historically contextualizing the dominance of females as opera actors and the appeal of young-male roles. Based on ethnographic and archival research, I discuss the significance of the female-xiaosheng trend in relation to cultural conventions. The second part of the chapter is focused on contemporary actors and transformative performance practices. I consider the theatricality and manner in which contemporary practitioners construct and stage young-male roles. I draw on the theories of Butler and, especially, Halberstam to facilitate the analysis of gender construction that I observed in fieldwork.
SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR THE OMNIPRESENCE OF FEMALE OPERA ACTORS

The present ubiquity of opera actresses is due to specific sociohistorical conditions that propelled women to enter the opera profession. Although female actors were present in the early days of Taiwanese opera, they remained a small minority until after the 1950s (Wu 1988). Based on the current number and age of female and male active actors I tracked during my fieldwork, I posit that between the 1960s and the 1980s, only women became opera actors. Actors in their forties and fifties are all female, whereas male presence is only noticeable in the age groups sixty and above and thirty and under. As women in their forties and fifties make up the great majority of the actors who play young-male roles today, it is relevant to keep in mind that both their past and current positions in society as women and as performers are fundamentally connected to the transformative-gender work that they perform today.

Contemporary Taiwan remains a patrilineal society in which women’s “proper” roles are constructed from the male-dominant ideologies inherited from the island’s premodern Confucianism-inclined era. Although the women’s liberation movement has been active since the 1970s and the status of women has been transformed in recent decades, “certain patriarchal values and practices remain” (Farris 2004, 358). In certain sectors of the society, such as rural communities and urban working-class families, the older values prevail over the modern ideas (Farris 2004). In the patrilineal system, daughters are still perceived to “marry out” of their birth families, a process that fulfills the “true” destiny of daughters. Accordingly, daughters are often viewed as not a part of their birth families.⁴ Sons, on the other hand, “marry in” and typically inherit the family wealth, to which daughters are not entitled. Sons are therefore favored and considered more important than daughters and are more likely to receive social advantages.

In the institution of the family, females are expected to be filial daughters or daughters-in-law, virtuous wives, and good mothers (Farris 2004). In working class families, this has meant that daughters are expected to contribute to family finances as children and are taken out of school for that purpose, whereas sons might be released from this obligation until they have finished compulsory education. One former business practice that reifies this cultural convention in Taiwanese opera was pa’t-hi or contracting girl performers. To expand on an earlier explanation of this practice (Chapter 2), working-class parents, out of financial need, sent their daughters to opera troupes to work for a predetermined length of time, during which the daughters lived, traveled, and worked with and in the troupe. During the contracted time period, the parents not only relieved themselves of the burden of having an extra mouth to feed, but they also received a monetary compensation for giving up their daughters. In a conversation regarding the contract system, actor He Hsiu-li, who began her opera career through this practice, estimated that there are still at least thirty active professionals who started off in Taiwanese opera as contract child workers.⁵ The majority of actors who did not start in the contract practice, most likely hereditary performers or those recruited through family connections, also did not have the luxury of finishing compulsory education; instead, they entered opera careers early in life in order to assist with family finances.

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⁴Unlike in the English language that has only one verb for the act of marriage, in Mandarin and Taiyu, two words exist. In marriage, women “marry out” whereas men “marry in.” The bride marries out by leaving her birth family and becoming the property of her husband’s family. The groom marries in by bringing a spouse/daughter-in-law into his family.

⁵Personal communication, June 28, 2008.
Marriage can often end or interrupt an actor’s career. Some married women quit the opera profession because they are asked by their husbands to stop acting in order to uphold family reputation (see below). This option is only available to the families that can afford to do so since married women are also expected to contribute to family income when necessary. Other women maintain their opera careers after marriage out of a combination of need and personal choice. However, once they marry, women are expected to have and rear children. During pregnancy and shortly after giving birth, most women stop acting. For performers who continue to work after having babies, they carry out double duties. I have seen young mothers who brought their babies to work and while the mothers were onstage everyone backstage helped look after the little ones.

Practitioners perceive opera culture to be an older way of life in relation to the modernized aspects of Taiwanese society. This perception persists partly due to the nature of their lifestyle, affiliation with temple culture, and, particularly, I argue, due to the embodiment of age-old patriarchal ideals in storytelling. Historically, operas were “a source of information and an arbiter of moral standards and social behavior for their audiences” (Yung 1989, 8). Even though “the importance of this function has been reduced” (ibid.) in recent decades, the stories still continue to disseminate and reaffirm ideas such as women’s inferior place in society and role in the institution of family. In one story, for example, an imperial family, in an act of deception and betrayal, switch their baby daughter for their servant couple’s baby son. On a general level, many stories portray wives and daughters-in-law as submissive to the will of the men in the family. Consequently, in the opera subculture, performers continue to disseminate ideals that suggest female inferiority through storytelling, experience these inferiority beliefs through acting and in their personal lives, and reinforce the value of these notions for audience members.

To further complicate the social context, the social subordination of female performers is twofold. The patriarchal ideology is amplified by the age-old sociocultural stigma that views all professional performers as socially inferior. The stigma is deeply rooted in Chinese history, and its ripple effect is still evident in contemporary Taiwan. Throughout the history of imperial China, the acting profession was defined as “the lowest of ten classes of occupations in society” (Chou 1997, 134). Furthermore, acting was “relegated to one of the lowest social categories associated with prostitutes” (Li 2003, 50). This low regard affected both male and female performers, since actors of both genders were subjected to prostitution. Female performers, however, were the more oppressed group of the two; they violate the idea that women should not show their face in public and were treated like prostitutes for doing so (Chou 1997). Women performers were institutionally targeted with repeated bans of their appearance on public stages, the most consequential of which was issued in 1772 and not lifted until 1911 in China. Although the ban should not have affected performers in Taiwan starting in 1895 when the island became a Japanese colony, the low status of opera performers was sustained through other means. Although the Japanese colonial government allowed females to perform alongside males, the government marginalized all performers of local folk arts. After the Japanese occupation, the same type of performers continued to be subordinated by the former Chinese renegade political party up until the 1980s.

Since the 1980s, the status of performers has changed along with the greater value being placed on local culture and art. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 5, public and academic discourses have elevated Taiwanese opera to an important and high status in contemporary Taiwanese culture. Government agencies began sponsoring performances and instituted
traditional performance arts training programs at the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts that include Taiwanese opera. These forces have all contributed to lessening the contemporary relevancy of the age-old stigma against performers. Now young people of all social standings can become Taiwanese opera performers, and the professional folk opera (minxi) performers are, so some say, no longer looked down upon by the greater society.

Despite all these changes, I posit that the stigma is still very much alive but in a reformulated and hierarchical manner. The reformulated stigma against folk opera performers is situated within a pecking order, wherein government-sponsored performances are considered to be superior to folk, or temple-contracted performances. The folk performances continue to survive alongside the newer type of government-sponsored Taiwanese opera performance. The latter type is generally perceived to be the more artistically refined. In multiple conversations I had with various professional performers, they implied that temple shows are less worthy and cannot be compared to the government-sponsored performances. I doubt this viewpoint is an expression of humility, but rather, it is a facet of the dominant cultural hierarchy that continues to subordinate the predominantly working-class performers’ profession.

Performers specializing in the government-sponsored context are also considered to be superior to those in the temple performance context. No longer are all performers looked down upon, but only those who do not work in the “ideal” context and are not “properly” trained. The latter group of performers is regarded as the unfortunate individuals who are poorly paid, stuck working in a noisy and dirty environment, and have to face the heat and cold from working outdoors year-round. The former group is affiliated with institutions in which Taiwanese opera is taught and a refined version of Taiwanese opera is practiced. Mona, a student of the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts, relayed that instructors in the institutions warn their students who choose to participate in temple context performances to beware of bad habits from the “outside” actors.⁶ Institutionalized perspective on the Taiwanese opera professionals in the temple context views them as poorly trained and the less talented, rendering the performers second-rate or substandard.

I see this as a reformulation of the age-old stigma that has created a sanctioned space for the institutionally designated “sophisticated” performers while it continues to subordinate the opera performers in the temple context. These performers and their art, which make up the significant portion of “Taiwanese opera,” continue to be categorized and viewed as inferior in terms of artistry, social standing, and work environment. In essence, the stigma is still very much alive but hidden behind the veil of a new type of opera that promotes “tradition” and celebrates “refinement.” Plus, the stigma’s target appears to be safely tucked away in contemporary society’s old-fashioned corner of the opera subculture that functions, for the most part, far from the limelight and nexus of the dominant superculture.

FEMALE XIAOSHENG TREND

Females playing xiaosheng role types is not new in the history of traditional opera or unique to Taiwanese opera. Despite the repeated bans on female performers on public stages, throughout significant portions of imperial Chinese history (300 BC – 1911 AD), female actors had a constant and significant presence in private theaters, playing both male- and female-role types (Li 2003). In contemporary China, females in male roles are common in opera forms such

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⁶Personal communication, August 18, 2008.
as yueju (all female actors) and Cantonese opera. As for Taiwan, the national Beijing opera troupe, Guoguang Opera Company, also employs females who specialize in male roles.\footnote{Guoguang Opera Company. http://www.kk.gov.tw/. Accessed on April 9, 2009.} Women actors’ contribution to theater, however, has been written out of dominant narratives (Li 2003)—a practice that needs to change in light of present reality. Similar to Siu Leung Li’s *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera* (2003), I also focus on contributions that women have made in xiqu.

What is significantly different about the present female-xiaosheng trend in Taiwanese opera is the astonishing degree of popularity and excitement for the actors playing the roles. The appeal of the female-xiaosheng is so strong that, I contend, it is reshaping the opera’s repertoire, certain performance practices, and gender performance.

The popularity of role types and the gender of actors who play these roles have changed throughout time. It appears that actor-role-type popularity falls in and out of fashion with changing social conditions and cultural tastes. According to two senior members of the opera culture, the current female-xiaosheng trend was preceded by two other trends in their lifetimes. Sun Jung-hui, the troupe manager of the Yisin troupe, an actor and musician, is in his sixties. He told me that he was born into an opera family and has been around Taiwanese opera from the day he was conceived.\footnote{Sun Jung-hui, personal communication, March 31, 2008.} He has seen three role types rise and wane in popularity; in chronological order, they are *kudan* (tragic young-female role), *wudan* (martial-female role), and xiaosheng. In several conversations in 2007-2008, Chen Wen-yi related his acting career. Chen, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s manager and former actor, is in his seventies. He started acting in his early teens through his uncle’s encouragement. In his long performing career, he has played lead female and male roles. Chen recalled that audience members used to go crazy for the kudan and wudan, but now everyone wants to see the xiaosheng. Some of the older ladies who are still part of today’s regular audience members, he said, used to love to watch him play female roles when he was a young actor. Chen’s comments illuminate a former male-dan trend that, I assume, was related to the male-dan fetish made popular through Beijing opera and waned from the early to mid-twentieth century.

The availability of the lead xiaosheng role is rather limited. The three ways to gain the lead xiaosheng actor position that I observed are by managing a troupe, being the daughter of a troupe manager, or through a combination of stage experience and personal connections.

The lead actor/troupe manager position appears to be occupied by experienced actors who have decided to run their own troupes; the Chenmeiyun, the Hsiaofeihsia, and the Suenhua troupes are three examples. This path allows the actors/managers to secure the lead role, have more artistic freedom, and make independent business choices. Lead xiaosheng actors who are the daughters of troupe managers also have to prove their worth and their potential for success as xiaosheng prior to getting the position. Troupes such as Yisin and Hongsheng both have younger lead actors, but they are experienced and highly competent. In troupes with lead actors who neither are the manager nor have family connections with the manager, such as the Shinyingfeng and the Minchuan troupes, those actors gained their positions through stage experience and through knowing the troupe managers. For example, the lead xiaosheng actor of the Shinyingfeng troupe, Hsu Su-yun, got the position about ten years ago after the previous actor had retired. Rather than recruiting a lead actor from elsewhere, the troupe manager who had known Hsu for an extended period, promoted her to the lead role position.\footnote{Hsu Su-yun, personal communication, August 8, 2008.}
As the xiaosheng role is the paramount position in a troupe, the desire for the position can have an influence on an actor’s career path and its duration. One of the youngest and newest xiaosheng actors, Sun Shih-pei, told me that when she decided to make acting her lifelong career in her later teens, she made a pact with herself that she would only act if she could be the best, which is to become the lead xiaosheng.\textsuperscript{10} Hsu Yu-hua, an actor who used to specialize in young-female roles, switched to playing the young-male-role types. On multiple occasions throughout fieldwork, I heard her lament about her height saying that if she were taller, she could become the lead young-male-role actor. Hsu Hsiu-chin, a semiretired actor who was a lead actor and a popularly received xiaosheng said that the xiaosheng role is by far the most advantageous position and it was hard for her to walk away from it all.\textsuperscript{11} She had worked for as long as she could, she explained to me; although her fans would never say she was getting too old to play xiaosheng (in her late fifties), other audience members talked about her age and that made her decide it was time for her to step down.

The xiaosheng role type has become so important and the associated positions in troupes so coveted that the actors playing young-male roles, especially the lead role, are often in positions of power. The weight attached to their jobs appears to provide them with extra leverage in troupe decision-making processes.

I posit that actors specializing in xiaosheng roles are influencing the general dramatic repertoire in two ways. First, lead and supporting actors can choose to perform certain plays but not others. For example, Barbara refuses to perform a particular play in which her character transforms into a bull part way through the story. As a result, the play has remained dormant in her troupe’s repertoire. I found out about the situation at a performance in which Barbara was absent and a substitute actor took her place. The play was revived, as the substitute did not mind acting the part of a bull. In another instance, after performing a new opera, I heard Jennifer declare that she would not perform that particular opera again. She complained, loudly enough for everyone on stage to hear, that her character died too early and was a ghost throughout most of the story. She hated playing ghosts, even though she made her ghosts pretty rather than ugly. Therefore, a xiaosheng actor’s decision not to play certain characters can eliminate certain operas from being regularly performed.

A troupe or lead actor’s decision not to perform a particular opera can also create a risk of losing the unperformed stories over time. In an oral tradition, stories are remembered and refreshed through regular and repeated performances. I have heard performers comment that they have forgotten some stories because it had been too long since they had personally performed or seen another troupe perform them. I also participated in an opera that the Shinyingfeng troupe had not performed for over a year. The process of recalling the story was a group effort, and multiple performers commented that it had been too long since they had performed the story and thus they only remembered parts of it.

The xiaosheng actors can often influence the type of characters used in stories. Most of the classic and hybrid style plays performed today feature one xiaosheng as the main character and one or two others as supporting characters. The constant presence of xiaosheng roles seems deliberately constructed, as other roles such as the old sheng or the old dan are not necessarily present in all stories. Actors will change the age and role type—for example, a character in a play from an older to a younger male—to accommodate their desire to play the young-male role.

\textsuperscript{10}Sun Shih-pei, personal communication, August 6, 2008.
\textsuperscript{11}Hsu Hsiu-chin, personal communication, May 5, 2008.
I observed a story in which an unmarried young man raised his younger sister and was responsible for securing her future, which involved finding her a worthy husband as she had reached the proper age for marriage.\textsuperscript{12} The supporting actor who plays the brother, Wang Chiu-kuan, explained that in the original story her character was the father (old-male role), not the brother of the girl. She changed the father to a brother character so she could play a young-male role and wear her fancy stage costumes for the opera.\textsuperscript{13} Part of the advantage of the “live” nature of Taiwanese opera is the flexibility that allows such change, and xiaosheng actors’ influence over repertoire and opera characters are part of the continual transformation that sustains the opera as a living and contemporary practice.

**ORIENTING FEMALE ACTOR IN YOUNG-MALE ROLE**

During fieldwork, I encountered actors of a variety of gender identities, both heterosexual and nonheterosexual orientations but the commonly known fact of a notable presence of masculine female and lesbian performers in the opera culture was rarely spoken about. Some actors, I found, were somewhat willing to talk about personality identification with role types that, ironically, were more often than not gendered. As I was socialized into the opera subculture, however, I quickly learned that there is an unstated taboo on discussing the topic of gender identities and sexual orientation. On the whole, my experience with the performers indicated to me that it was the private business of individuals and none of my business as a foreign researcher to inquire about this issue. Another issue of cultural etiquette I was very much aware of was the respect that I, as a younger person, was obliged to pay to everyone who was older than I, which constituted the majority of the people with whom I worked. To ask questions regarding my elders’ personal lives would have been a breach of the etiquette.

My decision to retain the performers’ trust that I had painstakingly earned meant that I refrained from asking direct questions that were private or gender-sensitive, which would have been interpreted as a form of disrespect. With regard to indirect questions I have had an experience that echoes Judith Halberstam’s (1998) difficulties with interviewing drag kings and her reception that consisted of noninformative answers regarding dressing up in drag. In interviews, if my questions were too gender-pertinent such as “What do you like about playing male roles?” the actors did not answer the question or changed the topic. Unlike Teri Silvio’s study, which links Taiwanese opera culture with lesbianism (1999), my project was not focused on the sexual orientation or activity of performers offstage. I explored gender performance and its implications in Taiwanese opera based on materials that came from a combination of observations, casual conversations, select lived experiences, archival research, and theories regarding gender.

Above sexual orientation, the identification with particular characteristics is considered the most important aspect of successfully portraying role types. Chinese opera scholar Min Tian (2000), in his research on female impersonation, argues that, “given the apparent stylization, more significance was attached to the actor’s identification with the role he impersonated” (86). Taiwanese opera actors who specialize in male roles have told me that they like to play male roles because it suits their personalities better. For example, actor Wang Chiu-kuan told me that

\textsuperscript{12}The opera is from the Shinyingfeng troupe’s repertoire and called, Youbeilo (Meeting at the White Tower).

\textsuperscript{13}Wang Chiu-kuan, personal communication, multiple conversations throughout the academic year, 2007-2008.
she has played male roles since she was a child because she was more boylike. The only time she’s ever played a female character, she felt constrained and unlike herself.\textsuperscript{14}

Offstage personality likeness to that of onstage is not a prerequisite to playing particular role types. Although scholars such as Silvio have claimed that the “fit between role type and personality is seen as broadly outside the individual’s control” (1999, 597), I have found that exceptional actors surpass this limitation. In one particular instance, a guest musician, Yang Jing-feng, who was working with the Shinyingfeng troupe for a special event and has known Hsu Yu-hua for over thirty years, commented to me that Hsu’s (the troupe’s supporting male-role actor) offstage personality had taken a complete turn from what she used to be like.\textsuperscript{15} Yang said that her personality had changed from demure and reserved to outspoken and entertaining. Upon overhearing Yang’s comments to me, Hsu walked over to the corner where the musicians were seated to join the conversation. She agreed with Yang that she had changed and attributed the drastic personality difference to her somewhat recent switch in role specialization. Hsu used to play serious female roles but now she specializes in young-male roles, often playing the comical subtype, or the sanhua xiaosheng, and once in a while, the sanhua (male-comic role). Playing the comical types calls for a more outgoing, carefree, and humorous personification that she said had contributed to her change in offstage personality. Hsu, thus, carries the characteristics of a comical young-male role even offstage. It appears that identification can become so embedded in an actor’s onstage and offstage personalities that these personalities become entangled and feed into one another. Hsu Yu-hua’s example elucidates the complexity of interconnectivity between onstage and offstage identities.

\textit{THE HYBRID STYLE OPERA AND SPACE FOR CHANGE}

Taiwanese opera scholars have noted the contrasts in the two opera styles and criticized the hybrid style opera’s divergence from the classic style opera. The two general perceptions of the hybrid style can be represented with the following quotes from two scholars. As opposed to how performers use the word, Lin Maoxian’s states that “ô-phait-á” means “opera with reckless blending” and “compared with traditional performances, it is noncoherent and atypical” (Lin 2006, 116). Lin does not consider hybrid style opera as a serious opera style, but rather, a contaminated practice that should be dismissed. More in agreement with the performers, Cai Xinxin contends that hybrid style opera is a “postmodern bricolage . . . a modern-day opera and experimentation of modernism” (Cai 2005, 107). Cai perceives the mixing as a contemporary and updating process for Taiwanese opera, rather than as a deviation from tradition. Though Cai conflates postmodernism with modernism in an unclear way, her statement signifies the confusion that scholars encounter in attempting to categorize the hybrid style opera.

Whatever valuation is imposed on the hybrid opera style, it now flourishes as a style distinct from classic style opera. I posit that the catalyst for change is the embrace of nonhistorical stories in hybrid opera that releases the practitioners from constraints of historicity. Unlike classic opera stories, which are set in the Chinese imperial past, which predetermines story characters’ appearances and style of music, hybrid opera stories are often not bound to any particular time period or cultural specificity. In fact, stories in hybrid operas deliberately confuse time by mixing three chronotopes in one story: the historical past, the \textit{jianghu} (a no-man’s-land

\textsuperscript{14}Wang Chiu-kuan, interview, April 4, 2008.

\textsuperscript{15}Yang Jing-feng, personal communication, May 9, 2008.
time space), and the modern day (Silvio 2005). For example, in one story, a character makes references to the national examination system of imperial China, roaming aimlessly around in jianghu with a friend, and visiting current establishments for evening entertainment in Taipei.16 Without historical specificity as an anchor for presentation aesthetics, the visual and aural aspects of performance are left up to the imagination of the performers. The distancing from a distinctive historical and cultural time period therefore provides conditions of possibility to transform conventions and for the use of alternative visual and aural components.

THEATRICALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE MASCULINITY

Hybrid style operas consist of opportunities absent in classic style operas for contemporary performers to actively select and create manners in which story characters are represented. The spaces freed from historicity particularly in visual and aural presentation enable young-male-role actors to construct and perform female masculinity. In contemporary Taiwan, only male-role actors have significant numbers of fans and these fans, I contend, are important to the actors’ stage presence and their performance of female masculinity. As such, I approach the performance of contemporary young-male roles as theatricality. By theatricality, I mean a theatrical event that is simultaneously produced by the performer’s actions and the spectator’s reactions (Sauter 2003). In other words, events onstage and around the stage simultaneously create the theatricality of a performance. Thus, the events that take place onstage are as important as those around the stage and render the audience members active participants in performances. Specifically, I consider fan culture, performer’s use of visual aesthetics and the voice as the pertinent aspects in the performance of female masculinity.

FAN CULTURE

Though they vary in degree of popularity, each troupe’s lead xiaosheng actor is likely to have an established fan base. Actors frequently refer to their fans as “friends” (pêng-iú), especially the ones whom they have come to know over time. The types of relationship between actors and their fans-turned-friends tend to vary. There are fans that attend performances regularly to watch their idols perform and chat with them before or during a performance (backstage). Other fans assist their actors during performances by doing tasks backstage, such as bringing them food or drinks or helping them with their stage costumes by blow-drying and folding them after they are worn.17 Some give cash gifts to honor their idols with a common practice called “red paper posting” (M: tiehongzhi, T: tah-âng-chóa), in which the cash is displayed openly on stage, stapled to a piece of red paper with a generic written statement of wishes. The typical wording on a red paper is: “Wishing [name] lots of splendor, cash reward [amount] dollars, from dear friend” (zhu [name] guang cai, shang jin [amount] yuan, qin you he). Certain fans can also become close friends with actors, and they will provide their actors rides to performances and hang out with them on the actors’ days off.

An interesting practice of fan culture is that when one is a fan, one is strictly the fan of a particular actor and will display one’s loyalty outwardly towards the actor. Fans of an actor only

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16 Wenpan yu Shusheng is a hybrid style story in the Shinyingfeng troupe’s repertoire.
17 The main actors typically go through numerous costume changes in one hybrid style opera. The weather in Taiwan is very humid yearround and hot throughout most of the seasons. Performing in the subtropical climate, actors tend to sweat while in stage costumes. Even slightly damp costumes have to be hand-dried with a hair dryer after each time they are worn, and then the costumes are stored to prevent mold.
attend performances that the actor is in and consider attending performances with different xiaosheng actors as an act of betrayal. A fan of Hsu Yu-hua, Nina, explained to me that fans do not attend other xiaosheng’s performances, as they do not want to inadvertently glorify another actor with their presence. Furthermore, at a performance, fans of different actors can engage in a friendly round of rivalry. For example (figure 4.2), the Shinyingfeng troupe has three xiaosheng actors, each with her own group of fans. Occasionally, if one of the actors receives a red paper posting of a certain amount, the fans of another actor might match or surpass that amount especially if they are the fans of the lead actor of the troupe. Figure 4.2 shows a “competition” between the fans of Hsu Su-yun and those of Hsu Yu-hua.

Fig. 4.2. Red paper postings decorate a stage’s backdrop. The largest piece of red paper (with two bills attached to the bottom) is placed in the center of the stage. All the awards on the right of it are for Hsu Su-yun. The first column (two red papers attached horizontally with three bills separating the two) to the left of the center comprise awards for Wang Chiu-kuan. All the ones to the left of it are for Hsu Yu-hua. Each bill is $1,000 Taiwanese dollars (or roughly US$30).

Based on what I observed during my fieldwork, female-xiaosheng actors attract predominantly female fans of a varying age range. This is an interesting yet under-theorized phenomenon, but it is not within the boundaries of my project; rather, my project focuses on the nature of the performance practice on stage. The fans make the female-sheng trend possible and lay the foundation for the actors’ acquisition of power, particularly financial power. A lead actor might only get paid US$100 a day (the exact amount varies from troupe to troupe), but on a given day fans of really popular xiaosheng might reward her with tens times the amount of her

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18 In her dissertation, Silvio briefly touches on fan activities through clubs (1998), but her focus is on the fans of television opera stars rather than on those of live performances.
Some fans also buy expensive fabrics and pay for costumes as part of the cultural practice of showering their favorite actor with gifts of splendor. A stage costume can cost ten to twenty times the amount of an actor’s daily wage. Fans’ support, in other words, is the main reason that lead actors can become rich and able to own numerous magnificent costumes.

A common Taiyu saying regarding opera fans helps to elucidate the gender issue of female fans and cross-dressed female actors. During my fieldwork, I often heard practitioners say that fans attend shows to “see a specific individual, not to see opera” (khôa n lâng m’ sî khôa n hì). The main attraction is usually a xiaosheng actor of a troupe. Fans are well aware of the fact that their idol is female; yet they are fans because their idol plays young-male roles. The fans’ recognition of their idol being female is obvious in the practice of gifting the actor jewelry, which is usually in the form of jewelry designed for female individuals. To show appreciation for their gifts, an actor will wear the jewelry prominently on top of their stage costumes. Fans therefore attend operas, not for the storytelling, but to see a female in a male role. They attend shows to see their idol cross the gender line, at once female and operating in a masculine mode.

**Visual Aesthetics in Gender Construction**

Historically and currently, stylized acting—movements, gestures, and vocal performance—has been considered the central element for portrayal of both character and gender. As documented by one xiqu scholar, during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), boys were trained to play female roles in Beijing opera through the repetition of “highly disciplined acting techniques [that] were reinforced and perfected in their adult years” (Tian 2000, 83). In contemporary Taiwanese opera, the stylized movements and gestures (shên duan) are the most important component in the portrayal of role types. Throughout fieldwork, the most common type of comment that I heard with regard to whether an actor was too masculine or feminine was in relation to the way the actor moved onstage. Costume style, hair, makeup, accessories, and vocal performance, on the other hand, appeared to be of little consequence in relation to gender performance.

While costume, hair, makeup, accessories, and the voice are not scrutinized and deemed as significant for gender portrayal, I posit that they are the sites of transformation for the portrayal of gender in this opera form. Although both female- and male-role types alter visual presentation from classic to hybrid style operas, the change is greater for the xiaosheng actors than it is for their female counterpart, the xiaodan (young-female role) actors. In this section, I consider the ways in which xiaosheng actors draw on culturally specific feminine aesthetics to construct male roles.
The most frequently discussed attribute of a performing actor is beauty. Actors aim to look beautiful, as in the feminine aesthetic sense, through what they wear and how they do their hair and makeup. In figure 4.3a, Hsu Yu-hua, playing a young-male character in a hybrid style opera, is wearing a yellow stage costume with silver flower-shaped sequins. This can be contrasted with Chiang Su-lan’s character in figure 4.3b, which is a young-female role. The two costumes are similar in that they are made of shimmering fabric, heavy on beadwork, and custom made. The differences between “male” and “female” costumes are rather subtle and tailored to the actor. The length of the costume is cut exactly to the height that covers Hsu’s tall platform stage shoes that only male roles wear, making the costume as long as possible. The costume consists of multiple layers and segments of fabric most of most are light and flow with the actor’s movements. The excessive use of fabric is both to show off the costume and at the same time to disguise the actor’s small physique. The extra fabric that flows down from the arms and the superhero caplike element also cover up her body, while the tall shoulder pieces (slightly bigger than those in figure 4.3b) accentuate her frame and height. The costume is thus designed to be as big as it can be but looks fitting on the actor. With the large costume and tall platform stage shoes, Hsu looks rather formidable in size, hiding her petite-framed body underneath the costume.

Wearing wigs has become a normal convention associated with beauty. Wigs have lush hair and are stylishly shaped by professional hairstylists. The custom of wearing wigs started with television productions of Taiwanese opera and slowly caught on in the live performance context. In figure 4.3a, Hsu Yu-hua dons a wig and a ponytail-like hairpiece that stands almost straight up. The longhair wig, which is styled to her liking and regularly maintained by a
professional wig-hairdresser, covers her natural, thinner chin-length short haircut. Accessories, including the jewel studded headband, crownlike hairpiece and matching hair sash, are meant as ornaments of beauty. Furthermore, the ponytail and crownlike hairpiece increase the apparent height of the actor four to six inches; like her costume, they also enlarge her short and small frame.

On the one hand, stage costumes and accessories appear to be part of the construction of a large masculine size appropriate to the character. Together, the large costume, tall hairdo, and accessories extend her physical presence. On the other hand, the choice in the style, design, and look of her costume and accessories is based on her choice of a female sensibility of attractiveness. Hsu told me that, they (the actors) only really dress up and put on long hair to look truly beautiful for evening shows. Hsu’s comment about looking beautiful is what guides her in selecting accessories and putting together the complete outfit. She is not trying to pass as a male in her visual presentation but exposes her feminine beauty through her style of makeup and dressing.

In addition to the dressing up for a performance, Hsu’s fingernails are often professionally manicured and painted in a glossy peach or pink color. In a biographical account of xiaosheng actor Tang Mei-yun, she claims that she paints her fingernails red so not to be mistaken for a man (Chen 2005). One of Tang’s fans had fallen in love with her thinking that she was a man, and to prevent another gender-confusion episode, she subtly exposed her femaleness onstage. It appears that actors use painted fingernails as a deliberate strategy for audience members to recognize that those xiaosheng actors are female.

![Image of Hsu Su-yun in a young-male character dressed in hybrid opera style.](image)

Fig. 4.4. Hsu Su-yun in a young-male character dressed in hybrid opera style.

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The style of facial makeup that actors use for the hybrid style opera, like its stage costume and hairstyle, also combines feminine aesthetics with masculine characteristics. In figure 4.4 of a xiaosheng character played by Hsu Su-yun, the hairline defined by the wig is completed with a widow’s peak and thick sideburns that Hsu has drawn on with black eyeliner. The thick sideburns are typical of male-role characters; however, the widow’s peak is an added feature. Culturally, in Taiwan (and other parts of East Asia), the widow’s peak is viewed as a marker of feminine beauty. Unlike female-role foreheads that are often covered with bangs or accessories, xiaosheng foreheads are exposed, and more often than not, xiaosheng actors accentuate their facial hairline with a widow’s peak.

Hsu Su-yun’s makeup, like her hair, adds cultural-specific markers of feminine beauty male-role makeup, as defined by the thick eyebrows. Hsu’s lipstick is a bright, shiny red, which she accents with a shimmering pink in the center area of her pucker. The central focus of the makeup though, is on the eyes. Large (round or almond-shaped) eyes, a Taiwanese cultural marker of feminine beauty, come into play in creating facial beauty. Hsu accentuates the size and shape of her eyes with fake long lashes, blue eye shadow around the edge of her eyes, and silvery glittery eye shadow. The eye makeup draws attention to her eyes and makes them appear bigger and appealing.

Hsu Su-yun is also wearing a drawn-on bindi, which is a decoration worn on the forehead, just above the space between the two eyebrows—originally a female practice from South and Southeast Asia. As a bindi has become a general fashion adornment globally, Taiwanese opera actors have adapted the practice. In Taiwan, bindi stickers are rare commodities and drawn-on bindi marks are far more common. Whereas many actors draw exaggerated bindi with glitter-color pens, Hsu Su-yun conservatively dots hers with lip- and eyeliners due to skin allergies to glitter-pen products that other actors use for the same purpose.

Yet another marker of feminine beauty among many East Asian cultures is what is known as “double eyelids.” Anatomically speaking, many East Asians do not have eyelids that fold when eyes open and close. Creating a crease in the upper eyelids is one of the most common cosmetic surgeries for Taiwanese women. Eyes with folding upper lids supposedly make the eyes look bigger and are considered to be more beautiful. Actors who do not naturally have a crease in their upper eyelids artificially create them with clear medical tape prior to applying their makeup. For example, Wang Chiu-kuan has been artificially creating double eyelids for so long that they sometimes crease naturally without the help of the stickers she wears. On days of performances, though, I noticed that she always taped her lids to ensure they creased.

The standards of facial beauty for xiaosheng roles are thus set by feminine aesthetics and socially established markers of beauty. As female individuals in Taiwanese society, the social markers of feminine beauty have been engrained in the actors with regard to what are considered desirable facial features. Onstage, female actors are able to construct the sought-after beauty markers and proudly display their feminine faces while playing male roles. Hence, the xiaosheng actor’s femaleness is exposed through the hybrid-opera makeup style. With the makeup, wig, and accessories, she displays the social ideal of a perfect female face, yet with her gestures and movement, she represents the masculinity of a male character.

The natural features and shape of the actor’s faces and bodies virtually disappear underneath the stage makeup and outfit. As with in Hsu Yu-hua’s costume in figure 4.3a, Hsu Su-yun’s costume (figure 4.4) also protrudes from her shoulders in a larger-than-life frame, with enough fabric to cover two bodies. Hsu Yu-hua and Hsu Su-yun’s physically imposing figures
are but an illusion constructed by the platform shoes, tall hairstyles, and shapes of their costumes. The makeup, often very thick, also masks natural facial features. Although makeup is somewhat based on the shape of an actor’s facial features, in most cases, the transformation is rather dramatic, and one would not be able to recognize actors on the street without their stage makeup. The physical veiling of the female body through costumes, wigs, and makeup, however, is not a disappearance of femininity. On the contrary, the veiling is a hypermode of female beauty, exaggerated with elements that conceal what is underneath.

**Female Voice in Male Character**

A woman in male costume performing masculine movements looks male, but her voice betrays her gender. In vocal expressions, even though an actor sings in the codified masculine opera voice, her “grain of voice,” which according to Roland Barthes is the body and the soul of the singing woman, divulges femaleness. Furthermore, in a hybrid style opera performance, the actor’s female body and soul resounds through her vocal pitch range, and through her selection and performance of pop songs.

Scholars have analyzed the topic of voice and vocal performance in the different styles of xiqu. Two primary themes that appear in such musical studies (in the English language) are the relationship between language and singing (Pian 1993; Yung 1989) and the taxonomy of the use of the voice. For the latter theme, Elizabeth Wichmann’s (1991) study is the most extensive. Wichmann began her study of voice usage in Beijing opera by dividing it into speech and singing. For the purposes of this chapter, I only highlight her discussion of singing.

In Beijing opera, the two types of vocal timbres in singing are the “large” and “small” voices. The “large voice” (dashang), or “true voice” (zhensang), is lower in pitch range and uses the actor’s natural voice, whereas the “small voice” (xiaosang), or “false voice” (jiasang), is higher in pitch range and uses falsetto. The significance of vocal timbral differences is that they are used to distinguish between role types. For example, both the young-female-role and young-male-role types use the false voice, but only the young-female-role type speaks and sings entirely in the false voice, whereas the young-male-role type uses a combination of the two vocal timbres. This particular voice/role typing applies to both Beijing and Kun operas, the two most widespread forms of xiqu.

In Taiwanese opera, vocal timbre is configured differently. Actors sing only in the true voice. The phrase “true voice” does not refer to natural voice, but is used to contrast with a false, or falsetto, voice. Singing in Taiwanese opera contemporary practices thereby does not favor high-pitched falsetto aesthetic, nor are role types differentiated through pitch range. On the other hand, the pitch range of the true voice is delimited by the actor’s vocal range, which means that in the predominantly female actors’ domain, male and female roles often sound alike in pitch. From personal performance experience, the majority of actors are able to sing the same songs in the same keys. For example, the tonic of the seven-syllable tune type is typically set on the pitch of E-flat. Multiple actors can take turns singing this tune type consecutively without the worry of key changes.

Within true voice, role-type differentiation is based on the two gendered vocal qualities. All female-role types sing in the “thin” (xī) voice and all male-role types sing in the “thick” (cū) voice. A thin voice is delicate, nasal, and narrow in sound. In contrast, a thick voice is strong, not nasal, and open in sound. Unlike the thin voice, which can be learned through training, performers view the thick voice as one that is restricted to an actor’s natural vocal quality. If an actor were not born with a thick voice and needed to acquire it, the actor would need to “break”
her voice. For instance, actor Hsu Hsiu-chin began performing Taiwanese opera in her early teens and was assigned to female roles because of her vocal quality, which was thin and delicate. Through her teen years, she grew to be taller than most other performers, thus making her unfit for female roles. Her mentor asked her to switch to playing male roles, for which she had the build but not the voice. In order to make the switch, she had to break her voice. To do so, Hsu regularly yelled into as well as loudly as she could until her voice became permanently rough and open in sound. Hsu’s process of becoming a young-male-role performer damaged the feminine voice with which she was born. She explained that this is why her (talking and singing) voice is so grainy and almost hoarse today. Her “masculine” voice is not only her stage male-role voice but has also become her “true voice” in daily life. Therefore, the speaking voice (without considering speech pattern) that an actor uses onstage and offstage can become the same.

Pop song performance in the hybrid style opera highlights the paradox of the actor as both a male character and a female performer. Although a young-male role actor’s voice is masculine by operatic conventions, in the grain of her voice, the body and soul of the female are sonically exposed through the actor’s freedom to select appropriate songs. Actors choose pop songs originally sung by male and female singers, and perform the songs in their natural vocal range. In a pop song performance, it appears that the voice, not whether the voice is singing a male or female song, is the most important element. Furthermore, pop song performance also demonstrates an actor’s competence as a singer—ability to sing well and spontaneously—and exposes her artistic preferences through song selection.

To illustrate the centrality of an actor’s vocal quality and dexterity in song performance, I discuss an excerpt from a scene in the opera Hanlei Mudan (The Weeping Peony). During the sequence of events, Hsu Yu-hua, playing a servant character—the comic-male role—displays her skill as a singer. The comic character had misunderstood a conversation he had with the lead young-female character, performed by Chiang Su-lan, and he thought that the lady wanted to marry him. He realized the mistake during a conversation with the female character and his boss—the lead young-male role in the story played by Hsu Su-yun. After the comic character realized the lady was not the least interested in him, he expressed his despair and unwarranted emotions through singing select phrases from pop songs. My transcription (figure 4.5) begins at the moment Hsu Yu-hua was expected to sing.21

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21 Performance on February 28, 2008 in Beitou, Taipei.
In this sequence, the performers built in an occasion for Hsu Yu-hua to exhibit her voice and impulsively to recall appropriate songs. She was encouraged to sing by Hsu Su-yun, who thought Hsu Yu-hua had a good voice. The actor, as part of her display of virtuosity, had to be able to start the song herself without proper cues (of pitch and key) from the accompanists, which she was usually given for pop song performances. Furthermore, Hsu had to display her ability to recall appropriate phrases from songs demonstrating her breadth of pop song repertoire and the competency to spontaneously apply the knowledge.

Over the course of fieldwork, I have observed Hsu perform this particular scene differently. In this performance, Hsu Yu-hua used three sad and slow excerpts of two songs that

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22By “he,” Hsu Yu-hua was referring to the keyboard player.
were about falling out of love. In another performance, for example, she sang four selections, in which two were the same as this transcribed performance.\textsuperscript{23} The first two were sorrowful and introspective songs, although for the second song, she sang a different part of the song—the chorus rather than the opening. The next two pop songs she performed were faster in tempo and both were selected to show her anger. For the first of these two songs, she sang a folk melody with an improvised text. In the performance, she used both Mandarin and Taiyu and called the girl a fake and a “bad thing.” For the last song, she sang the word “crazy” rhythmically and repeatedly rather than sing actual phrases from a recognizable song. After she finished singing, she explained that the girl was crazy. Hsu’s song selection for the two performances illustrates that multiple pop songs and made-up songs could be adapted for this particular occasion. More significantly, her ability to creatively select songs and singing parts of them are the foci of the scene.

I turn to a serious character’s pop song performance to illustrate how the actor’s song choice is also an important element in constructing the actor’s voice and persona. Unlike singing a standard-repertoire song in which actors spontaneously create the text, in pop song performances, the actor sings set song texts that she has painstakingly memorized. During my fieldwork, when I asked actors how they chose which pop songs to learn, the consistent answer I got was “I choose the songs that are fitting for the stage.” During an interview with Hsu Su-yun, the lead male-role actor of the Shinyingfeng troupe, she elaborated her learning process beyond this typical answer. She said that she started learning and singing more pop songs only after she became the lead actor in the troupe. When she hears a song that sounds nice to her, she buys the commercial recording and learns the song from that recording. She knows a large number of pop songs and continues to learn new ones, sometimes according to the suggestion of her fans, which is another way in which audience members are part of the theatricality of the young-male role’s performance.

Hsu Su-yun’s comments about her pop song learning process highlight how important it is for a lead actor to continue learning new songs in order to bring “fresh” material to the stage and to connect with her fans by singing the songs the fans want to hear her sing. Thus, pop song performance is a form of cultural capital and a mechanism of actor-fan interaction. One such example is Hsu Su-yun’s new addition, “In-ū-āi-āi” (“Because of Your Love”), a Taiyu pop song that she learned toward the end of 2007 and started using regularly in 2008. “Because of Your Love” was a new and trendy Taiwanese pop song, released in 2006 and sung by a very popular male singer, Weng Li-yu. In The Weeping Peony, Hsu Su-yun had replaced an older pop song with the new song. The older song, which was “Chiú-chūi-ē-bāng” (“Drunken Dreams”) from 1989, was last used in this opera in December 2007. In the four repetitions of the same opera in 2008 that I observed, Hsu used “Because of Your Love” instead of the older song.\textsuperscript{24} Her fans showed their appreciation for the song with a warm round of applause after she first sang the song. Such a warm reception for singing is not typical of older songs but more common for new songs.

Although in “Because of Your Love,” Hsu Su-yun is singing a song originally sung by a male singer and in a young-male role, her voice belongs to a female body. In pop song performances, I contend that the singing actor is momentarily distanced from the character, which is the mediating medium between the actor and her voice. In a pop song performance, the

\textsuperscript{23}September 24, 2007 performance of Hanlei Mudan.

\textsuperscript{24}The Shinyingfeng troupe’s performances I observed of The Weeping Peony in 2008 were on January 12, February 28, April 23, and June 14.
actor is a singer, a diva occupying a stage, and not just a mere character in an opera. Furthermore, her voice is also undisguisably female, even though the actor is, in theory, still using the thick vocal timbre of a male character. On the one hand, pop songs are carefully selected to fit the dramatic progression of the opera, but on the other hand they also transport the performers and audience members out of the opera into a song recital or karaoke-barlike setting. Audience members know that they are there to listen to a female performer, and the performer belts out songs in her female carnal voice.

CONCLUSION

This chapter brings to light the cultural work that actors’ fans and friends perform in relation to theatricality and opera production. In defining the opera subculture, I also consider the fans, friends, and regular audience members as its practitioners. While that is the case, female-xiaosheng actors and their fans and friends also operate in their own minicultural realm, an offshoot sub-subculture of the opera subculture. Thus, gender-related issue analyses and discussion in this chapter exposes Slobin’s theoretical model on the trinity of cultural levels as lacking in a finer stratum of detail needed to capture the complex networks and nuances of the opera subculture.

The social context that led to the omnipresence of female actors shaped the emergence of the contemporary female-xiaosheng trend. In turn, the xiaosheng actors have actively transformed gender construction and the expected image of what a xiaosheng is and should be. The (1) layering of female body and male role and (2) the blending of socially female aesthetics and masculine characteristics have created a new kind of xiaosheng. In turn, this new construct has become the fashionable role-type and the expected norm. Thus, for as long as the current female-xiaosheng trend lasts, the female professionals have a safeguard to their careers barring potential male contenders from entering the favored positions they occupy. Furthermore, contemporary lead-xiaosheng actors have risen from being socially disadvantaged girls to becoming important performers, purveyors, and innovators of Taiwanese opera. Their stage experience and performance of female masculinity are the signature markers defining today’s Taiwanese opera.
Chapter 5:
Government Intervention and Selective Tradition

A VIGNETTE FROM FIELDWORK

On the July 4, 2008, a government-sponsored event, the “City of Taipei 2008 Taiwanese Opera Model Performances” (“Taipeishi Jiushiqi Nian Gezaixi Guanmuo Huiyan”), began at Mengjia Park located in an historic district. The two-week-long event consisted of thirteen evening opera performances on a temporary outdoor stage. Participants included three amateur troupes and ten professional troupes. The primary sponsor of the event was the Taipei City Department of Cultural Affairs (Taipeishi Wenhuaju). Two other local government units, the Taipei City Government (Taipeishizhengfu) and the Taipei Cultural Center (Taipeishili Shehui Jiaoyuguan), also provided logistical help.

According to the event’s schedule, distributed a few weeks prior through flyers and Internet postings, all performances were to begin at 7:30 p.m. On the first day of the event, I arrived at Mengjia Park about forty minutes early, and to my surprise I was just in time to catch the start of the performance. The performance, however, was not the scheduled opera of the evening, but rather, a special program that consisted of a short opera and an opening ceremony. The special program was not printed on the schedule and I was instantly intrigued by the purpose of it. I found two aspects particularly significant: the content of the short opera and the two masters of ceremony’s levels of expertise in Taiwanese opera.

The short opera (zhezixi) was about the cultural significance of Taiwanese opera and performed by the students of the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts. The story took place in a classroom setting in which young students learned about the history, social function, and background of the opera. Two highlights of what they learned were (1) that Taiwanese opera is the only xiqu (traditional opera) form developed in Taiwan and (2) the name of the form in English. The students enacted their learning process of the English phrase “Taiwanese opera” from their teacher in a repeated call-and-response fashion: every time the teacher called out “gezaixi,” the students responded with “Taiwanese opera.”

A renowned Taiwanese opera actor, Tang Mei-yun, and an experienced theatrical actor new to Taiwanese opera, Luo Pei-an, cohosted the opening ceremony. During the ceremony, the two masters of ceremony briefly introduced themselves, the event, the sponsoring organizations, and the organizations’ leaders. Introductions were mostly conducted in Taiyu, which Tang spoke with fluency but Luo struggled with. Tang, the daughter of a very famous Taiwanese opera actor, Chiang Wu-tiu (1909-1986), began her career in her teens and has since made a name for herself particularly through television appearances and her own opera company. Luo’s first acting experience in Taiwanese opera and very likely his first Taiyu-speaking role had been just a month prior in a new production by the Tang Mei-yun Taiwanese Opera Company. 1 In

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1 The premiere performance of Huanghuyin (The Seal of 1895) took place at the National Theater from June 12–14, 2008.
Luo’s manner of speech, especially his intonation, pronunciation, and stutters, he exposed his low-fluency level in the language. Luo admitted as much to the audience during the ceremony. He also expressed his newfound passion for Taiwanese opera, admiration for Tang’s talent, and desire for more opportunities to participate in future opera productions.

I draw attention to the two aspects in the special program as a point of entry to consider the function and purpose of government sponsorship. The questions that I raise here are not only pertinent to the 2008 event but also have broader implications. To begin with, why does the event open with a didactic short opera piece about the place of Taiwanese opera in the nation’s culture? What is the goal of providing an English translation of gezaixi to an audience of all Taiwanese people? What is the significance of having an expert and a novice in Taiwanese opera as hosts? Does a marked outsider’s enthusiasm for Taiwanese opera represent the appeal of and cultural interest in the opera itself? These questions are important to explore because government sponsorship of Taiwanese opera appears to be a major contemporary source and reason for transformations. Government-sponsored events have contributed to changes in the opera’s cultural significance, public image, social status, and performance practices.

Government sponsorship of the opera accounts for a vast array of activities ranging from instituting primary school programs to financially backing performances abroad. The particular type of government sponsorship that I focus on is largely aimed at professional troupes. For comparative purposes, my discussion also incorporates the type of sponsorship primarily reserved for opera troupes that specialize in government-sponsored performances.

The current chapter consists of three main sections. First, I establish a theoretical framework for studying government sponsorship of Taiwanese opera. Second, I construct an historical context for the political significance of the opera in relation to issues of national identity. Third, I analyze a case study from my fieldwork. My main goals in the chapter are to situate government-sponsored Taiwanese opera events as a selective tradition and to consider their presentation in performance.

**GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED EVENTS AS SELECTIVE TRADITION**

To theoretically contextualize government sponsorship for Taiwanese opera, I adopt Raymond Williams’s idea of “selective tradition,” which he first introduced in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Williams posits that selective tradition is “an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a preshaped present” and that, “within a particular hegemony, and as one of its decisive processes, this selection is presented and usually successfully passed off as ‘the tradition’” (ibid., 115). Williams’s selective tradition is a counterargument against the famous and the then-current essay by Louis Althusser, who claimed that tradition is inherited from the past (O’Connor 2006). According to Williams, tradition is not static or inherent but always shaped, and particularly by a dominant power. Moreover, a particular tradition that is “passed off as ‘the tradition’” is deliberately veiled as an untampered legacy.

Williams further explains the main theoretical thrust of his concept of selective tradition in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980).

But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put
into forms which support … other elements within the effective dominant culture.

(39)

By preceding tradition with “selective,” Williams underscores the fact that a tradition is constructed from a multitude of sources and is a composite of meanings and practices. A dominant power stands behind the deliberate process of construction. Furthermore, a selective tradition is integral to affirm the very dominant power that actively defines and maintains it. One example of a selective tradition that Williams mentions is on education, in which the information one learns in school is only “a particular selection from the whole available range” of knowledge that is transmitted (1977, 117). The example implies that a particular selective tradition is also a sociopolitical strategy of the dominant power.

Another important aspect of Williams’s model of selective tradition is that it exposes the marginalization of the other variations of “the tradition.” The point is especially pertinent for living traditions that are integral to the lives and cultures of practitioners because they are likely to be practiced in multiple variations. Williams calls the alternatives to a selective tradition “residual” and “emergent” forms (1980, 40-42). Although alternatives exist, they are far less visible, existing in the shadows of a selective tradition and posing little threat to the constructed authoritative version.

While Williams focuses more on selective tradition as a process at the macrolevel of politics and society, I am interested in the process at the level of micropractices of individuals. Particularly, I focus on the roles of individuals in performing tradition, in shaping styles of performance, in negotiating the hegemonically-instituted guidelines for government-sponsored events, in determining how such guidelines affect actual practices, and in their use of alternative practices excluded from the selected tradition. The aspects of selective tradition I focus on are thus not the dominant power but the people who perform and, in the process, actively transform the tradition. I illuminate not only the ways in which the ideals of a selective tradition are expressed but also the manner in which performers are involved in the process of selecting the tradition.

HEGEMONY

In Williams’s (1977; 1980) theorization, hegemony is a complex force that is fundamental to the construction, dissemination, and maintenance of a particular selective tradition. Hegemony, according to Gramsci (1971), is something that deeply penetrates a society. Williams contends that, although Gramsci provides a complex definition of hegemony, it is often discussed as a relatively simple and uniform phenomenon (1980). He asserts that “we have to give a very complex account of hegemony” and “emphasize that hegemony is not singular” (ibid., 37–38). The dominant power is itself not a singular entity or force but rather it is decentralized, stratified, and overlapping.

Williams’s model of hegemony accounts not only for the complexity of a hegemonic system but also for the space for alternatives and oppositional culture (ibid., 40). The dominated, like the dominant power, are not uniform; individuals differ in how they interact with the dominant power and in the manners of presenting a selective tradition. On the ground level, it is up to the individuals to realize the ideals of a selective tradition. Individuals thus have the potential to act in alternate ways that deconstruct the totality of the hegemonic construct.

For Williams, hegemony is not only very complex but also constantly changing (1980). He contends that hegemony must be continually “renewed, recreated and defended” and “can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified” (ibid., 38). This particular model of hegemony reflects the reality of uncertainties and the changing needs of a political and social
Implicitly, a selective tradition is also constantly being transformed along with the hegemonic power.

Tradition in a Place Like Taiwan

In considering Taiwan’s history, especially the rapid economic development and dramatic political and cultural changes in the past century, one has to question any claims to “the tradition.” Scholars on Taiwanese society have argued that “[w]hat is perceived as tradition is very likely not the same as what Taiwan was like at any particular time in the past” (Harrell and Huang 1994, 2). Given that as the case, however, it does not mean that dominant powers of Taiwan’s past and present have not evoked particular traditions as direct and unchanged connections from the past. On the contrary, select cultural traditions have been integral to the legitimization and representation of the dominant cultures and hegemonic regimes. Williams’s selective tradition is thus a productive framework because it deconstructs the claims that “the tradition” is solely constructed by a hegemonic power.

A History of Foreign Domination and Marginalization

The island’s political history and past ruling powers are significant elements for today’s Taiwanese scholars as they attempt to explain the development of a distinctive culture and to construct a Taiwanese national identity. Throughout the 17th century, the Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, English, and Dutch maritime forces all attempted to settle on the island (Wills 1999), which was primarily inhabited by the Malayo-Polynesian peoples. The first Chinese ruler on the island, Zheng Chenggong, established power in the seventeenth century, but his regime was brief and considered rebellious by the Chinese. The Qing dynasty (1644–1911) of imperial China incorporated Taiwan into its territory in 1684, setting off a long and tumultuous period of struggle between the indigenous tribes and Han Chinese settlers over rights to the land (Shepherd 1999). The Han Chinese settlers were predominantly from the southeastern region of China and were the primary ancestors of today’s “Taiwanese” people. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the island was transformed from a subsidiary frontier to a robust Chinese settlement and economic locus for international trade (Chen 1999; Gardella 1999).

In 1895, at the end of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95, Taiwan was ceded to Japan. Taiwanese scholars now consider the Japanese colonial period to be integral to the development of the island’s modern society (Lamley 1999). The colonial government made sweeping changes, such as instituting universal education, constructing an islandwide railway system, and encouraging citizens to cease the practice of certain old-fashioned Chinese customs such as feet binding for women and long, single-braid hairstyle for men. Presently, Japanese rule is fondly remembered by the elderly generations of the society. During this time period, local culture was, for the most part, able to develop on its own. The only exception was during Japanese involvement in war between 1937 and 1945, when the colonial government enforced Japanizing laws and heavily promoted Japanese culture and national pride.

Taiwan became a Chinese territory once again at the end of the WWII. In 1949, the renegade political party from China, the Nationalists’ Party (Guomindang), retreated to Taiwan after they had lost power on the mainland to the Communist Party and took over the rule of the island instead. The split meant that two Chinese political parties simultaneously ruled on

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2 For more on the political, cultural, and economic changes in early Taiwanese history, see Rubinstein (1999).
separate lands, but only one could gain international recognition as the legitimate Chinese
government. Up until 1971, the government in Taiwan held the position as the Chinese
representative in the United Nations, but lost the seat to the Chinese Communist Party that year.

It was not until 1988 that a president (Lee Teng-hui) of the same ethnicity as the majority
of the population ruled Taiwan. The process of democratization gradually progressed, and in
2000, the people of Taiwan elected their first president from the oppositional Democratic
Progressive Party (Minjindang), Chen Shui-bien. Chen’s government was pro-independence
when pressure emerged to rejoin China, and under his eight-year rule, the tension between China
and Taiwan greatly increased. Since the election in 2008 of the new Nationalist president, Ma
Yin-chiu, however, policies appear to be shifting toward economic integration and increased
cultural exchange across the strait.

Although Taiwan is a sovereign state, it holds an ambiguous status in the global context.
The government continues to struggle in gaining international recognition as an autonomous
country and has regularly petitioned for UN membership. The source of difficulty is China’s
assertion that Taiwan is a part of China. Most nations around the world are in agreement with
this. Nevertheless, domestic focuses on nation-building, indigenization, and cultivation of local
culture have all contributed to the solidarity of the Taiwanese nation.

THE EMERGENCE OF TAIWANESE IDENTITY

Scholars consider the ideological shift from Chinese-centered to a Taiwanese-centered
sociocultural focus in 1990s to be the “single most important aspect of cultural and political
change in Taiwan over the past quarter-century” (Makeham 2005, 1). Sociologist A-chin Hsiau
argues that “the particular internal dynamics of ethnic relations and the ongoing confrontation
across the Taiwan Strait … have formed the essential driving force for the pursuit of
indigenization” (Hsiau 2005, 265). The Taiwanese people’s cultural uniqueness is a form of
resistance against the Chinese-centered ideology that was imposed up to the late 1980s by the
recently defeated the Nationalist’s regime and the internationally dominant one-China discourse
in which Taiwan is considered as part of China.

Taiwanization is a complex and vast phenomenon that upholds the distinctiveness of the
Taiwanese state, people, and culture. Taiwanization is also perceived as a form of nationalism,
such as Hsiau’s (2000) “cultural nationalism” and Joseph Wong’s (2003) “civic nationalism.” It
is a composite of multiple sources of activism: former president Lee Teng-hui’s institution of a
Taiwan-centered policy as part of democratization (Tsai 2005), the native literature movement
(Chang 1999), Taiwanese cultural themes in films (Yip 2004), and transnational exchanges that
center around Taiwaneseness (Wang 2000). My project is situated in the intersection of the
state-initiated process of constructing a Taiwanese national identity and civic participation in the
process in which Taiwanese opera is a key component.

Taiwan’s national identity is constructed not only as separate from that of the Chinese,
but also as cosmopolitan and internationalized. Although the Han Chinese people comprise
the ethnic majority of Taiwan’s residents, the Han peoples’ identities are formed through lived
experiences that are unique to Taiwan (Brown 2004). Taiwan’s uniqueness draws on factors
such as the island’s history and its locally developed culture. The current construction of a
Taiwanese- rather than Chinese-based identity is also a continual dialectical process that Thomas
Gold (1994) calls Taiwan’s quest for identity, which he has traced back to the late 1970s.
Wang’s (2000) study on Taiwanese nationalism in today’s context of increased international

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flows of people and material goods argues that “[g]lobal culture is now incorporated as a component of Taiwanese culture, upon which a new identity has been constructed” (Wang 2000, 109).

POSTWAR CULTURAL POLITICS, NATION-BUILDING, AND CHUANTONG XIQU

In the immediate decades after WWII, “[c]ultural markets had little autonomy” (Winkler 1994, 29) because the state had dominated the public cultural sphere. Control over culture was a part of the state’s plan that ideologically constructed the nation or what Anderson calls an imagined community (1983). The Nationalist party-state’s authoritarian rule de-Japanized and re-Sinicized the island’s population and at the same time marginalized local culture. One example that shows the extent of disruption caused by the state power is the promotion of Mandarin as the national language. The Nationalist party-state instituted Mandarin as the standard language taught in schools in the late 1940s, even though the majority of the population did not speak it at the time (Kubler 1985). The state-controlled television stations, established throughout the 1960s, were restricted to broadcasting in Mandarin. Shows in Taiyu, such as Taiwanese opera and budaixi (hand-puppet theater) drama series (Su 2003), were restricted to narrow time slots that were in effect until the end of martial law in 1987.

Different forms of chuantong xiqu (traditional opera) have been instrumental in the constructions of a monolithic Chinese culture (1950s–1970s) and a multicultural Taiwan (1970s to present). As part of the Nationalist party-state’s self-construction as the legitimate Chinese government, the regime established itself as the proprietor of traditional Chinese culture. A main component of the regime’s strategy was the elevation of Beijing opera to the status of “national opera” (guoju) and the institution of military-based Beijing opera troupes and opera training programs. Beijing opera as a national cultural emblem, however, contradicted the reality of the local cultural scene. The Ministry of Education’s 1958 survey found that of the 525 xiqu groups, Beijing opera comprised a mere 6%, or fifteen troupes, while Taiwanese opera dominated at 47%, or 235 troupes (Lu 1961, 269). Beijing opera as national opera was a selective tradition in which its national significance in Taiwan was literally invented and imposed.

From the late 1970s through the 1990s, locally popular forms of xiqu that survived as independent businesses on the margins of state intervention began to rise to importance. With the ideological shift placing a higher value on indigenous theatrical cultures, government intervention gradually reconfigured to provide more support for already popular forms of xiqu, such as budaixi, Hakka opera (kejiaxi), and particularly, Taiwanese opera, whereas state support for Beijing opera waned. One major turning point was Taiwan’s participation in the 1990 Art Festival of the Asian Games in Beijing, sponsored by the People’s Republic of China. It was the Taiwanese government’s first time as a participant (Chang 1997). To culturally represent Taiwan, the government selected the Minhuayuan troupe, which is the largest and most widely

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3 See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on language.
4 For a comprehensive discussion and analysis, see Guy (2005).
5 Anderson (1983) contends that official nationalism conceals the discrepancy between what constitutes the nationalism and the lived realities.
6 The state-funded, militarily-based Beijing opera troupes were formally disbanded in 1995, though they had steadily declined as artistic ventures prior to that time.
recognized Taiwanese opera troupe on the island. The Asian Games was the first instance in which Taiwanese opera replaced Beijing opera as the “national” opera.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN TAIWANESE OPERA (1945–2008)

COMPETITIONS (XIJU BISAI)

Shortly after the Nationalist party-state took over Taiwan, the government began to impose stipulations on Taiwanese opera. In 1952, the government established the organization Taiwan Province Local Xiqu Association (Taiwansheng Difang Xiqu Xiejinhui) to govern Taiwanese opera and other local forms of opera. The association established a mandatory business-licensing registration for operating troupes, set rules for opera stories that were permitted for performance, encouraged anticommunist stories, and organized annual “Local Xiqu Competitions,” or “Difang Xiqu Bisai” (Ji 2007). Beyond the agency, Taiwanese opera was also included under the control of the state regulation on xiqu dramatic repertoire.7

The local xiqu competition was the only state-sponsored event for Taiwanese opera. The main purposes of the event were to “reform” (gailiang) performance practices and coordinate the opera with greater societal and educational goals. All licensed troupes were required to compete in order to renew their business license. Standards for judging the competition were based on Beijing opera, particularly in the areas of costumes, facial makeup, style, and instrumental ensemble (Su 2003). It appears that by “reform,” the government agency aimed to transform Taiwanese opera to look and sound more like Beijing opera. An example of “coordination with greater societal goals” is the 1959 competition that mandated troupes to perform one of the four preselected stories in the first round of competition (Lu 1961). It appears that the stories were selected to align with the dominant regime’s political ideology.

From the 1950s through the 1990s, government intervention in Taiwanese opera was in the form of negative regulations that in effect rejected Taiwanese opera for what it was. First of all, the Nationalist party-state categorized Taiwanese opera as “local opera” (difang xiqu), which was subordinate in status to Beijing opera as “national opera.”8 Although, in practice, the number of Taiwanese opera troupes was considerably larger than that of Beijing opera troupes and the opera was integral to local culture, the realities of lived experiences were ignored in order to construct Beijing opera as the national symbol. Secondly, by judging Taiwanese opera based on Beijing opera conventions in the competitions, the state assumed that Beijing opera was superior and that its practices should set the standards for other types of xiqu. In effect, the state attempted to obliterate the unique style and aesthetics of Taiwanese opera.

Although scholars cite strict regulations on Taiwanese opera from the immediate postwar period up to the 1980s, the effectiveness of government intervention seems questionable based on the limited secondary sources available. According to Chen Zhisheng, a Taiwanese opera scriptwriter and director at the time, “The rules—scripts for outdoor shows must be submitted for approval prior to performance, costumes must be orderly, performances cannot use Western music, or Japanese warrior swords as props” were in actuality followed by few (1975). If the majority of troupes did not follow the rules even for the only state-regulated event, then that suggest that the rules were not enforced and most likely did not affect performances beyond the event. Furthermore, “Ninety percent of Taiwanese opera stories do not have scripts …

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7 See Nancy Guy (2005) for details on the topic.
8 See Guy (2005) for further reading on the topic.
[therefore,] the government’s order that all operas performed must be registered is impossible in practice” (Lu 1961). Repertoire regulation was also seemingly ineffective for governing Taiwanese opera because it contradicted performance practices.

During a fieldwork follow-up trip in the summer of 2009, I had the opportunity to watch a video recording of a competition performance and I saw that it was very similar to a contemporary temple-context performance in the classic style. The video was of a 1991 competition performance by the Wang Kui-kuan Three Sisters Troupe (Wang Kuikuan sanchiemi gechutuan), which had previously won the first place on multiple occasions. Wang Chiu-kuan, the second of the three sisters, is the owner of the video and she invited me to watch it in her home. Her sister’s troupe was not officially operating at the time of the competition, but because the troupe still held a business license, its participation was mandatory. For the competition, the sisters rented sound and stage equipment and hired performers to form a troupe. According to Wang, even though the troupe was assembled just for the occasion, her and her sisters performed a good-quality opera in the classic style, as they would have done for a temple-contracted show. Moreover, the manner in which Wang and her sister assembled the equipment and troupe for the competition and the troupe’s style of performance resembled the practices of the temple context. It appeared that the competitions did not transform the opera but only applied restrictions to what could and could not be performed. More research is required, however, to draw further conclusions on the extent to which government intervention through competitions affected troupe practices.

**PUBLICIZED PERFORMANCES (GONGYAN) ON MODERN STAGES: SPACE AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES**

State intervention in Taiwanese opera began to change in the late 1970s, but it was not until 2000 that competitions were completely replaced with gongyan (publicized performance) sponsorships. However, publicized performance of Taiwanese opera had emerged long before the year 2000. The first instance was in February of 1981, when the Yang Li-hua Opera Troupe performed at the only modern theatrical venue in Taiwan at the time, the National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall. Although it was the first for Taiwanese opera, it was not the first xiqu performance in the space.

The change in venue is significant because of the size, technology, and expectations that come with the space. Xiqu performances up to that time took place in a very different kind of space—on small stages with simple props and an abstract backdrop (if needed). It was necessary to change performance practices in order to adapt to a much larger and more technologically advanced space. The first xiqu performance in a modern venue was in 1979 by a progressive, privately run Beijing opera company—Kuo Hsiao-chuang’s troupe, Yayinghaoaxi. Xiqu scholar, Wang Anqi (2006), named Kuo Hsiao-chuang as the first person to modernize xiqu and adapt it for large and modern theatrical venues. Kuo collaborated with theatrical production specialists who were not Beijing opera experts. Stage, music, and costume designs used those of Western theatrical productions as standards. It appears that Kuo and her company’s

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10 Although xiqu scholars generally agree that xiqu is historically an abstract performance art, preliminary data that I gathered during fieldwork suggest that Taiwanese opera performances in the theater houses of the 1950s were realistic rather than abstract.
11 See Wang (2008) for more on the topic.
productions paved the path to modernizing xiqu, which influenced government sponsorship of and innovations in Taiwanese opera for publicized performances (Su 2003).

**Government Agencies as Patrons of Taiwanese Opera**

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, government agencies increasingly sponsored Taiwanese opera performances, but initially the resources were limited to the few troupes that quickly adapted to the new venue and style of performance. Most of the professional troupes in the temple-culture circuit, on the other hand, were excluded from such opportunities. It was not until 2000 that the National Center for Traditional Arts (NCTA) sponsored the first program, “Outdoor Taiwanese Opera Performances” (“Waitai Gezaixi Huiyan”), which were specifically aimed at the professional troupes.

Since 2000, many more government agencies have sponsored Taiwanese opera. Government support for Taiwanese opera is not centralized but diffused and can come from different levels of government and overlapping programs. At the national level, the three most important agencies for cultural sponsorship are the Council for Cultural Affairs, the National Center for Traditional Arts, and the National Culture and Arts Foundation. The three agencies have established recurring programs and events that I discuss in the current and subsequent chapter. At the local level, resources can come from county, city, or community agencies. In the Taipei area, for example, the event I described at the beginning of the chapter involved three of the city government’s agencies.

Although Taiwanese opera is one of the many types of performance art that the central government sponsors, Taiwanese opera troupes together receive a significant portion of state funding. The Council for Cultural Affairs 2008 distribution of subsidy funding (fuzhi tuandui) illustrates the point. Of the seventeen chuantong xiqu troupes awarded the subsidies, Taiwanese opera comprised half. The seventeen troupes included eight for Taiwanese opera, four for budaixi, and five for other forms of opera. The total sum of the funding Taiwanese opera troupes received amounted to 47% of the allotted amount in the chuantong xiqu category. Based on the distribution of funding, Taiwanese opera seems by far the most important xiqu.

**Case Study: Opera Face-Off**

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a case study that focuses on a government-sponsored event featuring two simultaneous opera performances. I first examine the sponsoring government agency as an institution and then I discuss the goals of the sponsored event. Next, I analyze a specific moment of the event—the opera face-off.

**National Center for Traditional Arts**

The development and establishment of the National Center for Traditional Arts spanned over fifteen years (Su 2003). The Executive Yuan, one of Taiwan’s five branches of government, conceived the embryonic idea for the Center in 1990 with a six-year proposal, the “Northeastern Folk Arts Park Plan” (“Dongbeibu Minsu Jiyiyuan Choushe Jihua”). In 1995, the Executive Yuan renamed the proposal the “National Center for Traditional Arts Plan” (“Chuantong Yishu Zhongxin Choushe Jihua”) and appointed the Council for Cultural Affairs as the responsible agency for realizing the plan. The Council for Cultural Affairs established the

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12 According to the Council for Cultural Affairs, the funding awarded to Taiwanese opera troupe totaled $11,350,000 Taiwanese dollars.
Preparatory Office for the National Center for Traditional Arts the following year. This office oversaw the seven-year-long preparation and construction of the sixty-acre Center that officially opened to the public in 2003. Paying visitors at the heritage park enjoy features that include scheduled performances, art displays, museums, public lectures, exhibits, shops, local specialty-food items, historical architecture, and audio self-guided tours.

The National Center for Traditional Arts is not only a heritage park, but, more importantly, it is also a funding and planning agency for traditional arts and an institution for research and archival collections. In 2008 the Council for Cultural Affairs appointed the NCTA as the national-level central bureau for traditional arts planning, funding, collecting, publishing, transmitting, promoting, nurturing, and providing space for displays.13

According to the NCTA’s official website, “tradition” (chuantong) is defined as historical heritage and the “arts” (yishu) include performance and visual arts.14 It appears that the center does not restrict the definition of “traditional arts”; rather, the range of what this definition can encompass includes a broad list of categories, such as music, dance, opera, painting, ceramics, knitting, and metal work. Given the wide definition, it is surprising that the subheading under the “Introduction to Traditional Arts” the section titled “Categorical Area” only includes two specific forms of “traditional arts”—Taiwanese opera and budaixi. The prominent featuring of Taiwanese opera reveals that the phrase “traditional arts” is not widely encompassing but very selective.

The NCTA as an institution is a selective tradition. First, it is at once a theme park, a museum, a research facility, and a funding and organizing agency for cultural events. The NCTA as a facility and agency falls outside of conventional categorizations in terms of what it is. The Center consolidates functions that are effective in preserving and maintaining cultural practices, elements of public display, and education. In other words, the NCTA is a novel and innovative entity with extensive abilities to govern culture. Second, the NCTA’s intervention in cultural practices is a selective process in terms of the type of practices it promotes, how it intervenes, who and what are highlighted, and the degree of promotion of one particular practice in relation to another. The NCTA possesses tremendous power for shaping cultural imagination and memory, as well as the present state and future potential of cultural practices.

**Recurring Program: “Outdoor Taiwanese Opera Performances”**

The “2008 Outdoor Taiwanese Opera Performance” was the fifth time that the NCTA had sponsored such an event. All five occurrences of the event were funded by the NCTA under the direction of the Council for Cultural Affairs. The latest, however, differed from the previous ones in three major ways: type of organizer, scale, and overall goals.15 For the first four “Outdoor Taiwanese Opera Performances,” in 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2005, the NCTA designated event-organizing responsibilities to the private sector. The past organizers of the event included the Holo Taiwanese Opera Troupe (2000), the Minhuayuan Opera Troupe (2002; 2003), and Jiayu International Audio and Video (2005). For the 2008 occurrence, the NCTA

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15 Some occurrences of the event were also given additional names. For example, the 2008 event is also known as “All people’s gezaixi: 2008 Taipei Baoan Temple Taiwanese opera performances” (“Quanminga Gezaixi: 2008 Taipei Baoangong Gezaixi Huaiyan”).

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itself organized the event, with collaboration from the Baoan Temple Association and the City of Taipei’s Department of Civil Affairs. The NCTA’s direct involvement as the sponsor and organizer produced an event that was much more ambitious.

Past occurrences of the event were far smaller in scale in terms of the number of troupes involved and the event’s duration. In all four of the previous events, the format was the same; only ten to twelve troupes performed over roughly two weeks’ time. For example, the 2000 occurrence took place from November 18 through the 26 and consisted of twelve consecutive evenings of performances by twelve troupes. The 2008 event, on the other hand, spanned a total of eight months (March through June, and September through December) and included over seventy opera performances by twenty-plus Taiwanese opera troupes, some of which performed more than one opera in the course of the event. Another point of difference was that most of the performances were on Friday and Saturday evenings, with a couple of added performances on Sunday evenings. Furthermore, whereas only professional troupes were selected for participation in previous years, the 2008 occurrence included amateur groups and opera companies that specialize in government-sponsored performances. The expansion of the event was thus not only an increase in the number of performances and participating troupes but also in the variety and eligibility of troupes. Professional troupes were no longer the exclusive target group of participants; rather, they had to compete with other types of groups for slots in the program.

Program Goals

The NCTA began the event as a way to promote professional troupes. From three of the first four occurrences of the event, the NCTA released DVD sets with the best opera performances and pamphlets that introduced the troupes and operas. According to the material included in these releases, the goals of the first four occurrences of the event were similar. As stated in the 2002 pamphlet, the goals according to the director of Council for Cultural Affairs in 2002, Chen Yu-hsiu, were to “gather Taiwanese opera arts troupes on one stage, have the troupes observe one another, and allow audience members to have an exciting and colorful experience” (National Center for Traditional Arts 2002, 4). The program goals were vague and could be applied to both government-sponsored and temple-contracted performances. More important than the goals, however, was the NCTA’s repeated promotion of professional Taiwanese opera troupes as a recurring event, thereby making the event a “tradition.”

Unlike the previous events, the “2008 Outdoor Taiwanese Opera Performances” was not a stand-alone series of programs but part of the “Baosheng Cultural Festival.” It was held in conjunction with another series of Taiwanese opera performances, the “Baosheng Cultural Festivals’ Folk Theater.” The separate components of the Baosheng Cultural Festival were not distinguished in the program as far as the goals were concerned. Assuming they are the same, the goal of the 2008 Baosheng Cultural Festival was to promote temple culture through an extensive program of rituals, exhibits, lectures, and, most importantly, performances. Among the performances, Taiwanese opera dominated 90% of the program. The goals for such an extensive program of Taiwanese opera performances, according to the festival’s widely distributed pamphlets, include 1) to maintain the gradually weakening traditional culture, 2) to codevelop the Baoan Temple as a “theater niche” and cohost the program “2008 Taipei Baoan Temple Taiwanese Opera Performance” with the National Center for Traditional Arts, 3) to hold performances every Friday and Saturday evenings at 7 p.m. in the Baoan Temple’s courtyard, 4) to have the Baoan Temple become an internationally recognized as “Taiwan’s Taiwanese Opera
Theater” with a regular performance schedule, and 5) to welcome domestic and international friends to appreciate theatrical performances that are unique to Taiwan. In stating maintenance of a “weakening” culture, i.e. Taiwanese opera, as a primary goal, there was no attempt to hide the fact that the sponsoring agencies selected Taiwanese opera as the candidate for cultural preservation. Furthermore, the goals were publicized in a manner that rendered the sponsoring government agencies as benevolent forces acting in the interest of local culture. What the statement of goals failed to reveal is the fact that the type of performances selected for the festival was vastly different from nongovernment-sponsored performances. The alleged preservation effort was not to simply continue the Taiwanese opera tradition as it is widely practiced but to nurture a specific style of Taiwanese opera that was constructed for the festival context.

Like most government-sponsored events, the festival’s performance guidelines consist of practices that are not part of the professional troupes’ long-standing practices. One major difference is the primacy of the script. As discussed previously in this dissertation, professional actors do not typically use scripts; they improvise spoken and sung texts for temple-contracted performances that occur on a regular and frequent basis. For the occasional government-sponsored performance, the actors are expected to memorize written texts for their parts. During performance, the texts are projected as subtitle on screens for audience members to follow. The switch from an oral to a written practice is a source of immense anxiety that professional performers feel in government-sponsored performances.

The second goal of the festival—to make Baoan Temple a locale with regular and frequent Taiwanese opera performances—is also a noticeable selection toward establishing a tradition. Although the idea sounds ordinary enough, it is unusual for a venue to host frequent Taiwanese opera performances. Taiwanese opera is an itinerant practice and most temples that do hire opera troupes do so only on special occasions. Moreover, Baoan Temple does not really have a permanent structure that can be called a theater. All the performances I saw took place on temporary stages that were placed on and around the temple’s grounds. As the situation stands, it is a far cry from deserving the reputation of the island’s “Taiwanese Opera Theater.”

**The Chenmeiyun Troupe Versus the Hsiuchin Troupe**

A highlight of the festival program was a pǐá’-tāi’, or “face-off.” In an opera face-off, two troupes simultaneously perform on stages that are located near each other. The troupes do not compete for the judges’ favor, as there are no judges; nor do they compete for a trophy or monetary award. Rather, they compete for audience members who are free to mill back and forth between the two performances and stay at the one that they prefer. The troupe that is able to attract more audience members to its performance is victorious.

The opera face-off idea is not a new invention, but the context for the face-off is. In the temple-contracted context, such face-offs occur on occasion for a variety of reasons and they are not publicly announced events. One reason for a face-off to occur would be that two closely located temples independently hire troupes to perform for the respective temples’ festivities that fall on the same day. According to a performer who had participated in such performances, patrons’ choice in hiring troupes depends on previously established patronage relationships. In the case of the particular festival’s face-off that I observed, however, the process to enter the

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16 Translated from the official pamphlet widely distributed for the festival. The pamphlet includes the performance schedule, description of the festival, and its goals.
event was highly orchestrated. This opera face-off was an adaptation of a folk practice that transformed it into a major attraction and dramatic production.

The face-off was between the troupes Chenmeiyun and Hsiuchin. Both troupes are well recognized and considered top-notch, if not the best, in their cities of origin. Surprisingly, the Hsiuchin troupe’s performance drew a steady crowd at least three times greater than that of the Chenmeiyun troupe. The unexpected landslide victory of a presumed equal match-up raises questions: What are the forces at work that make one performance more crowd-enticing than another? What role does long-established conventional artistry play, if any at all, in determining success in the competition? How do the performances and audience response inform the selective tradition? My analysis focuses on the performances and implications of the result.

**The Appeal of Troupes’ Star Actors**

In Taipei, the Chenmeiyun troupe is often spoken of as the best in the area. On multiple occasions throughout my fieldwork, I heard practitioners comment on the excellence of the troupe’s actors and musicians. In addition, some practitioners also recognize the troupe’s performances as a model for “authentic” (zhengtung) style of performance. The troupe also has one of the busiest work schedules of all the troupes in the area and a large, steady fan base, which are both signs of the troupe’s popularity.

The appeal of the Chenmeiyun troupe rests not only in its reputation but also in some of the individual actors’ competence and fame. The most widely known actors in the troupe are the xiaosheng (male-role) actors and, significantly, also instructors of Taiwanese opera. In Taiwanese society, teachers are highly respected, and teaching is considered to be one of the most honorable professions. The troupe’s manager and lead role actor, Chen Mei-yun, and another of the troupe’s actors, Liu Hsueh-feng, at the request of institutions and a group of students respectively, became Taiwanese opera instructors. Chen Mei-yun teaches at the National College for Performing Arts and at a community cultural center. Liu Hsueh-feng teaches a group of long-term amateur performers and prepares them for the group’s biannual performances. In Taipei, Chen and Liu are two of the few full-time professional performers who also teach on a regular basis, and their role as teachers boosts the status of the Chenmeiyun troupe.

Like the Chenmeiyun troupe, Hsiuchin also has a good reputation in Taipei, even though the troupe is not from there. It is exceptional in its ability to maintain temple patronage relationships in Taipei as a troupe based in the southern part of the island. Professional performers from Taipei unanimously claim that Taipei troupes are the best on the island, and performances in and around the city are also the most desirable and competitive jobs to secure. They consider that only the best troupes are able to establish long-term temple patronage relationships within Taipei. The Hsiuchin troupe has remarkably built a solid name in Taipei, where the troupe’s distant home base has come to work in its favor. Local audience members perceive the Hsiuchin troupe’s intermittent performances in the capital city as special occasions, and they flock to them in numbers far greater than those for local troupes.

The lead male-role actor and manager of the Hsiuchin troupe is Chang Hsiu-chin, who has led her troupe in artistically innovative directions in recent years. The troupe’s lead female-role actor, Chang Chin-mei, is also famous, and she has been actively involved in creating new stories and collaborating in producing new shows with Chang. The two are strategic in advertising the troupe through constructing and distributing publicity photographs that are innovative for Taiwanese opera. The troupe’s advertisement photographs that I saw for their
2007 and 2008 productions were stylish, beautiful, and glamorous. For example, one of the
troupe’s publicity photographs for the 2008 production, *Yushibian (Jade Transformation)*, features the main male and female characters in an embrace, with their faces turned towards the viewer and their hands touching, set against a pink background.\(^\text{17}\) The male character is wearing a highly ornate golden mask, a tall and mostly gold headpiece, and a patterned gold base and blue-trimmed costume adapted from Chinese period clothing. The female character’s hair is also decorated with a headpiece but one that is much fancier and more colorful than the male character’s headpiece with multiple accessories protruding from it. Her costume is dark pink with white floral patterns, and around her neck is a fluffy light-pink scarf. The characters’ pose, costume and accessory design, and color schemes of the photograph render the actors as trendsetters in Taiwanese opera and suggests that the story *Yushibian* is a beautifully enchanting tale.

**Opera Story Type and Performance Style**

For the face-off, the two troupes presented two contrasting productions that were different in the source of stories, style of costumes, and overall vocal performance. The Chenmeiyun troupe’s opera followed the customary practice of adapting a story based on a widely known historical legend. The story, titled *Jinzhi Yuye (Gold Branch, Jade Leaf)*, is about a prince known for slapping his newly wedded wife, who was a proud and spoiled princess. In the performance, actors wore period clothing that indicated the historical context of the story and the social status of the characters. The cultural and historical specificity of the period-style stage costumes clearly signaled the Chenmeiyun troupe’s performers as faithful followers of the long-standing opera practices.

The Hsiuchin troupe’s opera, titled *Zui (Sin)*, on the other hand, is not drawn from Taiwanese or Chinese historical legend, nor is it a part of local common knowledge. The story is inspired by the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* but recreated for the troupes’ cast, and it is set in a fictional non-specified foreign land. Actors did not wear period clothing, nor did their costumes resemble the clothing style of any realistic culture or historical time. The Hsiuchin troupe’s stage costumes ranged from flashy and out of the ordinary to refashioned and embellished versions of period clothing specifically designed for the production. The Hsiuchin troupe’s production, thus, departed from long-standing practices setting the performance apart as atypical in the context of the performances included in the festival, which were, in general, more like that of the Chenmeiyun troupe’s style. The unfamiliar story piqued curiosity and created suspense, and the loud stage costumes were eye-catching and unique.

Musically, both productions used songs from a shared Taiwanese opera repertoire, but they differed in performance in relation to the vocal sound. In the Chenmeiyun troupe’s performance, actors who are well-trained singers with years of stage experience played the singing roles, which were seven in total. In contrast, in the Hsiuchin troupe’s performance, of the six actors with singing roles, only four were experienced actors. The other two were young actors in training. The level of disparity in the acting and singing between experienced and inexperienced actors was easily discernable in performance.

The contrasts in the two troupes’ types of opera story and styles of performance bring into question the nature of the selective tradition that the festival promoted. Given that one of the goals of the festival was to preserve and promote local tradition, stories based on Taiwan’s

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culture and historical past would have been expected. Yet, a classic story was pitted against a story adapted from a foreign mythology, and the former proved to be less popular. The implication of the contrasts is that neither the origin of the stories nor the style of performance mattered to the sponsoring agencies as long as they were adapted for Taiwanese opera. Furthermore, the agencies also implicitly suggested that Taiwanese opera troupes need not follow long-established customs and that each troupe could create its own version of the opera. Thus, the goal of preservation is only in name and not reflected in practice.

**Spatial Influence on Audience Aggregation Pattern**

A major factor that influenced the outcome of the face-off was the performance space. The two stages on which the troupes performed were situated in dissimilar spaces that inevitably shaped the traffic flow and aggregation pattern of audience members. The stage that the Chenmeiyun troupe performed on was located in an enclosed courtyard. It was the same stage as the one used for all other performances in the festival. High walls on three sides and a metal gate on the temple-facing side enclosed the courtyard. In front of the stage, a few hundred people could fit, seated on plastic stools provided by the temple. The courtyard is the property of the temple and was dedicated to Taiwanese opera performances for the duration of the festival. The stage, though a temporary structure, became a semi-permanent space because it was where almost all of the festival’s performances happened. The stage in the courtyard was, thus, a familiarized space for the participants and returning spectators.

The stage that the Hsiuchin troupe performed on was set up in an open plaza next to the temple just for the competition. The stage was located near a corner of a four-way traffic intersection and the city had to stop road traffic during the performance. This left a wide-open space that was more conducive to the gathering of large crowds and offered multiple vantage points from which the performance could be easily observed by hundreds and hundreds of spectators. Moreover, the stage had a higher profile; audience members coming from three of the four routes to the performances would see the Hsiuchin troupe’s stage first. Audience members did not have to look for the Hsiuchin’s performance; they would have walked right into it.

The stage that the Hsiuchin troupe performed on occupied a civic space in which the rhythm of the traffic around the space was broken for the safety of the audience members. The sense of being in the space created just for the face-off was special, exhilarating, and novel. In a dense and crowded metropolitan space, it is not often that one gets to stand on the street, not have to worry about being hit by scooters or cars, and watch an opera performance. When I was there, I observed that audience members flocked to this space and willingly stood to watch the performance rather than be seated in an enclosed courtyard nearby.

The two troupes did not choose their performance space; rather, it was assigned. Given that the space affected the audience aggregation pattern, it appears that the sponsoring agencies’ space assignment was, in effect, a preselection of the winner. Interestingly, the preselected winner also performed in a more innovative style, suggesting that the sponsoring agencies preferred the newer to the older style of the Taiwanese opera selective tradition.

**A Critique of Instrumental Ensembles**

The accompanying instrumental ensemble of a given troupe is oftentimes overlooked as a factor in determining the quality and affect of a performance. As a way to compensate for this common oversight, I present here a nuanced critique of the musical performance.
Shortly after the face-off, I had the opportunity to discuss the musical performance and instrumental ensembles of the two troupes with a xiqu music specialist known in the opera community as “Professor Hsin” (Hsin jiaoshou). He is one of the very few specialists who are aware of the current working conditions of the professional troupes and one who regularly observes temple performances. Hsin is also one of the few xiqu specialists whose area of expertise is music, and government officials often consult him on the subject. I found that his comments illuminated the ideals that many performers strive for.

At a performance later in the festival’s program and at a point when over twenty other troupes had performed in the festival, Hsin declared that the Chenmeiyun troupe’s music was by far the best. His criterion was that certain pieces should be sung in particular keys and when actors are unable to do so, they are considered to have bad voices. For example, the seven-syllable tune type should ideally be in the key of F, especially for government-sponsored performances. Most troupes perform the tune type in E-flat for temple-contracted performances (because it is easier on the voice) but are expected to raise it to the key of F for government-sponsored performances. He found that the Chenmeiyun troupe’s actors are able to sing in “correct keys” and in styles with individual idiosyncrasies, which they certainly did in this performance. By contrast, Hsin stated that the only notable singer in the Hsiuchin’s troupe was the lead female role actor, Chang Chin-mei.

Hsin also asserted that the Chenmeiyun troupe’s melody section of the music ensemble was the most complete of all the troupes that had performed. An ideal melody section ensemble is comprised of at least four instruments from the four families of Chinese instruments, which are bowed, plucked, hammered, and blown. The Chenmeiyun’s ensemble had all four and more—yehu, erhu, sanxian, yangqin, dizi (flute), and a keyboard. Hsin sounded a little surprised and disappointed to have observed that Chenmeiyun was the only troupe that hired a “complete” ensemble for the festival’s performances.

Hsin is an advocate for acoustic instrumentation and a complete representation of the four instrument families, but it appears that the majority of the professional troupes share those priorities. Professional troupes have to consider the high cost for the festival’s performance, and many artistic decisions are affected by the available budget. Most troupes I observed included a keyboard player in their ensembles, in addition to a few other acoustic instrumentalists. The keyboard is a cost-effective hire because the instrument is multifunctional and can single-handedly provide a fuller ensemble sound.

Although these musical ideals are important to the practitioners, they appear to fall outside of the hegemonically-constructed selective tradition. The festival’s performance guidelines make no mention of the instrumental ensemble, nor was competency of musicians a criterion for participation. Practitioners all know that the music ensembles for government-sponsored performances are not fixed, but rather, selected on a case-by-case basis. The selection of troupes was partially based on video recordings of past performances, but at the time of application, the troupes could not have known the exact roster of their musical ensembles for the festival. Sponsoring agencies appeared to have overlooked the instrumentalists despite the fact that they are integral to opera performances.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I return to the opening vignette and address the questions that it raised for me. For the special program that opened the event in Menjia Park, Taiwanese opera as a
selective tradition was constructed as an indigenous culture. The opera’s central position in local culture was not only presented as part of common knowledge, but it was also presented as international, signaled through the use of English. Textually, the rubric “Taiwanese opera” signals to English speakers that it is the opera of the island, though the Chinese word “gezaixi” does not carry that connotation. Taiwanese opera was also presented in the event as an attractive musical theater in which actors from other theatrical realms are also interested. Thus, the sponsoring agencies promoted Taiwanese opera as a selective tradition that belongs to everyone and, as such, it implies that Taiwanese opera is a national opera.

The question of what the Taiwanese opera selective tradition looks and sounds like is a more complex issue. The Baosheng cultural festival exemplifies how government agencies aimed to counter the “gradually weakening traditional” Taiwanese opera culture in the temple setting yet demand selective performance practices that are exclusively used for government-sponsored events. The selective practices I observed did not provide a uniform idea of Taiwanese opera in the opera face-off, which consisted of two stylistically contrasting performances.

The success of the state’s construction and presentation of the Taiwanese opera selective tradition rests at the intersections of hegemonically-constructed ideologies, performer realization of the ideologies, and audience reception. The result of the face-off tentatively suggests that the departure from established customs and routine practices achieved greater popularity with the audience members when location of performance is an advantage. For Taiwanese opera to remain popular with audiences, it appears that the contemporary function of an opera performance are not only to preserve old matters and practices and assert national cultural identity, but also to appear in unusual places, to entertain, and to awe spectators who are more interested in a new-fangled spectacle than a refurbished antique.
Chapter 6: Congruities and Incongruities in Selecting Tradition

A VIGNETTE FROM FIELDWORK

On May 16, 2008, the day of a government-sponsored performance by the Shinyingfeng troupe, a final on-site rehearsal was scheduled to take place at 1 p.m.¹ The site was on the grounds of an historic temple, in a courtyard that was partially occupied by an outdoor temporary stage. The troupe’s actors who arrived at the stage early used the time to set up their changing stations in the backstage area. I had also arrived early with my erhu but waited for the lead melodist and drummer to arrive and set up first. In the meantime, to cool off the stage and allow airflow through the working areas backstage, I helped other performers roll and pin up the tarpaulin that was covering the sides of the stage. With the backstage partially opened, we saw that inquisitive audience members were roaming about below us and peeking up with curiosity, even though the performance was not to start for another seven hours. While some audience members milled around the stage, others stood close to the front of the stage in the courtyard, which was still empty of seating.

Like the stage structure, the seating arrangement for the performance was temporary. Not only was the performance free to the public, but the sponsoring agencies also provided free seating in the form of plastic stools with an “open” seating policy—as in, when the time came, grab a provided plastic stool, place it in an open space, and sit. The stools were not available until two hours before show time, but that did not stop audience members from showing up early in order to secure the space in which they wanted to place the stools. Audience members marked out territory for prime seating spots by placing ropes, umbrellas, water bottles, and shopping bags on the ground of the courtyard. From the stage, I saw that the spectators’ personal objects covered an area that could easily seat three to four times the number of people present. It was obvious that the early birds were saving space not only for themselves but their later-arriving friends as well.

Starting shortly after 1 p.m., while audience members quibbled over space, the Shinyingfeng troupe members and additional performers hired for the special occasion began rehearsing on stage, with the curtains fully open in plain view of the waiting audience members and passersby. Throughout the afternoon, the number of audience members grew steadily, but they were there to wait for the performance and not to watch the rehearsal. By nightfall and shortly before the show started, the courtyard was close to full. When the performance began promptly at 7:30 p.m., the crowd size continued to increase until the courtyard was packed to its maximum capacity with a sea of seated and standing spectators that spilled out into the street.

Peeking out at the mass of spectators from the stage, I found it difficult to fathom the degree of incomparability of this experience to my performance with the same troupe (minus the

¹The Shinyingfeng troupe performed *Tangminghuang Youyuegong (Emperor Tang Visits the Moon Palace)* as part of the “*Baosheng Cultural Festival*” discussed in Chapter 5.
additional performers) only days before at a temple-contracted performance that drew only a 
trickle of onlookers. Just a few days prior to this government-sponsored event, the Shinyingfeng 
troupe performed at a small and remotely located temple in a rural community. For that 
performance, actors and musicians arrived thirty to ninety minutes prior to the start of 
performance, with just enough time to set up, do their makeup and hair, and get dressed. Also at 
that performance, only a mere handful of audience members watched the afternoon show, 
whereas the evening opera drew a crowd of about fifteen to twenty people, which was fewer in 
number than that of just the early birds at the May 16, 2008 government-sponsored performance. 
Based on the enormous differences in the scale and reception of the two events, it seemed that 
the Shinyingfeng troupe worked in two separate worlds, each with a distinct type of opera and a 
specific group of audience members.

In theory, the two types of performances are disparate productions, and most professional 
troupes are capable of performing both, although the performance context, style, and practices of 
government-sponsored events are relatively new to the opera subculture. For professional 
troupes, such as the Shinyingfeng troupe, that are more comfortable in temple-contracted 
performances, the government-sponsored shows are considered to be more labor intensive. The 
latter type typically involves more people, material, procedures, time, money, preparation, and 
effort. Furthermore, government-sponsored programs can be very different from one another, 
from completely original productions to remakes of existing operas, and some requiring more 
work than others.

**WHO SELECTS TRADITION?**

This chapter continues the theoretical concerns of the previous chapter, which situated 
government-sponsored performances as selective tradition. The current chapter differs in that it 
provides a more nuanced understanding of selective tradition through case studies and behind-
the-scenes performance practices. As discussed in the previous chapter, a selective tradition, 
according to Williams, is hegemonically constructed, but it is impossible for a dominant power 
to control totally, especially when the tradition is also a living culture and is performed by 
practitioners who improvise for a living. A selective tradition requires the cooperation of and 
compliance from practitioners to actively construct and perform the tradition. When full 
cooperation or compliance is lacking, the selective tradition would appear different from that of 
the hegemonic construct.

Although practitioners are not involved at the hegemonic level of constructing a tradition, 
they are essential for performing that very tradition. Through their participation in the 
production process and in performances, practitioners are also involved in the selection of 
tradition at the level of micropractices. In practice, the task equates to the performers’ artistic 
decisions and act of performing. It is thus important to consider performers and their work as a 
part of the selection process that leads up to the presentation of a tradition. Furthermore, 
performer compliance with hegemonic notions should not be assumed; performers are 
independent agents and can employ counter-hegemonic and alternative modes of action in 
performing tradition.

The approach I take in this chapter differs from that of the previous, in that I shift from 
observations from offstage to those from behind the stage in two case studies of the Yisin and the

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2 The performance took play on May 13, 2008, in Hengxi.
Shinyingfeng troupes. Furthermore, rather than looking only at moments during and after performance, I analyze the preparation and rehearsal processes leading up to performances. The two cases are similar in that they were each troupe’s new government-sponsored production for the year 2008, but differ in the sponsoring agency, program goal, scale of production, budget, and performance context. Furthermore, the two cases provide divergent examples of how professional troupes produce new operas and comply with government-agency selected practices. Before delving into the case studies, I first discuss reasons that troupes choose whether or not to participate in government-sponsored events. This is a significant point to address, as performer participation should not be assumed. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the two case studies in which I examine the goals of sponsorship and select aspects in the production process and the performance of the opera.

My overarching argument in this chapter is that the selection of the Taiwanese opera tradition is not a uniform process, nor does it create one version of the “tradition.” The manner in which particular troupes produce Taiwanese opera and the micropractices particular to those troupes must be considered in order to understand the selection of tradition as a performance practice.

**DESIRE FOR PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT SPONSORSHIP**

For most professional troupes, the decision to participate in government-sponsored events is a calculated one. Undertaking such projects requires troupes to deviate from their ordinary routines. In order to apply for a government sponsorship program, troupes have to first complete a series of tasks: fill out the application, formulate a plan, and write a proposal. Government agencies expect troupes to employ a secretary or administrative person to perform these tasks, but many troupes rely on volunteers instead. Furthermore, applications often require long-term plan proposals that are cumbersome and not the customary way most troupes in the opera subculture operate. Once selected for participation in a performance, the troupes are to meet the program’s expectations, such as hire external specialists and additional performers for the production, but they are not penalized for not doing so. Troupes have to be able to shoulder the initial financial burden of such productions, as they are typically reimbursed after performances rather than beforehand. The professionals from the temple-contracted performance context are used to a different way of operation, one that is far smaller in scale and much more spontaneous. The desire to deal with the hassle and stress that come with government sponsorship varies from one performer to the next.

During fieldwork, I noticed that more performers openly express their lack of desire to participate than express enthusiasm to partake in government-sponsored events. On multiple occasions, I heard performers complain about the challenges and amount of effort required to produce them. During a disagreement between certain actors in the Shinyingfeng troupe and the troupe manager, I heard some actors request that the manager stop applying for government-sponsored performances and focus on maintaining the troupe’s established temple patronages and regular work schedule. I asked the troupe’s lead melody-section musician, Wang Chin-hung, why he thought the troupe manager continued to apply for government-sponsored events even though many of his actors did not approve. Wang postulated that the manager was doing it for the money and the potential for attaining fame.³ In another interaction I had with

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Hsiao-chiang, the manager of the Hsiao-chiang troupe, he openly expressed his decision not to apply for government-sponsored events and commented, “Life is busy enough. Why make it more complicated?”

On the other hand, there are also professional performers who strive to be eligible for government-sponsored events. For example, the Suenhua Opera Troupe participated in its first government-sponsored event on July 7, 2008. The lead melody musician, A-de, considered it a significant feat for the troupe. He explained that government-sponsored events are for “big” troupes (T: tōa), not for “small” troupes (T: sè) like ours. The Suenhua troupe employs a small group of full-time members and relies on contract performers on a case-to-case basis. As such, their performances vary in quality and even style, depending on the competency level of contract hires and the nature of the interaction between the performers. In general, the opera subculture’s practitioners consider the quality of the Suenhua troupe’s shows to be lower than that of troupes that employ larger numbers of performers. Even though the Suenhua troupe’s work schedule is relatively busy, its performances are often in remote locations. Only “bigger” (as in “better”) troupes are able to establish patronage relationships with more centrally located temples. Big troupes, like the Chenmeiyun, Minkuan, and Shinyingfeng troupes, have enough work in more desirable locations and do not have to seek work far afield. The Suenhua troupe therefore is a “lesser,” or “smaller,” troupe because they are not competitive enough to obtain the highly coveted temple patronages that bigger troupes have earned and maintained. The Suenhua troupe’s participation in a government-sponsored event has the potential to increase its status and demonstrate its competency level.

Although the desire for participation in government-sponsored programs varies from individual to individual, overall, troupes can benefit from such sponsorships. Professional troupes that choose to participate and are selected for the higher-profile government-sponsored events, are given the opportunity to produce operas on big budgets and receive public exposure at scales unimaginable in the temple-contracted context. Hence, the desire for participation is also a balance between the advantages gained through participation and the challenges in production and performance. During a production process, troupes also need to find a balance between adopting performance practices prescribed by government agencies and adapting those they prefer from the temple context.

CASE STUDY: THE YISIN TROUPE’S 2008 ANNUAL PRODUCTION

SPONSORING AGENCY AND PROGRAM: NATIONAL CULTURE AND ARTS FOUNDATION’S PRODUCTION AND PERFORMANCE OF TAIWANESE OPERA

The National Culture and Arts Foundation, established in 1996, is a major funding agency for the arts in Taiwan. It was established by the Council for Cultural Affairs to “guide, assist, and create an exhibition and performance environment that benefits individuals working in the area of art and culture.” The agency provides two types of funding for professional artists: long-term grants and project grants. The project grants currently consist of five special

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4 Hsiao-chiang, personal communication, April 28, 2008.
5 A-de, personal communication, May 14, 2008.
6 The Suenhua troupe was selected as a participant in the biannual Taiwanese opera festival sponsored by the City of Taipei from July 4–20, 2008.
projects of which Taiwanese opera is one. Interestingly, the Taiwanese Opera production project is the most specific category of the five. The other four projects are (1) creative writing, (2) excellence in performing arts, (3) performing arts marketing, and (4) media arts. Whereas all of the other projects are defined broadly, the Taiwanese opera project is devoted solely to a subgenre, indicating the importance that the agency accords Taiwanese opera in relation to other arts.

In 2008, the National Culture and Arts Foundation sponsored the “Taiwanese Opera Production Project” for the fourth time. The main objective of the program was to give participating troupes opportunity to write, produce, and premiere a new opera. As in the events in 2003, 2005, and 2006, three troupes were selected for participation (Chi 2007). In 2008, the new operas were premiered in three sets of performances in the three cities—Kaoshiong, Tainan, and Taipei—where each of the participating troupes is based. Each set of performances comprised three consecutive evening performances, one by each troupe. Goals specific to the fourth round of the sponsorship, expressed by the agency’s president, Huang Min-chuan, were as follows:

The fourth round hopes to continue in encouraging new productions of Taiwanese opera. More importantly, through the participants, local government agencies, and small businesses collaborate. The program hopes to raise the quality of the temple environment and provide traditional troupes with a new kind of aspiration and free art activities that are professionally presented. In addition, the program has to maintain the intimate atmosphere and raise the quality of performances and audience taste.

The 2008 program goals appear very ambitious in their attempt to transform multiple aspects of Taiwanese opera, not just in production but also in the performance context and audience behavior and taste.

The performance practices of the Taiwanese opera production project combined certain elements from the opera subculture with modern theatrical conventions adapted from non-Taiwanese opera sources. Elements that the agency aims to conserve from the opera culture include the relevance of Taiwanese opera to temple culture, free admission to the public performances, and intimacy between performers and audience members. It appears that the selected elements for conservation aim to uphold the sociological function of the opera established in its older context. The agency claimed to have preserved these aspects, but I argue that only the first two were achieved and the intimacy between actors and audience members was mostly lost.

The intimacy between performers and audience members in a temple-contracted performance is typically created through unstructured audience space and, more importantly, through improvisation. Both of these elements were missing in the series of performances offered by the program. In an unstructured space for observation, audience members can stand or sit as close to the stage or as far from it as they choose. Some also lean on the stage and hang their belongings on the stage structure. Audiences also have the freedom to roam around, eat, chat, clap, and orally direct comments to actors in a given moment. Watching a performance in

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8The three sets of performances were (1) June 27–29 at the Fengshan Kaichang Shengwang Temple in Kaohsiung County, (2) July 4–6 at the Anping Kaitai Tienhou Temple in Tainan City, and (3) July 11–13 at the Hsiiahai Chenghuang Temple in Taipei City.

such a space renders the atmosphere informal whereby audience members can verbally and physically express reactions. Additionally, for the performers’ improvisation, it is crucial to incorporate audience members into their acting (see Chapter 3). At the performances of the Taiwanese opera production project event, however, audience space was divided into a special guest area in the front and a general-public area in the back. All spoken and sung texts were memorized and songs prearranged. As the elements for creating intimacy were absent, it would have been impossible in the government-sponsored performances to preserve the type of intimacy between the actors and audience members that is customary in temple performances.

According to the program goals, the major elements that the agency aimed to change were the methods of production, quality of performance, and audience taste. By “a new production,” the National Culture and Arts Foundation encouraged the use of procedures and practices outside of the conventions for temple-contracted performances. To produce a new production, troupes had to, at a minimum, hire a scriptwriter, a director, and a music designer. Through the collaboration of the three specialists with troupe members, the sponsoring agency aimed to raise performance quality and, through the exposure to high-quality performance, the agency also hoped to improve audience taste.

By requiring troupes to hire specialists in the production process, the sponsoring agency is not only promoting a set of production methodologies, but it is also marginalizing practices ubiquitous in the opera subculture. Working with a scriptwriter in creating a script, a director who directs from the script, and a music designer who constructs the score for the opera is about working within the realms of written tradition. Thus, the professional troupe’s use of oral conventions in the temple-contracted performance is marginalized and replaced with a selectively constructed one.

It appears that the program’s goal of raising quality did not correlate with the practices prescribed for the troupes participating in the program. The sponsoring agency in fact did not institute strategies targeted at raising quality but it simply provided a different methodology for opera performance. To change the performance practices is perhaps the sponsoring agency’s hidden goal, veiled behind their feigned attempt to improve quality. If the agency had truly intended to improve the quality of existing performance practices, the more sensible method would have been to provide services such as training workshops to polish improvisatory acting techniques, singing, and musical accompaniment. In the process of constructing an authoritative version of the Taiwanese opera tradition, the long-established performance practices that were selected out—oral tradition, flexible approach, and improvisation—were also subordinated to a lower stature.

**PARTICIPATING TRoupES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

According to the agency’s chief official, Chen Chin-cheng, the selection of troupes for participation was primarily based on the troupes’ script proposals and interviews with the performers. Troupes also had to demonstrate that they possessed general “ambitious plans” for developing Taiwanese opera. As in past years, three grants were awarded in 2008 (Chen 2008). Of the thirteen troupes that applied, the Yisin, Chunmei, and Hsiuchin troupes were selected for the event.

The three selected troupes were all past participants in previous rounds of the Taiwanese Opera Production Project. Keeping in mind that 2008 was the fourth time that the agency had

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10Chen Shou-kuo (2008).
hosted the program, it was the Yisin troupe’s second and both the Chunmei troupe’s and the
Hsiuchin troupe’s third time to be awarded the opportunity. Over the course of the four offerings
of the program since it launched in 2003, these three troupes occupied eight of the twelve total
slots. It appears that the agency privileged the three troupes by repeatedly selecting them.
However, such preferential treatment conflicts with certain goals of the project. If the agency
were truly aiming to “raise the quality” of Taiwanese opera and the performance environment,
the grant would be distributed more broadly to troupes that have not participated. Or perhaps
the project was purposefully privileging past participants in an attempt to breed a select group
of professionals to produce new operas.

Each troupe was allotted a sum of $1,000,000 Taiwanese dollars (roughly $30,000 US
dollars) for its opera production, but the expectation of responsibilities entailed more than just
production, preparation, and performance of the opera. The National Cultural and Arts
Foundation’s program provided funding but expected troupes to shoulder the responsibilities of
organizing the events. Each troupe was responsible for the logistics, advertising, public
relations, and the hosting of the set of performances that took place in the troupe’s home
location. Some of the other duties included sending representatives to press conferences and
performing short excerpts in stage costume at press conferences. Local arrangements included
publicizing the event, arranging for the construction of a temporary stage structure, applying for
traffic control (only in Taipei due to limited public space for performance), organizing volunteers
to work the event, arranging for special guests’ seating, and hosting the visiting troupes. All in
all, the amount of work outside of performing is a tremendous load for professional troupes that
maintain a regular work schedule for temple festivities. In the Yisin troupe’s case, family
members and friends volunteered their time to make the whole event possible.

Production and Preparation Process

Working with the Yisin troupe in June and July 2008, I observed and participated in the
troupe’s preparation process and the three performances that premiered the production around
Taiwan. I attended almost all of the troupe’s group rehearsals, traveled with them to the two
southern cities, and performed as an accompanist playing the erhu. The days of rehearsals,
traveling, and performance were long workdays; rehearsals lasted six to nine hours, travel time to
the first two performances was roughly ten hours per trip, and performance days included one
last rehearsal and some downtime between rehearsal and performance. However, the long hours
enabled me to spend time with the troupe members and observe and actively engage with the
production process. Hence, I combine personal observation, participation, and analysis to
consider the troupe’s work as a construction of the Taiwanese opera tradition.

Script. The Yisin troupe’s scriptwriter for Jubaopen (The Magic Bowl of Plenty) is Sun
Fu-juei, who is the Yisin troupe manager’s son. Sun was relatively new to the world of opera
script writing, and his other notable work was written for his uncle’s troupe just a few years
previous. He had spent half a year working on The Magic Bowl of Plenty and finished the first
draft of the script at the end of 2007. That was not the end of his work on the script, however.
He continued to revise the script throughout the duration of the preparation and performance
period. At the suggestion of officials in the National Culture and Arts Foundation, the script had
undergone one major round of revisions only a few weeks prior to the first performance. The

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11 A reworking of Baishezhuan (The Legend of the White Snake) for the Minhuayuan troupe.
12 Sun Shih-pei, personal communication, July 14, 2008.
suggestions came after the officials had seen a preliminary performance by the main actors in the production. Sun continued working on it up to the last performance in the event.

The multiple revisions that the script went through can partially be attributed to Sun Fujuei’s perfectionist attitude and inexperience in scriptwriting. Another factor was that Sun was less comfortable working in Taiyu. At the time of the first group rehearsal, just two weeks prior to the first performance, Sun was still making minor adjustments to the script with linguistic assistance from the troupe’s more senior and experienced performers. Sun is in his late thirties and, similar to the majority of his peers, prefers to converse in Mandarin over Taiyu. He attended the rehearsal to help direct certain scenes, and, during free moments, he consulted one or two of the more experienced (and older) actors who speak only Taiyu on how to say certain phrases and express various notions.

The troupe benefited in several ways from hiring Sun even though he is a novice opera scriptwriter. In the long run, the Yisin troupe is cultivating an opera scriptwriter in the family and can potentially count on his contribution in the future. The troupe also did not have to outsource the work to another individual and deal with the logistics of finding an eligible candidate and negotiating a contract. Most importantly, the troupe could work intimately with him throughout the production process and count on him for help with tasks outside of a scriptwriter’s duties, such as being a representative for the troupe at meetings and spokesperson at performances. Furthermore, as a family member who is invested in the success of his father’s business, Sun is also more inclined to continually fine-tune the script to perfection.

Music design. The Yisin troupe also employed a family member, He Yu-kuang, to collaborate on the music design and help compose new songs for The Magic Bowl of Plenty. He is the troupe’s resident melody-section musician who worked with guest musician Chen Mengliang collaboratively in designing the opera’s score, which consisted of songs and motifs from the opera’s existing musical repertoire and newly composed material. The collaboration comprised of He composing new songs for the lead actors, and Chen writing accompaniment music and incorporating preexisting songs for the new script. As expected of a government-sponsored performance, the music score was almost completely fixed, unlike music for a temple-contracted performance that is improvised. The only exceptions to fixity in this opera’s score were the accompaniment motifs, which did not have preset numbers of repetition and were left as flexible elements to accommodate time variations in each performance.

Like the scriptwriter, He Yu-kuang is also a member of the Sun family and relatively new to his specialization as a music designer. He married into the family over ten years ago, is the son-in-law of the Yisin’s troupe manager, and husband of the troupe’s lead female-role actor. During the troupe’s routine temple-contracted performances, He Yu-kuang is the lead melody section accompanist. He has been in the troupe for well over ten years and has an insider’s knowledge of the vocal capabilities of the troupe’s actors. For example, the solo song that he composed for the lead female-role actor was especially designed to showcase her voice. Over the last few years, as the troupe has participated in government-sponsored productions, he appears to be learning to take on increased responsibilities as a music designer and composer.

By employing yet another family member to create and collaborate on a crucial component of an opera production, the Yisin troupe is again making a long-term investment in cultivating talent that is loyally attached to the troupe. The troupe has already benefited from the intimate family connection with He Yu-kuang, not only due to his insider’s knowledge of the troupe’s actors but also his personal investment in ensuring that the troupe members sound their best through extra (unpaid) rehearsals and practice sessions.
Rehearsals and director. In preparation for the performance, the performers spent a significant amount of time individually and as a group learning and rehearsing their parts. Leading up to the first group rehearsal on June 19, 2008 the lead and supporting actors of the troupe had already memorized their parts and learned the new songs for their solo performance. The rest of the group, which included some regular members of the troupe, a handful of additional actors hired for the performance, four performers who specialize in martial and acrobatic tricks (M: wujiao, T: bú-kha), and the musicians, learned their parts during the eight daylong rehearsals held in the two weeks prior to the first performance of the opera. Over thirty performers (not counting the stage extras) participated in the production. Although for the rehearsals the performers were paid only a fraction of their daily wages, the large number of performers involved and the high number of rehearsals held amounted to a big expense for the troupe. Adding to that expense was the salary of the director, Liu Kuang-tung, the person the Yisin troupe hired to help them produce the opera.

The Yisin troupe was required to have a director as a participant in the Taiwanese opera production project and Liu was the director with whom the troupe had worked on previous occasions. Although troupe manager Sun Jung-hui is also experienced in directing Taiwanese opera performances and has done so in the past for his own troupe and other troupes, his daughters, who are now the lead actors of the troupe, did not want him to direct them. Apparently he has extremely high expectations of his daughters and had conducted very stressful rehearsals for a past performance by the troupe. His daughters have since insisted on hiring a nonfamily member to direct their productions in order to reduce the anxiety level and the strain on family relationships. Liu Kuang-tung is a famous xiqu director who is experienced in directing both Beijing and Taiwanese operas. The troupe spent close to ten percent of the total budget of the production on the cost of hiring him. Sun believes that the price was well worth paying for Liu to lead the rehearsals and direct the performances.

Costumes. Specifically for the production, the troupe ordered new stage costumes and accessories that were custom designed and made. All of the outfits for the main characters and certain special characters of the story were brand-new and special-ordered through a tailor. For the less important characters, the troupe borrowed costumes from a close relative’s troupe and had one of the senior actors hand-make others. The actor who made the costumes is Hong Ming-hsueh, a woman in her sixties and a relative of the Sun family. Hong’s contribution to dressing the characters went far beyond making a few outfits; she also hand-made many of the headdresses. During the first few rehearsals, while Hong waited for her scenes, she worked intently on putting the final touches on some of the stage props and headdresses. She explained during one of the rehearsals that she had stayed awake all night trying to finish the headdresses but was unable to do so, because she moves a lot slower than she used to and the particular headdresses she was working on required lots of detailed work. With some of the costumes and headdresses hand-made by or borrowed from family members, the Yisin troupe was able to cut down on the cost of costumes.

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13 He Hsiu-li, personal communication, June 28, 2008.
14 Sun Jung-hui, personal communication, July 22, 2008.
15 Hong Ming-hsueh, personal communication, June 24, 2008.
PERFORMANCE DAY AND PRODUCTION ISSUES

On the actual dates of performance, June 29, July 5, and July 11, 2008, the troupe received more help from immediate and extended family members. A few of the Sun family members who are not in the opera profession appeared in the performances as stage extras. Four of the troupe manager’s grandchildren, ranging in ages from four to ten, appeared as young characters. The presence of the extras, both adults and children, added a dramatic effect and grandeur to the production. The extras would most likely have been left out of the production had they not been readily available as close relations to the performers. Additionally, certain extended family members of the Yisin troupe who lived locally in southern Taiwan lent a hand in the first two performances, which took place in southern Taiwan, in the cities of Kaoshiong and Tainan. Relatives who ran their own opera troupe brought backstage furniture and stage costumes for the Yisin troupe, and stored the production’s props between the two performances so the troupe did not have to truck the bulky items back and forth. The relatives also helped with setup and cleanup, and provided dinner and cold drinks for the entire crew. Their help was tremendous in that the troupe did not have to seek paid help or hire an extra vehicle just to move the stage furniture and props.

On the long bus ride back to Taipei after the first performance, performers discussed two major issues that could improve the production. The first issue was that certain scene transitions were too long. For many of the transitional moments, the musical ensemble played short instrumental motifs that were repeated. The exact number of repeats for each of the motifs was left open in order to accommodate varying amounts of time for transitions. One of the lead musicians, Chen, thought that the time lags between certain scenes were too long and that the musicians repeated the musical motifs too many times. For Chen, the music was not designed with long transitions in mind and she did not like the multiple repeats. It turned out that the main cause for the time lags was that one of the lead actors, Sun Shih-pei, had trouble changing her costumes. Chen suggested that Sun adjust elements of her costume or practice how to change her costumes more efficiently to make the performance progress more smoothly.

I heard a different angle regarding the time lag issue on the second leg of the ride home in a taxi that I shared with one of the actors and two friends of the lead actors (who worked as volunteers in the production). Actor He Hsiu-li, whose character wore a new stage costume, told us that the costumes were poorly designed and almost impossible to put on and take off alone, particularly Sun Shih-pei’s elaborate costumes. Although actors are used to dressing themselves and being able to do quick costume changes, Sun’s delay was not completely her fault. Moreover, Sun was not only one of the lead actors in the show, but she was also responsible for some of the logistical arrangements for the production, which made her extra busy on performance day. He Hsiu-li thought that Sun Shih-pei needed a wardrobe assistant like her aunt Sun Tsui-fiung just to help her get ready. (Having an official assistant is virtually non-existent as a practice in the opera subculture, as most of the professionals are very independent and an assistant is not necessary.) Sun Shih-pei did not realize how long dressing and changing would take because the troupe did not hold a full dress rehearsal. Actors tend to expect their stage costumes to be designed in a fashion that makes them easy to put on and take off. In this case, however, the tailor did not take that into consideration and made costumes that were cumbersome to manage.

The second problem with the performance was that the overall duration was too long at two hours and twenty minutes. Lin Szu-fen, who rode in the taxi with us and was heavily involved with administrative work for the production, said that the performance could be
trimmed down to fit into the prescribed timeframe of two hours. Surely enough, at the only rehearsal between the first and the second performances, Sun Fu-juei (the scriptwriter) handed out new, trimmed down versions of the script. He had eliminated certain characters’ lines and songs to tighten up the dramatic plot and informed the group of each change in a brief meeting at the beginning of the rehearsal. During the meeting, the two lead actors looked like they were in agony as the list of changes not only eliminated certain lines but also made revisions to the text for their parts. One of them said aloud that she was confused enough from having to rememorize certain lines several times. Although the changes were minor that day, the actors had already had to cope with other prior revisions and were nervous that they might confuse all the different versions that they had memorized, especially when the next performance was only few days away.

Despite the additional work that the revisions added, the performers accepted them because fine-tuning the production went beyond the two performances left in the program. The short-term goal was to give the best performance of the three in Taipei, the final event of the program. The long-term goal was to incorporate this production into the troupe’s repertoire for government-sponsored performances. For instance, the troupe was already scheduled to perform the new production for another government-sponsored event in July 2008. Furthermore, the quality of the production would be directly associated with the troupe’s name. Thus, the extra investment in effort was important for the troupe’s reputation and the quality of an opera in their repertoire.

**Event Evaluation**

The day after the last performance, I had the opportunity to discuss the event with an experienced performer, Judith, who had attended two out of the three performances, those of the Hsiuchin and Yisin troupes, and had heard about the Chunmei production through multiple sources. Based on what she observed and heard, Judith concluded that both the Chunmei and Hsiuchin troupes made a profit from this government sponsorship program and, by not spending the money allotted to them, the troupes sacrificed the quality of their productions. Judith saw flaws in the Hsiuchin’s troupe’s performance that would have been fixed had their director been involved in the production process from beginning to end. Furthermore, the Hsiuchin troupe’s director, Tsao Fu-yung, and the scriptwriter, Wang Yu-hui, were obviously not very familiar with Taiwanese opera, according to Judith. The Yisin troupe, on the other hand, seems to have spent more money based on the high-level of professionalism obvious in their production.

I spoke with the Yisin troupe’s manager to discuss the issue of budget. Sun claimed to have spent more money than the other two troupes on the new show and he expressed that the value of investment was obvious as he thought his troupe’s performance was better than those of the Chunmei and Hsiuchin troupes. After the first two performances, a scholar (whom Sun did not name, but someone who had seen all three performances) told Sun that he could have been more frugal on production spending. I found this comment a little shocking considering that the very purpose of the program was to produce high-quality shows. Although I do not have hard evidence to verify that the Yisin troupe did spend more money than the other troupes in the new productions, it does appear that might have been the case based on the performances.

The manner in which the Yisin troupe produced its new opera is congruent with the government agency’s protocol of employing specialists, including a director, music designer, and scriptwriter. As a relatively young troupe in terms of experience of the lead performers, the Yisin troupe adapted to the performance practices prescribed by the government agency more
easily than older performers would have. Additionally, the troupe adapted one of its subcultural practices of enlisting help from family members and close friends. Through their participation in the program, the Yisin troupe did not make a profit from the subsidies but they did gain an additional opera for its repertoire, and obtained valuable experience that increased the expertise of the troupe’s members as well as national exposure that boosted the troupe’s name recognition.

**CASE STUDY: THE SHINYINGFENG TROUPE’S 2008 ANNUAL PRODUCTION**

**FUNDING AGENCY AND PROGRAM: COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS’ SUBSIDIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TROUPE PERFORMANCE**

The Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA) is the central government’s chief agency for governing culture. It is one of the thirty-plus agencies directly under the Executive Yuan, which is one of the five branches of government. The agency positions itself as the national head of cultural development, and has five overall goals: (1) strengthen cultural development groups, (2) subsidize the cultural industry, (3) nurture cultural appreciation through education, (4) encourage international exchange, and (5) increase exhibitions and cultural tourism.\(^\text{16}\) The second of the five goals is particularly pertinent to Taiwanese opera. In 1996, the agency began offering annual subsidy grants to professional performing troupes, including music, dance, traditional xiqu, and modern theater.

The “2008 Subsidies for the Development of Performing Groups Plan” (“Jiushiqi Niandu Yanyi Tuandui Fazhan Fuzhijihu”) awarded subsidies of varying amounts to sixty-five arts groups. The CCA’s goals for the yearlong subsidies were to “sustain performance troupes, increase professional production, and raise performance standards.”\(^\text{17}\) Of the sixty-five groups selected, seventeen belonged to the traditional xiqu category. Within the seventeen, Taiwanese opera at eight troupes occupied the largest percentage of allotted funding. The other nine slots were divided between different types of troupes including hand puppetry, Hakka opera, nanquan, and Kun opera. Evident in the distribution of the subsidy grants is that the CCA considers Taiwanese opera as the most important type of traditional xiqu today.

The eight Taiwanese opera troupes selected for the 2008 round of grants were the Tangmeiyun, Hsiuchin, Chunmei, Minhuayuan, Mingchu, Holo, Yisin, and Shinyingfeng troupes. Although most of these troupes were awarded comparable funding, there was a significant disparity between the largest and smallest grants. The Minhuayuan troupe, as in the previous years, was awarded the highest amount, at NT$3,400,000 (roughly US$870,000), whereas the Shinyingfeng troupe received the smallest sum, which was 20% of the Minhuayuan troupe’s subsidies, at NT$700,000 (roughly US$20,000).\(^\text{18}\) Although the troupes all competed for the same type of funding, they are not the same type of troupes and therefore were not awarded equal subsidies. Generally, troupes that have a record of producing frequent large-scale publicized performances receive more funding, whereas troupes that do not specialize in that type of performances are awarded smaller amounts.

I contend that the subsidy program is itself a selective tradition and a major force in selecting tradition. It is a modern invention for government agencies to support Taiwanese opera

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and the subsidies are not merely for sustainability, production, and improvement, but also for the CCA to select practices that shape a particular version of Taiwanese opera.

**Conditions for Participation**

As part of the performance requirements, troupes were to produce and premiere a new opera, and to perform six other publicized performances during the year of the subsidy program. Furthermore, troupes were expected to follow the stipulations that are relatively new to the opera subculture regardless of need and capability. The requirement for each troupe to present six publicized performances forces the troupe to step out of its normal mode of functioning. For example, they have to advertise and seek out opportunities for such performances. One example of a stipulation is for a troupe to establish an office and rehearsal space, but the professional troupes do not need such spaces for their routine performances. The conditions can be viewed as unrealistic since participating troupes are small private businesses that often do not have the financial resources to perform beyond what the subsidies cover.

Troupes selected for the CCA’s subsidy program were not restricted from other types of government sponsorship, and most troupes did apply for additional funding and programs offered through other government agencies. The practice of applying to multiple programs is partly due to the fact that CCA’s subsidy amounts, particularly the smaller sums, were not sufficient to cover the cost needed to achieve the conditions of participation. It almost appears as if CCA’s subsidies were actually meant to just stimulate and not completely fund, and they provide no additional help if troupes do not receive more funding from other sources. For example, the troupes selected for the 2008 Taiwanese opera production project, the Chunmei, Hsiuchin, and Yisin troupes, were also selected for the 2008 subsidy program. The three troupes’ new productions for the National Culture and Arts Foundation’s program counted towards CCA’s requirements and enabled them to pool their funding from both agencies to produce one opera. Without the additional source of funding, their original productions would not have been possible.

**Production and Preparation Process**

Overall, the Shinyingfeng troupe did not adopt the expected practices of government-sponsored context performance practices as much as the Yisin troupe did. Rather, it adapted many of its customary practices from the opera subculture to produce and premiere its new opera of 2008. Although the Shinyingfeng troupe’s experience is an example of incongruity with government agency protocols, it highlights how performers are active agents in managing their own tradition and how they engage in the selection of tradition.

Script. Once the Shinyingfeng troupe manager, Chen Wen-yi, was notified that his troupe had been selected for the 2008 subsidy program at the end of 2007, he started searching for a scriptwriter. The story, *Menggufongyun (The Mongolian Saga)*, was already in the troupe’s repertoire, but had to be adapted into a script. Chen found a scriptwriter after some trouble. In a different circumstance, Chen might have found a scriptwriter with whom the troupe was familiar, but he contracted the job to scriptwriter Jayden, who completed the script five weeks prior to the impending performance.

Problems with the script had only begun with its late completion. The script was not written to the satisfaction of the Shinyingfeng troupe’s actors on several grounds. Since the actors have performed the story, as it is part of the troupe’s repertoire, they did not agree with the script adaptation of certain scenes. It was unclear whether the scenes in the script that needed
alteration were caused by a miscommunication between the scriptwriter and troupe manager or by an omission by the scriptwriter. Another problem, according to the lead and supporting actors, was that the text was written in a manner that was very difficult to memorize. I later asked actor Wang Chiu-kuan to elaborate on what the actors meant by that and she responded with an example. Unlike the scripts written by Liu Nan-fang (scriptwriter the troupe had worked with on multiple productions), which read well and have lines that are easy to memorize, Lin’s script was neither. The syntax in Lin’s writing was different from that of the stage speech pattern to which the professionals are accustomed. The third problem came to light when the lead melody-section musician hired for the production, Liu Wen-liang, read the script with the intention of selecting existing songs to fit the lyrics. He explained that some of the song texts were hard to set to existing music because they did not follow the most widely used form, which is seven words per phrase and an even number of phrases per verse. It was as if the scriptwriter expected new songs to be composed for the unusual textual line lengths.

Due to the dissatisfaction with the scriptwriter’s work, the tight schedule the troupe was on, and the limited funding, the two lead actors of the troupe, Hsu Su-yun and Hsu Yu-hua, edited and wrote additional texts for the script. At the first rehearsal four days prior to the premiere performance, the Hsu sisters arrived with a new version of the script and copies for everyone. Hsu Yu-hua and Hsu Su-yun announced that they had stayed up the night before to write the script with the help of Hsu Su-yun’s son, who knew how to type. As they continued to relate their experience of editing and writing the script, they laughed at themselves, saying how they had become scriptwriters also. Later on, Hsu Su-yun gave most of the writing credit to her sister, Hsu Yu-hua. They only wrote new song texts, not dialog, because the actors had planned on improvising the latter.

Since professional opera actors are trained in the spontaneous composition of new texts, it did not surprise me that the Hsu sisters were able to construct appropriate rhyming lines for additional song texts. Furthermore, most of the changes the sisters made concerned their parts, which made the writing job less daunting. The lead female-role actor, Chian Su-lan, and another young-male-role actor, Wang Chiu-kuan, also quietly made changes to the texts for their parts. In the end, the final script was created through a group effort. The troupe’s lack of familiarity with the scriptwriter and resource circumstances forced the actors to take on additional tasks that would not usually fall into their domain of responsibilities. I attribute their ability to adapt to the situation and improvise a solution to their years of stage experience and the flexible attitude with which they approach their work. These enabled the script production of *The Mongolian Saga* to progress quickly in time for the premiere performance.

It appears that the Shinyingfeng troupe is used to fine-tuning scripts to their liking, regardless of who wrote the script. The troupe’s actors had made minor alterations to the original scripts of two other operas for their government-sponsored performances in the same month. In the temple-contracted context, I have also observed the troupe modify stories form the storyteller’s versions. Thus, for *The Mongolian Saga*, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s adjustments to the script were their customary methods of operation. The adjustments are not necessarily a sign of disrespect towards the scriptwriter, but rather, the actors’ way of making the material fit their personal preferences.

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Music design. Liu Wen-liang, the lead melody-section musician, designed the music for *The Mongolian Saga*, but not without initiatives taken by the main actors of the troupe. Liu was first given a copy of the script for the opera at a rehearsal for another one of the troupe’s government-sponsored performances. At the rehearsal, Hsu Yu-hua asked Liu if he could make extra time to help them pick songs for the opera, a process known as *an-kao*. After Liu explained that his schedule was full and apologized for not having additional time, the actors decided to cut short their next rehearsal—dedicated to another government-sponsored performance—in order to allow time for Liu to design the music for *The Mongolian Saga*. It appeared that the troupe manager had not prearranged with Liu to design the music but rather given the job as events unfolded.

The initial opaqueness of Liu’s responsibilities reflects the fact that the Shinyingfeng troupe did not have an overall plan or a clear distribution of duties for people working in this production. Moreover, there was no oversight for a designated person who assigned responsibilities. Upon realizing that, the performers involved themselves in the production process and through team effort they ensured that all the tasks were completed on time.

Liu’s music-design process took place at a meeting in which the actors were included in Liu’s process of song selection. Liu selected existing pieces based on the dramatic context of the songs, textual syntax, and type of characters. For the three actors who were not present, Liu selected songs without consultation. As for the actors who were there, he either made sure they knew the songs, or, given no other appropriate song choice, asked them to learn the songs they do not already know by making recordings of him singing right then and there. This happened to actor Hsieh Jih-chu. Liu sung it for her and asked her to record it and learn it. Hsieh was rather nervous about learning a new song and later asked me to rehearse with her during breaks in the temple-contracted performances leading up to the premiere. Liu also selected a piece for Hsu Su-yun, but she quickly asked another actor (who knew the song) to sing it in her place; this was only possible because the dramatic context for the song was conducive to it. Hsu asked Chiang to sing the song from backstage as accompaniment music while Hsu performed movements onstage. Hsu explained that she did not want to take on yet another task in preparing for the big show, as she had already enough to memorize and do. The process of negotiating music design and singing was a rather unique situation, and I postulate that the negotiation between music designer and actors happened because the performers had so little time to prepare for the premiere performance.

Casting. Role assignment for the lead roles in *The Mongolian Saga* was slightly different from the troupe’s practices due to time constraints. About halfway through the story, the drama jumped eighteen years ahead. The lead young-male characters in the two halves were the father and the son. When I observed the Shinyingfeng troupe performing the opera in the temple-contracted performance, the lead xiaosheng actor, Hsu Su-yun, played both characters. For the publicized performance on May 24, 2008, however, Hsu refused to play both characters due to the tight scheduling that would not have given her enough time to memorize the sung text for both characters. Instead, she elected to play only the first young-male character, but modified the ending of the story so that her character dramatically reappeared as a spirit in the grand finale.

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22 Liu received the script on May 9, 2008.
23 I have seen multiple stories that contain jumps in time accompanied with changes in the main characters, in which cases lead actors also change the characters they play to remain in the lead role. It is not unusual for a single actor to play multiple characters in a performance, because in stories with lots of characters, troupes usually do not have enough actors to cover all the parts.
of the performance. Her reappearance thereby reinforced her position as the lead actor of the troupe, not to be forgotten or replaced by another actor.

Rehearsals and director. The Shinyingfeng troupe held three rehearsals dedicated to the May 24th performance during the week leading up to it. The first rehearsal, which I mentioned above, consisted only of the Shinyingfeng troupe members and musicians but not of the additional contracted actors. The following two rehearsals involved the entire cast and a run-through of the opera.

One central person missing in two of the three rehearsals was the lead melody-section musician, Liu Wen-liang. Performing with the Shinyingfeng troupe was a side job for him, since he was working full time for a troupe that specializes in publicized performances. Liu had made a prior commitment to work for the Tangmeiyun Taiwanese Opera Company, which was rehearsing around the clock for its upcoming premiere of a new production at the National Theater. 24 Liu explained he could not get more time off from the other job as he was already in trouble for taking too many off days for the Shinyingfeng troupe (for the troupe’s rehearsals and performances of the other two government-sponsored performances that month). 25 Although Liu could not devote more time to the troupe, he was still the only lead melody-section musician the troupe wanted to hire. He was the person they had worked with in all of the troupe’s previous large-scale government-sponsored performances, and they refused to hire another musician they did not know. The infrequent government-sponsored performances that the Shinyingfeng troupe acquires also means that the troupe cannot offer contract musicians, like Liu, long-term job security. When the troupe does have a job to offer, it has to settle for the fact that musicians might have other previously arranged work that supersedes the Shinyingfeng troupe in priority.

Although the sponsoring government-agency expected each participating troupe to hire a director for publicized performances, the Shinyingfeng troupe did not exactly do so for The Mongolian Saga. The lead actor, Hsu Su-yun, directed the rehearsals and performed in the lead role. Hsu has regularly directed the troupe in government-sponsored performance since the troupe began participating in them in 2001. For each of the performances in which she was the director, she also performed as the lead actor. When I asked Hsu how she came to the director’s position, she said, “khôan-kêng pek-eh,” meaning that she was forced into the situation. 26 Her qualification as a director for government-sponsored events is her acting experience in temple-contracted performances. In the course of fieldwork, I have observed Hsu Su-yun informally “direct” improvised shows and make suggestions for improvements to certain scenes. Hsu has never received training in directing and even admitted that while she can direct wenxi (singing focused opera)—for which she is known as a good actor—her weakness is in wuxi (fighting focused opera). She would much prefer to have an assistant director who focuses just on choreographing and directing the fight scenes. It seems that she learned directing on the job, similar to cowriting the script.

Support structure. Unlike the Yisin troupe, which is comprised principally of family members and has family connections with opera professionals in other troupes, the Shinyingfeng troupe members (except for the Hsu sisters) are only coworkers without family ties. Without the family structure and support that the Yisin troupe has, the Shinyingfeng troupe lacks human

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26 Hsu Su-yun, interview, August 8, 2008.
resources. The troupe has to hire extra people on a contract basis for extra work and depend upon volunteers, rather than having family and relatives to fall back on.

There was one exception for the May 24, 2008 premiere performance in which a family member who was not an opera professional was involved in the performance. Actor Hsu Yu-hua asked her teenage daughter to do a dance for the opening scene. Her daughter performed a ribbon dance, which she had learned as an extracurricular activity in school (not related to Taiwanese opera). Hsu thought the dance would be appropriate, as the opera opens with a banquet in progress and the dance serves as a focal point for guest entertainment. To view it from another angle, the scene was adapted to give her daughter an opportunity to perform. Had there not been an appropriate family member for the part, the performers would mostly likely have modified the opening scene in another manner in which a different type of entertainment would have replaced the dance.

**IMPROVISING IN THE PREMIERE PERFORMANCE**

The premiere of *The Mongolian Saga* took place at the Guisui Street Xiqu Park, a small outdoor amphitheater where temple-contracted performances are regularly held. In fact, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s premiere of *The Mongolian Saga* was sandwiched between a series of temple-contracted performances. The venue, located in the heart of Taipei, is a permanent outdoor stage with tiered benchlike seating for audience members. The size of the stage was far smaller than those that are typically erected for government-sponsored events. Having performed and observed multiple temple-contracted performances at that location, I felt that the stage seemed large and spacious for such performance. However, for a government-sponsored event that involved double the number of performers that is normal for the troupe’s temple-contracted performances, the space felt cramped. Furthermore, a troupe that had performed the day before and was to perform the day after on the same stage had left all its show crates stacked along the wall of the backstage, occupying a considerable amount of the already-limited space. With the backstage area densely packed, a couple of the actors could not fit backstage and had to use the side of the stage to place their dressing stations. The music ensemble was also squeezed into one small area on the right (looking at the stage) side of the stage (opposite of where the actors enter). Due to the tight space, moving around backstage from one area to another was very difficult. While the troupe manager saved money by not having a large temporary stage constructed for the event, the performers did not have a comfortable working space.

Unlike the Yisin troupe’s performance, which was completely scripted and rehearsed, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s performance was only half scripted and the rest was improvised as a result of the process described above. Although *The Mongolian Saga* was initially a complete script with spoken and sung texts, the script was missing some dialogs after the actors made changes to it. Despite the fact that most of the spoken texts were already written, the Shinyingfeng troupe actors decided they were going to improvise and only memorize the sung text. They rationalized that since the sung texts were the only portions of the script that were subtitled, the audience would never know the difference if they memorized or improvised the dialogs. Although the actors expressed a little guilt that they did not memorize the spoken texts, by choosing to improvise, the actors acknowledged that they were more comfortable in improvising than in memorizing texts. Nonetheless, I contend that the actors fail to recognize that improvisation is not an inferior skill, but a much more challenging way of performance.

In a half-improvised show, performers have to be attentive to each other as in a fully improvised version. They must interact spontaneously, and remain flexible in performance. To
the credit of the performers’ stage experience and familiarity with working with each other, the performance progressed smoothly overall and audience members were not able to tell the improvised from the rehearsed aspects. For the performers in the production, however, the few mistakes that the troupe did make were noticeable. The biggest mistake was that the lead melody-section musician started a song too early. The mistake can be partly attributed to his time constraints and absence from the rehearsals in which the troupe ran through the entire opera. The music ensemble was supposed to start the song sometime after the scene had started rather than right at the beginning of the scene. In the performance Liu forgot the arrangement and started the song as soon as he saw that the actor was about to enter the stage. The lead actor reacted by yelling, “No” at him from across the stage before she entered. Upon realizing his mistake, Liu turned the piece into a fast-paced accompaniment song that he composed on the spot. After he diverged from the prearranged piece, the other three melody-section musicians dropped out, and Liu played on alone. As Liu’s composed piece settled and he started repeating recognizable phrases, the musicians jumped back in and played along until there was a break in the action for an appropriate moment to end the music. The mistake blew over without any repercussions and I suspect that Liu’s high reputation had something to do with it.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Sometime after the premiere, I discussed the performance with one of the contracted actors in The Mongolian Saga, He Hsiu-li. She is a regular member of the Yisin troupe and had performed multiple government-sponsored performances in that troupe. He Hsiu-li compared her experiences working in the two troupes and declared that she did not like performing in the Shinyingfeng troupe’s The Mongolian Saga. She explained that the May 24, 2008 performance was a big mess for the actors backstage; a coordinator was needed that day to prevent confusion. In the Shinyingfeng troupe, even though Hsu Su-yun was officially the director, on the day of performance, she had to perform the lead role, which was her main responsibility in the first place. Although having her as the director worked well in the preparation process, on the day of the performance, her priority was different and it was not her job to direct nor could she handle preparing to act, doing costume changes, and directing all at once.

Feedback on The Mongolian Saga premiere came from audience members who were friends of the actors. According to the feedback Hsu received, audience members would have liked to see Hsu Su-yun play both the father and the son characters. I heard the same comment made weeks later by another practitioner who saw the performance but who was not affiliated with the troupe or one of Hsu’s fans. To explain why audience members would have preferred her in both roles, Hsu mentioned that the actor who played the son character was not very masculine and did not possess the vigor of a xiaosheng. Audience members who gave Hsu this feedback were probably all her fans or at least individuals who like to watch Hsu play xiaosheng roles. More significantly, the audience members knew the conventional practice (for one actor to play both father and son roles) of the temple-contracted performance context and expected that to be the same even in a different performance context.

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27 He Hsiu-li, personal communication, June 28, 2008.
CONCLUSION

The production process and performance-day experience for the Yisin troupe’s *The Magic Bowl of Plenty* and the Shinyingfeng troupe’s *The Mongolian Saga* were considerably different. The Yisin troupe adapted to the government-sponsored large-scale type of production in which specialists were hired to focus on each aspect of the process. The troupe’s performances were highly organized down to the details. The Yisin troupe’s production better fit the ideal model for government-sponsored events. The Shinyingfeng troupe’s production, on the other hand, resembles how troupes operate in the temple-contracted performances, in which everyone pitches in to shape the performance and spontaneous decision processes prevail. The input that the production received from specialists was minimal and depended upon the stage experience of the performers. It appears that the performers in this troupe understood what the government-sponsored performance’s ideal mode of operation was (thus why certain members refused to participate), but were limited by resources, budget, and time. Regardless of the lack of a well-managed production process, the troupe still performed a well-received opera. The Shinyingfeng troupe’s production departed from the ideal model by exercising improvisation skills and adding their own creative contribution beyond just acting.

In the three case studies I presented in the previous and current chapters, the forces influencing the selection of the Taiwanese opera tradition include government agencies, performers, and audience members. Prior to the advent of publicized performances by professional troupes, much of what took place in such performances was foreign to the opera subculture. With increases in government-sponsored programs and more professional troupes participating in such programs, performers are also the selectors of tradition through realizing guidelines and executing plans. Furthermore, audience members are also involved in the process through a feedback loop that enables performers to gauge the interest and success of their performance, and to adjust their future performances accordingly. Practitioners are thus actively transforming performance practices prescribed by government agencies and thereby modifying the Taiwanese opera tradition.
Postscript

In the summer of 2009, I returned to Taipei for a visit to follow-up field research. The purposes of my trip were to reconnect with the performers with whom I worked during the previous year, confirm the validity of my arguments in this dissertation, and obtain updates on the Shinyingfeng and the Yisin troupes. My trip’s timing was influenced by an Internet posting I saw in April 2009, which was an announcement for a series of temple-contracted Taiwanese opera performances in Taipei. From May 31 to June 14, 2009, the Xiahai Chenghuang temple was to host a cultural festival (wenhuaji) that consisted of fifteen consecutive days of Taiwanese opera performances by five professional troupes. Obtaining information on a multiday temple-contracted event with so much advance notice was equivalent to finding gold nuggets on the ground, and I took advantage of the discovery. Furthermore, both the Shinyingfeng and the Yisin troupes were a part of the festival’s program, providing a rare opportunity during a Taiwanese opera low season (the fifth to seventh months on the lunar calendar, which in 2009 was June to September) for me to reunite with both troupes in a two-week time span. My experience in returning to my fieldwork site after a considerable time away enabled me to gather the latest data and gain new perspectives with which I close this dissertation.

In relation to the temple-contracted context and its opera subculture, the Xiahai Chenghuang Temple’s 2009 cultural festival was an unusual event on three accounts. First, the festival appears to be the only temple-contracted event in Taipei that is publicly announced. There have been other temple-contracted events of similar scale, such as the festival hosted by the Yunglien temple of Luchou in July of 2008, but information for those performances typically remains within the particular temple communities. Second, the Chenghuang temple asked each contracted troupe to preselect the operas they were to perform, create a performance program, and widely distribute the information in advance. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, professional troupes typically select improvised operas only on the very days they are performed. Lastly, the Taipei Cultural Center (Taipeishi Shejiaoguan) provided publicity support for this privately commissioned temple festival, even though government agencies typically do not interfere with business transactions between temples and troupes. Thus, the Chenghuang Temple’s atypical event is a reminder of the complexity of contemporary Taiwanese opera. It also illustrates one manner in which a continually emerging tradition resists scholarly categorization and characterization that attempt to present a tidy version of a dynamic reality.

I visited the Yisin troupe that performed the first three days of the Chenghuang Temple’s festival and found myself backstage amongst a buzz of excitement. For these centrally located festival performances, I expected a busy backstage bustling with performers, their family members, friends, and fans. But something else was causing the excitement. The Yisin troupe had just started selling DVDs of one of its productions, Guifuma (The Ghost Consort Prince). This opera was the troupe’s first video recording project recently completed and the final product just received. The DVD was so new that certain members of the troupe were seeing it for the first time. 

first time and appreciating its photographic artwork. Of the two versions of the DVD, a normal edition in a simple plastic case without accompanying material and a deluxe edition in a specially designed cardboard box with a pamphlet and beautiful photographs of the actors, the latter was the main object of admiration. Between the afternoon and evening performances, fans milled on and off the backstage to purchase copies of the DVD and to ask their favorite actors for autographs on their new acquisitions.

The Yisin troupe’s production of a DVD is a significant accomplishment that breaks out of the mold of a professional troupe in the temple-contracted context. Although it was not the first troupe of its kind to produce DVDs of their operas, the act signals the troupe’s eagerness to embrace new means of technology and production, promote commercial circulation, and sell Taiwanese opera for wider consumption.

The Yisin troupe’s DVD brings up issues concerning ownership that did not emerge as significant for the dissertation. In the opera subculture, as I mentioned, stories and songs are a part of the oral tradition and shared knowledge that is owned by all of the performers. As such, within the opera subculture, ownership is typically a non-issue and performers usually have a mutual understanding that opera material is communal property. In the case of the Yisin troupe’s *The Ghost Consort Prince*, the work is an opera that the troupe produced and premiered in 2007. The troupe owns the production because it is an original story, with newly designed costumes, stage set, and musical score, which is a combination of existing and new songs. Even though the majority of songs used in the production are drawn from the shared Taiwanese opera musical repertoire and many other aspects follow common conventions, *The Ghost Consort Prince* is still considered the property of the Yisin troupe. Nevertheless, through packaging and selling *The Ghost Consort Prince*, the Yisin troupe departs from the subculture’s conception and relationship with communal ownership and engages with intellectual property rights.

The Yisin troupe’s production of a DVD appeared to be the biggest news and indicates the troupe’s keen interest in sophisticated opera productions. When opportunities arise, some of the members regularly perform with the Minhuayuan troupe for large-scale, high-budget, government-sponsored performances. Interestingly, I saw one of the Yisin troupe’s lead actors and its lead melody section musician in a large-scale government-sponsored performance by the Minhuayuan troupe in Tainan (in southern Taiwan) on a day that the Yisin troupe had a small-scale government-sponsored event in Banqiao (in northern Taiwan). By allowing two of its core performers to participate in the Minhuayuan troupe’s performance, the Yisin troupe appears to be prioritizing performer experience in large-scale government-sponsored events. It also indicates that the Yisin troupe aims to be a crossover troupe type, at once a professional troupe in the temple-contracted performance circuit and a troupe that specializes in government-sponsored events.

During my trip, I had the opportunity to spend more time with the Shinyingfeng troupe—at two small temple-contracted events and at the Chenghuang temple’s cultural festival. The first two occasions were performances in Sanxia on May 31, 2009 and in Xinzhuang on June 6, 2009 during which I visited the performers backstage. At the two locations, different actors and actors’ fans proudly spoke to me about the new operas that the troupe recently added to its repertoire and how I would really enjoy them. As it turned out, I had not seen either of the operas the Shinyingfeng troupe performed in Sanxia. From watching the performances,

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2 The Minhuayuan troupe’s performance of *Maowang (Cat King)* took place on June 6, 2009.
however, I found that the most striking change for the troupe was not the expansion of its opera repertoire, but the troupe’s new supporting young-female-role actor, Yeh Li-hua.

Since an improvised opera is such a small-scale production and fundamentally shaped by the performers’ competence, interactions, and stage persona, a new core actor drastically changes the feel of the of the Shinyingfeng troupe’s performances. Yeh has a different stage presence from Chen Li-yu whom she replaced, and the interactions between her and other actors are also dissimilar to those involving Chen. I bring up this point not to delve into the differences, but to highlight as a potential area for future exploration the reality that one core actor can alter the overall effect of a troupe’s performance. It appears to me that personal style, which in turn guides interaction, is a major performance-shaping factor in improvised Taiwanese opera that deserves more research and theorization.

The Shinyingfeng troupe did not have any government-sponsored performances scheduled in 2009 at the time of my visit. According to the troupe’s lead melody section musician, Wang Chin-hong, the troupe manager had not applied for any and did not plan on doing so. From conversations I had with multiple performers in the troupe, it appears that they were more concerned about the number of workdays rather than the type of performances they had, since it was a low season for Taiwanese opera. The performers all dreaded the following month in which the troupe had no performances scheduled. Having work is an economic priority and the performers probably would not have minded government-sponsored performances to supplement their temple-contracted performance schedule even though many of them have complained about participating in the former type of events.

Other troupes noted the Shinyingfeng troupe’s absence from government-sponsored events. Multiple practitioners with whom I interacted throughout the cultural festival at the Chenghuang temple asked why the Shinyingfeng troupe was not in the then-upcoming nationwide Taiwanese opera event—the 2009 outdoor Taiwanese opera performance from August 7–22, 2009 hosted by Taipei City government. The event was also a competition for awards judged by a panel of specialists. One practitioner, Jiafang (who is the Chenmeiyun troupe’s secretary), stated that the Chenmeiyun troupe had no equal competitor in the event since the Shinyingfeng troupe was absent. Even though the Taipei City government agency only selected fourteen out of forty-one troupes for the event, many practitioners assumed that a reputable troupe like the Shinyingfeng would be accepted, had it applied. Moreover, certain practitioners subdivide troupes into categories that are based on troupe reputation, actor competency, and overall performance quality. Whereas the Chenmeiyun and the Shinyingfeng troupes were seen as equals, other troupes fall all in lower-ranked categories and posed no threat of outperforming the Chenmeiyun troupe. Thus, the Shinyingfeng troupe’s nonparticipation affected other troupes and exposed the tight-knit community of the opera subculture in which one absent troupe can tip the balance of a multi-troupe event.

In 2003, the Taipei city government began sponsoring the annual series of outdoor Taiwanese opera performance for domestic troupes, but in 2009, the agency included a Chinese troupe from southeastern part of the country, the Xiamen Weixin Gezaixi Jutuan, in the event’s program. In addition, the agency provided special treatment for the Chinese troupe by allotting two days of performances of the sixteen available, while all local troupes’ performances were limited to one show. The inclusion of a Chinese troupe is a tremendous shift in state policy from maintaining the status quo to increasing interaction across the strait. This is the approach of Taiwan’s president newly elected in May 2008, Ma Ying-jeou. Although the 2009 outdoor Taiwanese opera performance is only one case, the inclusion of a Chinese troupe in a Taiwanese
government-sponsored event and preferential treatment given to it posed additional challenges for the already highly competitive environment. It is also a signal that a government agency deems the Chinese version of gezaixi comparable to Taiwanese opera, and as such, the agency undercuts the value of the opera as a unique national symbol. Thus, in the new political environment, the meaning of the Taiwanese opera tradition is perhaps undergoing a dramatic metamorphosis. Apart from the highly publicized performances and the intellectual discourse surrounding them, however, temple patrons are sustaining a living theater that is chameleon-like, able to self-modify and swiftly acclimatize in order to remain socially relevant and culturally significant.
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*English title included in publication
Appendix A: Note on Protection of Practitioner Identity

In this dissertation, certain individuals are identified only by pseudonyms. The first group of individuals whose identities I protect includes general audience members and fans of actors. I do not use their real names because during field research I did not ask for or I chose not to ask for permission to name them in my writing. For the general audience members, I did not ask for permission because I did not envision writing about my offstage social encounters and interactions. As for individuals who are fans of actors and many of their names are familiar to me, I decided not to identify them by their real names in writing in order to protect the privacy of actor-fan connections and relationships.

The second way that pseudonyms occur in this dissertation is for the protection of certain individuals involved in sensitive situations that I write about. In those instances, I use pseudonyms to avoid causing damage, shame, or embarrassment to the relevant individuals.
Appendix B: Glossary

Mandarin Terms, Names, Titles, and Phrases

A-de 阿德
A-lung 阿龍
Bailimingyi 百里名醫
Baishezhuan 白蛇傳
banxian 扮仙
Baodaodiao 寶島調
Baosheng Cultural Festival 保生文化祭
beiquan 北管
bendi gezai 本地歌仔
biandiao 變調
budaixi 布袋戲
caidan 彩旦
caihua 彩花
Chan Chen-heng 詹振亨
Chang Hsiu-chin 張秀琴
Chen Li-yu 陳麗玉
Chenmeiyun Opera Troupe 陳美雲歌劇團
Chen Meng-liang 陳孟亮
Chen Ming-ling 陳明伶
Chen Wei-ching 陳維清
Chen Wen-yi 陳文意
Chiang Su-lan 江素蘭
Chikung Huofo 濟公活佛
Chiuyue Opera Troupe 秋月歌劇團
Chou Huang-hsiang 周煌翔
chuan 串
chuantong 傳統
Chunmei Opera Troupe 春美歌劇團
cu 粗
dan 旦
dangjia xiaosheng 當家小生
dashang 大嗓
daozi 倒字
dayua 大月
dianshidaow 电视调
dizi 笛子
Dongbeibu Minsu Jiyyuan Choushe Jihua 東北部民俗技藝園籌設計畫
Dumadiaow 都馬調
erhu 二胡
fansheng 反生
Formosa Zephyr Opera Troupe 臺灣春風歌劇團
fusheng 副生
fuzhi tuandui 扶植團隊
gailiang 改良
gaohu 高胡
gezaixi 歌仔戲
Gezaixi Qudiao Xuanji 歌仔戲曲調選集
gezaixian 琶子弦
gong 宮
gongyan 公演
Guifuma 鬼駙馬
gulu 古路
guluixi 古路戯
Guoguang Opera Company 國光劇團
Guoli Taiwan Xiqu Xueyuan 國立台灣戲曲學院
guoyue 國樂
Hanlei Mudan 含淚牡丹
He Hsiu-li 何秀狸
He Yu-kuang 何玉光
Holo Taiwanese Opera Troupe 河洛歌仔戲
Hong Ming-hsueh 洪明雪
Hongsheng Opera Troupe 宏聲歌劇團
Hsiaochiang 小江
Hsiaofeihisia Opera Troupe 小飛霞歌劇團
Hsiao Ju-fu 蕭如福
Hsieh Jih-chu 謝日珠
Hsiehsin Opera Troupe 協興歌劇團
Hsiuchin Opera Troupe 秀琴歌劇團
Hsu Hsiu-chin 許秀琴
Hsu Su-yun 許素雲
Hsuyafen Opera Troupe 許亞芬歌子戲劇坊
Hsu Yu-hua 許宥樺
Huang Hsueh-e 黃雪娥
Huanghuin  黄虎印
jianghu  江湖
jiangxi  讲戏
jiasang  假嗓
jiebai  结拜
Jigong Zhan Nanbeidou  濟公戰南北斗
Jindiezi  緊疊仔
jingzhi  精緻
jingju  京劇
Jingzongman  緊中慢
Jinzi Yue  金枝玉葉
Jiushiqi Niandu yanyi tuandui fazhan fuzhijihua  九十七年度演藝團隊發展扶植計畫
Jubaopen  聚寶盆
Kao Le-fu  高樂福
Ke Ming-feng  柯銘峰
kudan  苦旦
Kuofu Chinienkuan  國父紀念館
Kuo Hsiao-chuang  郭小莊
Kuoli Taiwan Hsichu Hsuehyuan  國立臺灣戲曲學院
Liao Chiung-chih  廖瓊枝
Liao Chiung-chih Taiwanese Opera Foundation  廖瓊枝歌仔戲文教基金會
Lien Wei-chun  連薇鈞
Linqian Huimu  靈前會母
Lin Shih-chen  林世宸
liujiaoxian  六角弦
Liu Kuang-tung  劉光桐
Liu Nan-fang  劉南芳
Liu Wen-liang  劉文亮
Liu Ying-ling  劉盈伶
Liushui  流水
Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple  新加坡雚菜芭城隍廟
Miaowang  貓王
Mazu  媽祖
Menggufongyun  蒙古風雲
miao  庙
Minchu Opera Troupe  明珠歌劇團
Minchuan Opera Troupe  民權歌劇團
Minhuayuan Opera Troupe  明華園戲劇團
minjian xinyang  民間信仰
Minkuang Wangjia Sanjiemei  明光王家三姊妹

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nanquan  南管
National Center for Traditional Arts  國立傳統藝術中心
Ni Fan-lun  倪凡倫
minguo  民國
minxi  民戲
nung  農
opeila  胡撇仔
Outdoor Taiwanese Opera Performances  外台歌仔戲匯演
Peisi  倍思
pingju  平劇
Qizidia  七字調
qupai  曲牌
sanba  三八
san fen qian chang, qi fen hou chang  三分前場，七分後場
sanhua  三花
sanxian  三弦
Sanxianhui  三仙會
shen duan  身段
sheng  生
Shih Chiao-chien  施教鉞
shin diao  新調
Shinyingfeng Opera Troupe  新櫻鳳歌劇團
shou-wei  收尾
si  寺
suona  噴吶
Suenhua Opera Troupe  蘇恩嬋
Sun Fu-juei  孫富欽
Sun Jung-chi  孫榮輝
Sun Shih-pei  孫詩珮
Sun Shih-yong  孫詩詠
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Taipeishizhengfu  台北市政府
Taiwan guoyu  台灣國語
Taiwansheng Difang Xiqu Xiejinhui  台灣省地方戲曲協進會
Tang Mei-yun  唐美雲
Tangmeiyun Opera Troupe  唐美雲歌仔戲團
Tangminhuang Youyuegong  唐明皇遊月宮

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Tianduyuanshuai 天都元帥
Tianhou 天后
tiehongzhi 貼紅紙
Tsao Fu-yung 曹復永
Tudigong 土地公
Waitai Geäixi Huiyan 外台歌仔戲匯演
waitaixi 外台戲
Wangbaochuan 王寶钏
Wang Chin-hung 王進弘
Wang Chiu-kuan 王秋冠
Wang Yu-hui 王友輝
Wangyueci 望月詞
Wanshuowujiang 萬壽無疆
wen 文
wenchang 文場
wenhuaji 文化祭
Wenpan yu Shusheng 文判與書生
wenxi 文戲
wenxi jin, wuxi tu 文戲金 武戲土
Wenxin Performance Troupe 文薪表演戲劇坊
Wenyiji 文藝季
wu 武
wuchang 武場
wudan 武旦
wujiao 武腳
wuxi 武戲
wuxia 武俠
xi 細
xilu 戲路
Xiahai Chenghuang Temple 霞海城隍廟
Xiamen Weixin Geäixi Jutuan 廈門衛視歌仔戲劇團
Xiansiying 相思引
xiaoyue 小月
xiaodan 小旦
xiaosang 小嗓
xiaosheng 小生
xindiao 新調
xiqu 戲曲
Xiqu Bisai 戲曲比賽
xixiang 戲箱
Taiyu Names, Terms, Titles, and Phrases

An-kao 安歌
A-tiān 阿田
āu-pōa-ni 後半年
Bān-siū-bû-kiong 萬壽無疆
bûn-hi 民戲
bû 武
bû-kha 武腳
bû-tiū 文丐
bûn 文戲
bûn-hi-kim, bûn-hû-thô 文戲金 武戲土
bûn-tiū 文場
chaî 正
cha’p-chhài-mî 雜菜麵
Cha’p-liâm-a tiâu 雜唸調
chêng-pô"-nî 前半年
chhái-hoe 彩花
chhái-tôa" 彩旦
chhit-kho-pô" 七元半
Chhit-li-á tiáu 七字調
chhiú"-liām 唱喚
chhòan 串
chîaⁿ seng 正生
Chíu-chúi-ê-bâng 酒醉的夢
chô o’ah-hî 做活戲
ch’î-kho 一元
Chùi-pat-sîaân 醉八仙
gōa-kang 外江
gōa-tâi-hî 外台戲
gō-kho 五元
hi-lâng 戲籤
hi-lô 戲路
hóan-seng 反生
hô-hiân 胡弦
hok-á 福仔
Hûn-li Hûn-kâu-sî 恨你恨到死
hû seng 副生
iá-tâi-hî 野台戲
In-ûi-li-ê-âi 因為你的愛
iông-khîm 洋琴
khak-a-hiân 殺仔弦
Khang-chhiô-bâng 空笑夢
Khit-chiâ’h Chhi Chiông-gòan 乞丐養狀元
Kín-thiap-a 緊疊仔
koa-á 歌仔
koa-á-hî 歌仔戲
kô-kâi 鼓介
kô-lô 古路
kông-hî 講戲
kong-iân 公演
la’k-kho-pôa” 六元半
lâm-á 南仔
lào-jî 老二
lio’k-im 錄音
Liû-sûi 流水
lòng-hì  撞戲
níg  軟
mn’g-kho  二元
o’ah-e  活的
o’ah-hì  活戲
o’h-hi-gin-á  學戲囍仔
ó-phait-á  胡撇仔
pak-lái  腹內
pân-sian  扮仙
pa’t-hi-gin-á  綁戲囍仔
pêng-iú  朋友
phah-phòa-lô  拍破鑼
pián-tiāu-á  變調仔
pòa”  半
Pöe-su-a  倍思
pò-tē-hì  布袋戲
sam-hiàn  三弦
sam-pat  三八
Sam-sian-hōe  三仙會
sa” hun chêng tiu” chhit hun āu tiu”  三分前場七分後場
sa”-hoe  三花
sa”-kho-pōa”  三元
sè  小
se-á  西仔
seng  生
sì-kho  四元
sim khiâ pe’h bé  身騎白馬
sin-tiāu  新調
sió-go’eh  小月
siu-bóe  收尾
Siù”-su-in  相思引
sū sūi  是誰
tah-âng-chóá  thoa  拖
tiān-sī tiāu  電視調
Tī”-tong-bân-a  緊中慢
To-má tiāu  都馬調
tōa  大
tōa-go’eh  大月
tōa”  旦
Appendix C: Song Text Transcriptions

“Bao-dao diao” sung by Hsu Yu-hua (Chapter 3)

(A) Seⁿ chheng hûn göa a göa e miâ
    生就青雲我丫头名
(B) Chôe hâu göa m´ bat khôa tû i a tîa
    最後我無知看對阿爹
(C) Chí ú niû-a cchhin kah göa chi a
    只有娘親及我養啊
(D) Thiaⁿ kâng lâm-iû a chhin-a-e hó gia’h
    聽講男有啊真好額

Seven-syllable tune type sung by Hsu Su-yun and Chiang Su-lan (Chapter 3)

(A) Ya bûn xiang lâng khôai-kîn e siang a kha sî kûi e lo’h a tê
    丫們相人快緊e雙啊腳是跪e落啊地
(B) Ya hi-bâng lô-iâ-e göan-a liông o sî bûn e nn-g lâng e a
    丫希望老爺e原啊諒是們e兩e啊
(C) Ya sui-sê bûn-e nn’g a lâng ú chô chhiau kôe
    丫雖是們e兩啊人有做超過
(D) bûn siang kha e khôai kin kûi e kê ya kê
    們雙腳e快緊跪e低啊低

Duma tune type sung by Hsu Su-yun (Chapter 3)

(A) Ya cha’p kú ni lâi m´ bat ti’t chiap sî lâi khoaⁿ kiâⁿ a
    丫十幾年來無知直接是來看囉啊
(B) Gòa Chiu A-lô ná beh tâg chhû toh tán kah lâi li’t lo’h soaⁿ
    我州阿羅那卻轉處都等嘍來日下山
(C) Gòa chô khít chai’a sî üi beh chhî ya kiâⁿ a
    我做乞食是為要養啊囉啊
(D) Gòa sî k ê thâi bûn kiâⁿ Chheng-hûn e chô toä koaⁿ
    我是期待們囉青雲e做大官
(E) Ya sui sî göa khah sî sê chhin ná pháiⁿ miâ
    丫雖是我確實是真哪歹命
(F) Gòa mah chiū a chin úi khut ya chiū chēn chiat bōa
我麼就真委屈丫就盡折磨
//

(J) I kiò lâng kā gòa phah, phah tit gòa chōan sin thang thiaⁿ,
伊叫人嘎我打、打得我全身通痛
gòa chiah thoa mía̍ tò tīng khit chái’ iâⁿ
我才拖命倒返乞食營