

Entangled Identities: Music and Social Significance of Hsu Shih— A Vanguard of Taiyu Ballads

CS Stone SHIH*

Hsu Shih (許石), who as a young man studied at Tokyo's Nippon Kayo Gakuin (Japanese Ballads Institution)¹, was a long-forgotten figure in pop song history of Taiwan. Being a ballad pioneer of the post-war, Hsu Shih has several aspects of musical career which would be surveyed in this study based on historical documents. Hsu Shih studied at Tokyo for 10 years (1936-1946), under his mentor, Noshō Omura. When he returned to Taiwan, he was an example of the rare singer-songwriter who insisted on songs of original creation during a time when Japanese songs covered in Taiyu were popular. He wrote such songs as “安平追想曲”(Anping Reminiscence) and used symphony skills to promote the status of Taiyu ballads. The key difference between Hsu Shih's music and that of other Taiwanese figures rests on that he could harmonize both folk and academic qualities well.

In the early 1970s, Hsu Shih organized the “台灣若比娜子”(Taiwan the Peanuts), “許氏中國民謠合唱團”(The House of Hsu Troupe) that featured local music genres, Mandarin and Taiyu speakers singing in Japanese and which toured Japan. It was the first musical troupe from Taiwan to tour Japan and as the most popular foreign group of that time in Japan. Although Hsu Shih pioneered post-war Taiwanese and Japanese popular music cultural crossover, he was involved in Cold War-era disputes over the Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese identities. Hsu Shih combined Taiyu ballads and Chinese musical instruments, and led his “Chinese-style” troupe to tour countries to Singapore and Malaysia. Because of his Taiwanese identity, Hsu preferred singing Taiyu. However, he had to exhibit a “Chinese” identity in public and so sang in Mandarin, a political compromise necessary for his career to thrive under martial law. At that time, politically speaking, Taiwan was internationally recognized as the legitimate “China” (the so called “Free China”). To convey his Taiwanese identity, he was forced to publically identify his music as originally from “China”, otherwise he would have lost his mainstream musical appeal. The interweaving of Hsu's contradictory identities took the shape of special social and cultural characteristics that reflected pluralism in his music.

This article does not take it for granted the Taiyu ballads as outcome of “colonial modernity”² -- to explore the modernity, or “re-colonialization”³ of non-western music under colonial rule, i.e. as the consequence of continuous colonization being reflected both in multi-level political phenomena and social experiences. Instead this

* Professor and Chairman of Department of Sociology, Soochow University, Taiwan. cstone@scu.edu.tw

article would base on my past research, the “de-colonial modernity” by following the market mechanism involving a cross-language and cross-cultural collective movement.⁴ The spread of songs inside and outside Taiwan has an intricate link that signifies its multi-center role and changes its subordinate cultural status in East Asia, either under the former perspective of Japanese “imperial circle” or of “Chinese-speaking circle”⁵. We witness Taiyu ballads could become subject and capable of receiving and exporting songs to show its vitality under suppression of the Kuomintang government. Ballad creation by Hsu Shih is a good example of “de-colonial modernity”, though problems of entangled identity remained therein.

Show in Japan

Figure 2-1 shows the cover of Japan’s top entertainment magazine in the 1970s, namely “Show in Japan”, Issue No. 31. It introduces “The House of Hsu Troupe” as follows:

“The House of Hsu Troupe”: The cute Chinese girl group makes its debut in Japan! They are called the Hsu Sisters, and are the first girl band in Japan to perform with Chinese musical instruments. Chinese musical instruments were considered to have incomplete musical scales. But through their excellent performance, the Hsu Sisters demonstrate that their repertoire contains not only Chinese music, but also Japanese music, American music, and practically music from all over the world, which they manage to play through improvements that expand the range of their musical instruments. Although girl bands have become considerably common, a girl band such as theirs that is capable of delivering such brilliant performances by using musical instruments such as suona, yueqin, and others is truly remarkable. Despite their low fluency in Japanese, they sing “Sake wa Namida ka Tameiki ka” (Is wine symbolized as tear or sigh?), “Kage o Shitaite” (Cherishing the memory of your beautiful image), “Yu no Machi Ereji”(The sad song of Yu No Machi), and many other heartbreak songs with such talent that is thoroughly gripping and engaging. Their talent is impressive, which explains their huge fan base in their home country, Taiwan. In addition to Taiyu ballads, they have been able to deliver credible performances of Mandarin songs and English songs with ease. Moreover, their ability to synchronize their breath while singing, which results in seamless cooperation and brings a unique style of singing to their performances, also makes them one of the most promising bands today.

(Show in Japan, 1973)



Figure 2-1 The 1973 edition of the magazine “Show in Japan”. Photo courtesy: Hsu Chao Chin

This band, featured on the cover of the front page of “Show in Japan”, Issue No. 31, was led by the legendary Taiyu ballads master, Hsu Shih. It was formed in 1971 by Hsu and comprised his five daughters. Under his strict tutelage, the girls learned to master classical Chinese musical instruments such as drums, suona, erhu, nanhu, flutes, pipa, and yueqin. When performing on stage, they purposefully dressed in shortened Mandarin gowns, which made them appear as veritable Chinese dolls. The introduction by “Show in Japan” represented the beginning of the golden age of “The House of Hsu Troupe”, which lasted from 1971 to 1984. Other than in Taiwan proper, the troupe was also invited to perform in Japan, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia.

The coverage of the troupe in “The Straits Times” (Singapore) on May 1, 1976, (See Figure 2-2) conveys the troupe’s popularity:

They have played widely in Japan and Taiwan. They are now in Singapore performing at a leading nightclub for 3 months. After Singapore, they will perform in Penang and Japan before returning to Taiwan.

(The Straits Times, 1976)



Figure 2-2 “The Straits Times”: Family folklore troupe ring out the notes together (Monday, March 1, 1976). Photo courtesy: Hsu Chao Chin

The founder of the troupe, Shih Hsu, was born 1919 an ethnic Chinese in Tainan, Taiwan. He showed fondness for folk music at a fairly young age, as evidenced by his frequent attendance for Taiwanese Opera plays in temple festivals. Taiwanese Opera together with classical Chinese music and Taiwanese “流行小曲”(popular Xiaochu, forerunners of Taiyu ballads) set the foundation for his musical cultivation (SHIH and Chi, 2015). In 1936, Hsu studied music at Nippon Kayo Gakuin under famous composers Nōshōq Ōmura, and Yoshida Yasuaki, specializing mainly on theoretical composition and vocal enka. After graduation, Hsu advanced his music research in Tokyo Ongaku Gakko (i.e. Tokyo Music School, predecessor of the present-day Tokyo University of the Arts) under Go Taijiro, an expert on composing symphonies, orchestral and chamber music, piano and chorus songs, and opera as well. Hsu returned to Taiwan in 1946 and started his musical career by constantly composing and performing Taiyu ballads for national tours. In 1952, he founded the China Record Company, first in Taiwan after world War two. Since 1951 Katsuhiko Haida had sung on CBC radio station and Japanese ballads met with great popularity following the formal declaration of Japan's entry into the “愛唱歌時代”(love singing era)⁶. The evolution of radio, television and other cultural industries deliver images and make profits via pop advertising songs. Meanwhile, Taiwan had just passed the February 28 sorrowful incident and longed for also an era of love-singing. However, what we face was the Forbidden Song policy of Kuomintang Government. Even though under quite unfavorable conditions, Hsu Shih insisted and kept his struggle to

create and disseminate Taiyu ballads. Moreover, his passion for Taiwanese folksongs drove him to travel all over the island to collect disappearing rural, tea plantation, aboriginal, and Hakka folksongs and then convert them into symphonies, which greatly enhanced the status of such songs. In 1971, Hsu formed “The House of Hsu Troupe”, which became popular in various countries, such as Japan, Singapore, and Philippines. Throughout his life, Hsu strived to promote Taiyu ballads, until he passed away in 1980.

Hsu’s early experiences in the Nihon Kayou Gakuin and the Tokyo Ongaku Gakko paved the way for the House of Hsu troupe’s performance in Japan in the 1970s. During his studies in Japan, he took up various jobs with active involvement and positive friendship in the Japanese record industry, theaters in Shinjuku, and dancing troupes under Toho Co., Ltd., and his dedicated attitude enabled him to be closely connected with Japanese popular music and entertainment industries. Based on this, in 1968, he was no doubt able to invite the famous Japanese singer Ike Mariko, who worked exclusively for Nippon Columbia Co., Ltd., at that time, to tour most leading nightclubs in Taiwan. Moreover, Ike Mariko not only sang the Japanese version of Hsu’s “安平追想曲”(Anping Reminiscence), she also sang a duet in Japanese with Hsu in Taiwanese, for the play “南都之夜”(Night in the City of Tainan), which created quite a sensation in Taiwan. Thereafter, Hsu’s record company released the play in a gramophone record numbered KLA-003 and titled 池真理子の歌:安平追想曲 (the song of *Ike Mariko: Anping Reminiscence*) as shown in Figure 4. Ike Mariko was certainly not the only top Japanese star who befriended with Hsu, and this reflected also a latent Japanese identity in Hsu’s musical career.



Figure 2-3 Cover art of 池真理子の歌:安平追想曲 (the song of *Ike Mariko: Anping Reminiscence*).

Photo courtesy: Hsu Chao Chin

In addition to Hsu's Japanese connections, his signing with an entertainment agency in Tokyo was another factor that contributed to the success of "The House of Hsu Troupe" in Japan. To initiate his musical career in Japan, where he received his music education, Hsu wrote a business proposal titled "The House of Hsu Show Package" and mailed it to numerous entertainment agencies in search of performing opportunities. Yano Eiji, who worked for a Tokyo-based agency, perceived the potential of the troupe to be stars. Thus, he flew all the way to Taipei to see their show, and after acquiring the contract, styled the troupe with Chinese-style costumes and arranged for photo shoots. After sending publicity photos to major media houses, an interview with the talk show queen Kuroyanagi Tetsuko of the Nippon Television Network Corporation was arranged, which led to the troupe's rise to stardom (SHIH and Chi, 2015). Thus, Hsu's Japanese identity led to the zenith of his musical career.

Song for the Construction of a New Taiwan

However, as a Taiwanese, Hsu was convinced that only the music composed and sung in Taiyu was Taiwan's own music. This was a subjectivity that was deep-rooted in culture. Therefore, after he returned to Taiwan at the completion of his musical studies, he persistently followed Noshō Omura's instruction of "do not always copy Japanese songs; instead, look for Taiwan's own songs." Upon his return, he published the "新臺灣建設之歌"(Song for the Construction of a New Taiwan, later renamed as "Night in the City of Tainan"); although the song was written in Taiyu, the lyrics were so difficult to understand that it failed to gain popularity. Later, the lyrics were modified by Cheng Chih Feng, who was requested to make them more easily understandable, and the song was an instant success in Hsu's first island-wide tour in 1946. It subsequently became the first hit song since Taiwan's retrocession (Hsu, C. C., 2015). Later, Hsu composed more than a hundred songs in Taiyu, including the "夜半路燈"(Street lamp in midnight), "Anping Reminiscence", and "南都三景"(Impression of three historic scenes in Tainan). The Taiwanese identity of Hsu, who persistently composed songs in Taiyu, is visible in his beautiful melodies.



Figure 2-4 Cover of “New Popular Songs in Taiwan: A Selection of Taiwanese Jazz”. Photo courtesy: Hsu Teng Fang.

In 1949, the Taiwanese composer Yang Sang Lang, published a songbook titled “新台灣流行歌:台灣爵士歌選” (New Popular Songs in Taiwan: A Selection of Taiwanese Jazz, see Figure 2-4), which contained 12 of the latest popular songs at that time. Notably, its cover presented a short essay titled “Introduction for the experiences of Hsu Shih”, which stated that:

Mr. Hsu has always been interested in music since a fairly young age ... His work, the Song for the Construction of a New Taiwan, which is also known as “南都之夜” (Night in the City of Tainan), was completed upon his return after Taiwan’s retrocession and was co-published by introducing the performance of the dancer Tsai Jui Yueh, in Tainan. Later, they performed together in the “華麗歌舞團”(Wha Li Troupe) in Taipei and then toured the island several times for promoting Taiwanese musical culture. He has published numerous new works since then.

(New Popular Songs in Taiwan: A Selection of Taiwanese Jazz, 1949)

Tsai Jui Yueh, was a pioneer of modern dance in postwar Taiwan. Although she was once jailed in 1952 owing to political prosecution, she never gave up dancing. Instead, her perseverance and selfless passion drove her to pursue dance, and her graceful dancing style bought consolation and healed the wounds caused by political prosecution. Thus, she was a prominent contributor to the history of Taiwanese Arts (SHIH, 2015). In that era, when Japan was defeated and Taiwan was returned to the “Motherland,” every Taiwanese student returning home from overseas aimed to serve their country by constructing Taiwan into a place worthy of pride. Therefore, Hsu’s

“新臺灣建設之歌”(Song for the Construction of a New Taiwan) was an extremely inspirational title, which caused Tsai to name her play the “New Construction” and to perform with Hsu at the “宮古座”(Miyako Za Theater) in Tainan, which expressed the sentiments of fellow returnees from Japan. Through “Song for the Construction of a New Taiwan”, the pioneer of postwar Taiwanese modern dance crossed paths with Hsu. Figure 2-5 shows a snapshot of Tsai in her “New Construction” performance in 1946, her debut at the “Miyako Za Theater” in Tainan with two other performers, Wang Lian Chih and Cheng Jin Chih, representing the first beautiful event combining Taiyu ballads and modern dance in Taiwan’s postwar history.



Figure 2-5 Tsai’s 新建設 (New Construction) in 1946. Photo courtesy: Hsiao Wuo Ting

Tsai Jui Yueh, like Hsu Shih and other hundreds of students studying at Japan,

desired to go back and devoted herself to motherland Taiwan. Tsai as mother of Taiwan modern dance and Taiyu song composer Hsu Shih have so beautiful an encountering through “Song for the Construction of a New Taiwan”, later renamed as “Night in the city of Tainan”):「 My teacher Tsai always talks about Hsu Shih. She said that she and Hsu performed together at the “Miyako Za Theater” in Tainan, for her dance work“ New Construction” a New Taiwan” and former name of Hsu Shih’s “Night in the city of Tainan “. At that time, students returning to Taiwan from Japan wanted to make contributions by constructing a good Taiwan. Hsu’s song with its title touched many hearts of people. Master Tsai named this dance as the “New Construction” in 1946 to expressed all Taiwanese nostalgia and longing for a new Taiwan after Japanese colonial domination. 」⁷ He is a genuine Taiwanese in essence while being presented with his music.

Hsu Shih was good with comprehensive musical vision, which combines different forms of art, opera, drama and dance for interdisciplinary musical long-structured performances. He could be described as the best one at the early post-war era. In October 10, 1964, during the National Day Celebration, Hsu delivered a solo concert entitled “台灣鄉土交響曲 作品發表演奏會” (Taiwan Folk Symphony Performances) at the Taipei International Studies Hall. Live recordings were made by his own King’s album company, using oboe, crying tone and aboriginal Amis melodies. The symphony associated various social imagination, interpreting the harmonious life characteristic of all ethnic groups in Taiwan and displayed Hsu's musical talents. This symphony with epical structure and its evolution technique clearly related to his training at the Tokyo's Nippon Kayo Gakuin under the mentor, Noshō Omura and his further studies at “Tokyo Music School” with Professor Go Tai Jiro, an expert of academic composer on symphony creation. Perhaps the key musical difference between Hsu Shih and other composers of Taiyu ballads rests on that he is excellent both at popular and academic genres.

In addition to the creation of new Taiyu songs and publication of the album *台灣鄉土民謠全集第一集* (Folk songs of Taiwan Volume I, see Figure 2-6), Hsu took the role of preserving foresaid songs as his own responsibility. On October 10, 1964, the “United Daily News” featured his interview mentioning that he was alarmed by the negligence of folk songs in Taiwan's contemporary music industry; thus, he set out to travel through the island trying hard to record those disappearing or misrepresented folk songs so as to save and restore them to their original state by rigorous research and revision. During past decade, he had visited most corners of the island and collected near 300 native folk songs. Regarding his collection, he said that:

Hakka folk songs are mostly set in the backdrop of tea plantations and mountains,

whereas Hoklo folk songs depicting rural sceneries. “白字戲” (Baizi opera), including “南管” (Nanguan) music instrument and some Taiwanese Opera tunes, is richest in Taiyu rural flavor. Besides, Aboriginal folk songs could mainly be emotionally provoking tunes.

(United Daily News, 1964)

Hsu's ideal was to rekindle Taiwanese passion for such nearly forgotten folk songs



Figure 2-6 Cover art of the record 台灣鄉土民謠全集第一集 (Folk songs of Taiwan Volume I) released by the King Record Company. Photo courtesy: Hsu Chao Chin

Developing Taiwanese Identity through “cultural China”

After returning from Japan, Hsu strived to promote Taiyu ballads by organizing numerous concerts. However, the martial law was enforced by nationalist government almost the same time tending to marginalize popular Taiyu ballads through strict bans. And the government also assumed a defensive, even hostile attitude toward Japan, which not only colonized Taiwan before the war but also severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1972. The government adopted even an oppositional attitude toward Communist China, perceived as an arch-enemy. And this regime, i.e. Republic of

China, considered itself as “Free China” to be distinguished with Red Communist China. Moreover, this Free China considered itself as the legitimate or orthodox government of China as to form one center of the West Pacific Anti-Communism Circle, which includes United States, Japan, Taiwan (Free China), and Philippines, wherein Taiwan represented an “unsinkable warship.” However, this legitimacy was gradually lost with the expulsion of Taiwan from the United Nations in 1971 and the effectuation of diplomatic relations between Communist China and the United States, Taiwan’s former greatest ally, in 1979.

Comparing to Hong Yi Feng and Wen Xia, other two famous Taiyu ballads figures, Hsu Shih's Chinese identity is more akin to the Kuomintang government and its ideology. In 1972, before Taiwan and the United States ended diplomatic relationship, Hong Yi Feng left Taiwan for Japan's career owing to the censorial ban on two of his Taiyu songs sung. Wen Xia and Hong Yi Feng both took part in the prime-time filming and served as the leading role of the Taiyu films in the 1960s-1970s. They were very popular through Taiwan's “on stage” tours—singing major theme songs during mid time of the movie. However, one of Wen Xia's Japanese adapted Taiyu ballads was also banned on grounds of its lack of “national righteousness” by the Kuomintang government which is tied with Chinese complex at that moment. Therefore, the inclusion of slogans such as “Free China” on Hsu Shih's musical performance and his good relationship with the Kuomintang government and military force are unimaginable for other prominent Taiyu ballads figures in Taiwan during the 1950s-1960s. Compared with the direct rejection of “Chinese identity” by Hong Yi Feng and Wen Xia, Hsu Shih's “Chinese identity” is undeniably a reality out of more expedient causes.

Considering the political scenario in the era between 1950 and 1970, I believe that Hsu might probably be the first postwar leading singer conscious of the distinction between “cultural” and “political” China. Hsu published an article “The Neglected Folk songs” in “China Times”, stating that:

Taiwanese folksongs, which came from the mainland to Taiwan three hundred years ago with troops of “鄭成功” (Koxinga), are cultural heritages passed down by our ancestors..... Now, Taiwan has been returned to the motherland after 8 years of war against Japan, I urge our government to promote Taiwanese folksongs, in an effort to elevate our national spirit and traditional culture....

(China Times, 1966)

The statement above clearly indicates that Hsu’s deep sentiments toward folksongs originated from his identification with “cultural China”, thus constituted a crucial undertone in his music reverberating some complicated “Chinese identity”. Further proof

could be found in his program of the concert “中國各省民謠演唱會” (Folksongs from Various Provinces of China) he organized in 1968 (See Figure 2-7); this program contained 26 folk songs from various provinces of China, including Taiwan, Fujian, Guanxi, Guizhou, Xinjiang, Yunnan, Gansu, Sichuan, Qinghai, and even Tibet. And it implies that Hsu's idea of folk songs could never be limited merely to Taiwan, but might include those provinces from all over the cultural China up to his mind.



Figure 2-7 Program of “the Folk songs of China concert”. Photo courtesy: Hsu Chao Chin

Hsu did not truly identify himself with “political China”; instead, he assumed a functional, or rather, expedient attitude. At the summit of his career, Taiwan was gradually losing its legitimacy as the orthodox government of China. But conscious of its more local identity (i.e. Taiwanese) was still lacking among the general public. Therefore, the rejection of identifying with China was in practice not an option for artists who wanted to perform overseas, and neither could it be helpful to the box office. In an interview with the “United Daily News” in 1974, Hsu made his opinion quite clear by stating that:

Entertainment groups performing overseas must rely on the Chinese flavor to attract audience. At the same time, our traditional arts also help us promote Chinese culture and achieve nongovernmental cultural exchanges.

(United Daily News, 1974)

What Hsu could only do then was separate his musical career from politics. In his shows, he mixed Taiyu ballads with Mandarin songs and other languages; he used Mandarin songs, which represented “cultural China,” as a bridge to export his

“Taiwanese identity,” through which he also reached the zenith of his career. “Free China” was Taiwan, and in order for him to showcase his Taiwanese identity, he had to identify himself with his Chinese origin. In this manner, “The House of Hsu Troupe” became a musical adaptation of his culturally Chinese upbringing to the political realities, and this approach resulted in the troupe’s success on stage. In the end, his efforts in collecting native folk songs and composing nearly a hundred new songs greatly contributed to keeping Taiyu ballads relevant and popular in Taiwan, despite the “Free China” ideology of the Kuomintang government, which largely focused on reclaiming China proper.

However, the success of “The House of Hsu Troupe” cannot be attributed to the cultural China elements in their instruments and costume alone; what I called “the medley mixed-blood songs”⁸ in their performances constituted also a great part of their charm. When they toured the nightclubs all over Japan, they would sing Showa-period songs, Taiyu ballads, and Mandarin songs together with other popular songs from all over the world, which they attempted to sing either in Taiyu or Mandarin. One program list of “The House of Hsu Show Package” revealed its abundance in cultural diversity, Taiwanese characteristics and cover versions or remakes of existing foreign songs. Examples include (1) Popular Japanese songs from postwar Showa-period, such as “Gekka no Kokyu” (Kokyu in the moonlight), “Uramachi Jinsei” (Life in Uramachi), “Tabikasa Douchuu” (Wanderer with conical bamboo hat), and “Soshu Yakyoku” (Nocturne in Suzhou); (2) Taiyu ballads, such as “雨夜花” (The torment of a flower), “三聲無奈” (Three sighs of despair), and “卜卦調” (The divination tune); (3) Taiwanese aboriginal songs, such as “高山青” (Green mountain), “我還是永遠的愛著你” (I will love you forever), and “烏來追情曲” (Love recollection in Wulai); (4) Mandarin songs, such as “太湖船” (Taihu boat), “往事只能回味” (Past events are only for remembrance), and “梨山痴情花” (An obsessed girl in Lishan); (5) Western songs, including “Five Hundred Miles from Home” and “Tennessee Waltz” ; and (6) songs taken from musicals.

Through “the medley mixed-blood songs” strategy, Hsu demonstrated to the world that Taiwanese people could perform various types of songs. Popular songs in Taiwan between the 1950s and 1970s were not only remakes from Japanese songs but also from countries or regions related to Taiwan’s geopolitics, such as the United States, Shanghai, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Indonesia. Moreover, some songs even transformed into multiple languages. I term these songs as “the medley mixed-blood songs” because “there were not only Japanese, or Mandarin, or American songs remade into Taiyu but also songs that had multiple sets of lyrics in different local dialects, such as Hakka and aboriginal languages, and somehow, these

songs spread from Taiwan to Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, Japan, and the United States, resulting in a wondrous mixture of international and interregional music.” (SHIH, 2014:237) Overall, “the medley mixed-blood songs” exhibited two characteristics: 1)The “nodes” for the reception and propagation of music and 2)the international and interregional “covering” of music. If Taiyu ballads could be likened to a pendulum, such “the medley mixed-blood songs” would be at one extreme of its trajectory (the other being “民族音樂”(national music)); they were created not for “originality” or “orthodox” but for market demands. As a result, remaking foreign songs in Taiyu was accompanied with the market demand for Taiyu films: they indicated Taiyu was in vogue at the time. Hence, they were created out of demands from the mainstream consumer market. Such phenomena demonstrated also the “de-colonial modernity” following the market mechanism and involving a cross-language and cross-cultural collective movement.

Conclusion

From an overview, we have found Taiyu ballads were either officially derogated as a whole by the Kuomintang government or were manipulated therein to tame intellectuals whether deliberately or not to make Taiwan's ballads split into two types of “national music” and “mixed-blood songs”, and eventually being replaced by “Mandarin pop songs” and “campus folk songs” during the early post-war 1950s up to 1980s.

The “national music”, which represents the official mainstream, was actually initiated by Hsu Shih, a composer returning from Tokyo in 1946. His “Night in the City of Tainan” concert tour was not taken seriously by mainstream since the orthodox “national music” emphasizes songs of “canonical source”, i.e. “自然民謠”(natural folk songs) from Qing Dynasty or the Taiyu ballads based on the “cultural China” ideology, which are collectively referred to as “national music” or “folk songs”. They must correspond to the government's official ideology which dominates genres of popular songs under the Mandarin-centered language policy.

Hsu's “Chinese identity” is manifested in a kind of musical transformation under the early post-war political reality. “China” remains in Taiwan. To show Hsu's Taiwanese identity he must identify himself as a Chinese. For him, Taiyu ballads are one of the justified answers to his Japanese mentor Nosho Omura’s question. Taiwanese identity is thus a deeply rooted subject of Hsu Shih. Hsu's music collection of folk songs and his creative original songs near hundred have made Taiyu ballads keep their breath and historical visibility under the Mandarin-centered ideology of the Kuomintang government

Another Taiyu ballads track after the war was the “the medley mixed-blood songs”. In particular, Japanese songs were translated into Chinese and sung in Taiyu. The critics Huang Guo Long (1983) and Zhuang Yong Ming (1983) thought that “Taiyu popular songs” after the 1950s came out with a trend of plagiarizing Japanese songs. Record companies issued a large number of unhealthy songs that appropriate Japanese songs into Taiwanese ones. Huang and Zhuang emphasized and asserted the importance that Taiwanese should sing and compose songs by themselves. “The medley mixed-blood songs” constitute thus the other extreme side of the same pendulum from that of the “national songs”, but they have based not on some canonical source but rather on the consumption of the market, that is, the “Japanese songs singing in Taiyu” as prevalent in music producing and adopted in Taiyu films for various market demands. The de-colonial modernity is a market-centered world. Taiyu ballads as one form of modern songs become the mainstream consuming genre of pop music. Hsu expressed his dissatisfaction with current “the medley mixed-blood songs” and emphasized the significance of creating original songs. However, Hsu himself took a similar road when going abroad for performances, but it had different meanings. From the perspective of “the medley mixed-blood songs”, I suggested Hsu Shih’s songs of foreign mixture show that he has the ability of singing in representative of Taiwan.

The motherland of Taiwan is China. But in contrast with musical groups of Communist China in the 1960s, one in new trend from “Free China” (Taiwan), the “Taiwan the Peanuts”, led by Hsu Shih and his expanded “The House of Hsu Troupe” had its prime-time Japanese performances in the 1970s and early 1980s. Chinese, Taiwanese and Japanese identities were tightly entangled. This is exactly characteristic of the Taiyu “medley mixed-blood songs”. Through friendly connections established by Hsu during his studies in Japan and his indomitable spirit of hard rock, he turned over some Japanese stereotype thinking that Taiwan's music lags behind that of Japan's for one decade and made Taiwan the nodal place capable of receiving world music with further communications. With Chinese style of musical instruments and costume stage effects, as well as cross-cultural transliteration of Taiyu ballads, Hsu could make his cross-border performances exporting to Japan, Singapore and Malaysia.

As the pioneer of postwar Taiyu ballads, Hsu, Shih established his status as a major contributor to the history of Taiwanese music through his innovative folk songs collection, nearly a hundred new creations, and the performances of “The House of Hsu Troupe”. By emphasizing the preservation and continuation of Taiyu ballads and the incorporation and conversion of foreign music, he ensured the diversity and adaptiveness of Taiwanese music. With entangled identities, Hsu Shih was no doubt

the vanguard of Taiyu ballads.

Notes

- ¹ Nihon Kayou Gakuin (the Japan Academy of Songs): The school system has two types: “school-learning group” and “correspondence education group”. Before world war II, some Taiwanese went to Japan to attend the “school-learning group”, such as well-known Taiwanese composers and singers Wu Jin-huai (enrolled in 1933) and Hsu Shih (admitted in 1936). See: CS Stone SHIH (2016:118).
- ² The detail of this concept can be read on Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (1999).
- ³ This concept comes from Chen Peifeng (2008).
- ⁴ The discussion refers to SHIH, Stone CS (2014:264).
- ⁵ This concept comes from KISHI Toshihiko (2013:11-12).
- ⁶ Nobuo Komota (etc.), Japanese Popular Music History, 1938-1959, New Version. P.92, Tokyo: Social Thought Publishing House, 1994.
- ⁷ Based on the author’s interview on master Tsai Rui Yue’s daughter-in-law Xiao Wo Ting. April 16, 2015 am 10-12, Taipei, Rose Monuments: Tsai Rui Yue Dance Club.
- ⁸ Further discussion on the concept of medley mixed blood songs, see SHIH, Stone CS, 2016. “Ballads, Popular Song Collections and Magazines Circulation - The Influence of Cultural Transcendence of Nakano Tadaharu and Nihon Kayou Gakuin on the Early Days of the War.” p.118, LIN Chu-mei · Jun Shozawa (eds.), Japan in Taiwanese Memory - Construction of a New Image by "Reunion" after the War, 2016. Tokyo: Sangensha.

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