

The Politics and Aesthetics of Chinese Drama (*Huajyu*) in Taiwan

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A new drama genre, *Huajyu* (Chinese Drama), emerged at the end of 2011 that was touted as the flagship for Taiwan's future drama production. With the TV industry supporting and promoting the media hype, suddenly Chinese Drama replaced idol drama¹ as the "national drama" and was considered best equipped to compete with Korean dramas. This essay aims to investigate the conditions of possibilities that give rise to this cultural form as well as the politics of its aesthetics.

Chinese Drama's rise to visibility needs to be situated within the dynamics of the interweaving of global, regional, and local forces, condensed in the cultural-economic concept of the "Chinese language market." As a product of global capital expansion through regionalization,

1. Idol drama is a genre that emerged in 2000, beginning with the hit *Meteor Garden*, based on a script from Japanese comics. It is the product of Taiwanese localization of Japan's "trendy drama." This genre is defined as having idols (beautiful actors and actresses), urban romance, and placement ads. It is seen as having the capacity to generate foreign revenue. Before the launch of Chinese Drama, San-li station was the "kingdom of idol drama," as it produced the largest number of idol dramas in Taiwan.

the Chinese language market helped to sustain the hegemony of “traditional Chinese culture,” an invented tradition used to support the authoritarian Kuomintang (KMT) regime, at the time when Taiwan was undergoing democratization and decolonization. Chinese Drama, a new genre produced for the Chinese language market (with China as the center), while rhetorically legitimized through Taiwanese economic nationalism, has to negotiate the divisions between Chineseness and Taiwanese-ness aesthetically, expressed through “traditional Chinese culture” and “Taiwanese multicultural reality.” Using the first Chinese Drama production, *Inborn Pair*, as an example, this essay argues that the aesthetic transaction narrates Chinese traditional culture in ways that appeal to the imperialist gaze, while multicultural reality is presented in ways that reproduce the ethnic hierarchy and maintains the privileged status of Chineseness in Taiwan. The reprivileging of Chineseness operates through the commodification of Taiwanese-ness as ethnicity, and thus as difference, in the age of globalization, which works to the advantage of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the KMT’s goal for unification.

The first part of this essay discusses the notion of visibility through the works of Rey Chow, Jacques Rancière, and Kara Keeling. The second part employs the theoretical lens of the epistemic sense of visibility to investigate the conditions of possibilities that give rise to Chinese Drama. The third part looks into the aesthetics of Chinese Drama by first tracing the historicity of *hsiaochingsin* sentimentalism (a concept to be discussed later), followed by an investigation of how traditional Chinese culture and Taiwanese multicultural reality are narrated and negotiated. The essay concludes with a discussion on the production and commodification of ethnicity as difference.

The Politics of Visibility

In thinking about visibility, Rey Chow uses Gilles Deleuze to argue for a methodology that takes into account not only the visible object but also the invisible, the “forms of luminosity which are created by the light itself and allow a thing or object to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer” (Deleuze 1988: 52, quoted in Chow 2007: 11). What is emphasized in Rey Chow’s (and Deleuze’s) account is this: visibilities cannot not be confused with an object or image or thing that is visible or perceptible. Visibilities are “not defined by sight but are complexes of actions and passions, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes, which emerge into the

light of day” (11). It is these complexes of “the epistemic sense of visibility” or “a visibility of visibility” that Chow proposes to theorize as the conditions of possibilities of complexes of passions, actions, and reactions. The concept of visibility describes the “forms of luminosity” as “a visibility that is the condition of possibility for what becomes visible, that may derive a certain intelligibility from the latter but cannot be simply reduced to it. It is to this other, epistemic sense of visibility—of visibility as the structuration of knowability” (11).

If visibilities can be conceptualized as the conditions of possibilities that define how we visualize the world, becoming visible becomes a project of “discursive reconfiguration of the relations between center and margin” (11). Participating in visibility is about engaging with changing power relations (conditions of possibilities) that structure existing relations of visibility and invisibility. This reading of visibility can be read in conjunction with Rancière’s take on visibility.

Rancière uses the term *the distribution of the sensible* to describe the relationship between aesthetics and art, police and politics, the visible and the invisible. The distribution of the sensible is “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (Rancière 2004: 7). Visibilities, as what constitutes the distribution of the sensible, are historically constituted and shared within a community. Aesthetic practices are central to the shaping of visibilities within a community in that it is “the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience” (8). Aesthetic practices designate our place within a community and exclude others from the standpoint of a community.

Images, in particular, televisual or cinematic images, are central to aesthetic practices in the present due to the advances and spread of visual technologies worldwide. The notion of aesthetics as a historically constituted sense of visibility can be read in conjunction with Keeling’s notion of the cinematic, borrowed from Deleuze. In Keeling’s formulation, the cinematic (or in this case, the televisual) refers to “a conceptual framework made perceptible or visible by the development of cinema [or television]. . . . I employ the substantive *the cinematic* to designate a condition of existence, or a reality, produced and reproduced by and within the regimes of the image” (Keeling 2007: 3). The cinematic relies on clichés for its reproduction of images as realities. Clichés are a type of common sense and can be understood as “a common memory-image directed onto a percep-

tion prepared according to a common sensory-motor schemata” (14). Clichés allow us to see and make sense of reality in a particular way through repeated invocations of memory-image. As Keeling points out, “Clichés will come to predominate perceptions under conditions wherein one’s set of memory-images is already a set of clichés or, speaking more broadly, when that set consists of collective images, experiences, traditions, knowledges, and so on, and when the bodily habituation that determines perception has been made common through ‘affectivity’” (12).

Aesthetics, as “the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience,” is about the production and reproduction of commonsense images, and, thus, they define our place within a community. Politics, however, is about making common sense intelligible, hence subverting our place made natural and perceptible by this visual regime. “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière 2004: 8). In other words, politics is about intervention into the relationship between the visible and the invisible, the center and the margin. It is about asking “how vision is structured, and . . . how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and speak in the world” (Hammonds 1994; quoted in Keeling 2007: 11). The politics of (aesthetic) visibility is about the politics of subject constitution.

This essay approaches the recent visibility of Chinese Drama through the two aspects of visibility that Chow, Rancière, and Keeling explicate: the epistemic sense of visibility and the aesthetic sense of visibility. The epistemic sense of visibility allows us to investigate the conditions of possibilities, in particular, the intertwining forces of globalization, regionalization, and localization, that give rise to the visibility of this new genre. The aesthetic sense of visibility enables us to look into the historicity of commonsense images—that is, the shared experiences, collective images, traditions, and knowledge that constitute “the cinematic” (or the televisual), which gives us a place within a community. In thinking about the politics of visibility through aesthetic practices, this essay dives into the history of aesthetic forms in Chinese Drama in order to highlight the visibility of “national” aesthetics as not only historically constituted but constituted through struggles over power and dominance. The purpose of this essay is to engage in politics, defined in Rancière’s term as disturbing the existing distribution of the sensible by making clear the power relationships involved in our commonsense images. In doing so, this essay wishes to disturb and

subvert the dominance of Chineseness (*hua*, or *zhonghuaxing*) in cultural productions in Taiwan.

The Epistemic Sense of Visibility as Conditions of Possibilities

Global Greater China Discourse and the Chinese Language Market

The birth of the Chinese Drama genre and its legitimacy is predicated on the commonsense notion of “the Chinese language market” and, thus, is touted as the drama genre best equipped to create competition between the Chinese Wave (*Hualiu*) and the Korean Wave. The Chinese language market (*huayu shichang*) has regulated most cultural production since its emergence in the early 1990s and has become a hegemonic concept guiding Taiwan’s cultural policies since the 2000s. This section investigates the conditions of possibilities that gave rise to the emergence as well as the dominance of the Chinese language market, including the rise of China and globalization, technological change, and democratic/ethnic struggles.

First, as David Shambaugh points out, one of the new realities characterizing the post-cold war world map was the emergence of “Greater China,” a concept that subsumes three distinct but related political, economic, and cultural processes (Shambaugh 1993; Harding 1993). The globalization of the world economies and the opening up of China in the late 1970s marked a significant chapter in the formation of this “region.” The most common theme about Greater China was the economic integration of the transnational Chinese community. It was first referenced in the June 1979 issue of a Taiwanese journal, *Changqiao (Long Bridge)*, which advocated the creation of a “Chinese Common Market” that would link Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and China (Harding 1993). Economic integration is said to be facilitated by the cultural ties among these Chinese societies, which share “common culture, a common language, family ties and ancestral roots,” and all these make it “easier for Chinese to do business with one another than to engage in commercial relations with foreigners” (Harding 1993: 665). Politically, both Taiwan and China’s governments were deeply involved in promoting and guiding the commercial ties among their economies for different reasons. For China, economic interaction was viewed as a way of facilitating the eventual political reunification of China; for Taiwan, it was a way to earn money and forestall independence (Harding 1993).

Second, the cultural and economic integration of Greater China gave rise to the Chinese language market, which was also made possible

by technological changes. The term came about in 1992, when China successfully launched a satellite (Asia Satellite No. 1) and sold one of its channels to Hong Kong to set up Star Chinese Channel. The establishment of this satellite TV station was hailed as the beginning of “a brand new era with sight and sound” in that it not only had the potential to “eliminate geographic obstacles and penetrate national sovereignties” but also created a “Chinese global village,” a community formed through “watching the same television together” by “the Chinese, who belong to different nationals (sovereignties).” In this utopian imagination about Greater China, “the Chinese language programs would occupy a significant position in Asia,” displacing or replacing the centrality of American, European, and Japanese programs (Ku et al. 1992: 40).

Star Chinese Channel’s mission was to create a future Chinese community by “devoting itself to cultivate a demand for Chinese programs to all the Chinese in the pan-Asian area and gather all the best Chinese programs for the Chinese in Asia” (41). However, the reality of political restrictions and linguistic differences within the “Chinese” community posed a great challenge to these multinational corporations’ dreams of integration. The strategy to eliminate these obstacles was to avoid politics and focus on entertainment. As Chen Chi-yeh, the general manager of Video Land (Weilai) TV and the Chinese Satellite TV in Taiwan, said at the time, “There is no need to give it too much social and cultural responsibility. Satellite TV should develop according to human nature and needs. . . . The programs will be based on everyday life entertainment” (42). In this multinational corporation’s expansionist dream, Taiwan was positioned as “the stepping stone to China’s market” (Wu and Ku 1994: 18) as well as “the production center for Chinese language programs in the world in the future” due to its “capital, techniques, and talents” (Ku et al. 1992: 45).

Third, this globalization through regionalization discourse on Greater China “from above” was adopted in Taiwan as a strategy for struggles over ethnic dominance in television production at a time when Taiwan underwent democratization. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Taiwan embarked on the twin processes of democratization and neoliberal globalization, while at the same time, it began a new stage of opening up to China. In media policy terms, this meant the lifting of Mandarin-only language restrictions (in 1993) to allow for *Tâi-gí*² production, media deregula-

2. In Taiwan, a significant part of the struggle over democracy takes place in the domain of language. *Tâi-gí*, also known as *Taiyu* in Mandarin or *Taiwanese* or *Minnanhua*, was

tion (the establishment of the fourth network [FTV], and the legalization of cable TV in 1994), and the beginning of television coproduction with China. Before that, television was part of the ideological state apparatus for the KMT party state, and the television industry was structured according to “patron-client dependency,” with capitalists conforming to the KMT’s ideological demand in return for having a share in the industry. This industrial structure allowed the KMT Mainlander elite to control TV production. As democratization challenged the hegemony of Mandarin and the KMT monopoly over the industry, a new genre, *Hsiangtu* (rural and earthy) Drama,³ produced by FTV, emerged, featuring “everyday life in Taiwan,” in particular, that of mother- and daughter-in-law relationships. As this genre used *Tâi-gí* as its primary language and was immensely popular among women, the Mainlander elites in the entertainment industry felt threatened and used the global Greater China discourse to denigrate *Hsiangtu* Drama (Yang 2015).

In this discourse, the Mainlander producers and directors constructed *Hsiangtu* Drama for “elementary school level audiences,” and as such it was too local and too small-minded to reach international audiences. The chief manager of Chinese Television System (CTS), in an internal policy meeting, stated, “Media business should aim at more trendy topics and international markets, not to serve elementary-school level audiences” (Chen 1997: 12). Those “new shows which have begun to move forward to seriously consider the Chinese language market” (12) are cele-

designated as a dialect and banned during the KMT authoritarian regime. However, as many linguists assert, the difference between a language and a dialect is ideological and political, not linguistic (Klötter 2009). I use the term *Tâi-gí* for several reasons. First, it is a language of resistance/decolonization against the KMT’s privileging of Mandarin. Second, the term marks the boundary between China and Taiwan as well as other regional dialects (as opposed to the use of Hokkien in that *Tâi-gí* is much influenced by Japanese). Third, some people call *Tâi-gí* Taiwanese, but this term might obscure other languages, such as Hakka. The use of *Tâi-gí* or *Taiyu* acknowledges the multilingual environment in Taiwan and does not claim dominance. *Taiyu*, however, is a Mandarin term; hence, I choose to use *Tâi-gí* as it is pronounced as such in *Tâi-gí*.

3. *Hsiangtu* Drama, literally translated as “rural and earthy drama,” features *Tâi-gí* as its primary language. However, since the 2000s, the term *Bentu* Drama has replaced *Hsiangtu* Drama because it is seen as less derogatory. Both refer to serial TV dramas that feature *Tâi-gí* as the primary language, even though the content and format have evolved to adapt to the changing times. Since the 2000s, *Bentu* Drama has become more “modern,” in the sense that it deals with love and power struggles in the family, the business world, and in politics, while *Hsiangtu* Drama refers to those dealing primarily with mother- and daughter-in-law relationships.

brated as having the vision to leave Taiwan's small, local audience behind and develop international markets.

Since the 2000s, the Chinese language market has gained hegemony due to two factors. First, the entanglement of neoliberalization and democratization has led to democratization without the corresponding transitional justice in Taiwan. In the TV industry, the dominance of the KMT Waisheng/Mainlander elites was never addressed or reformed and was complicated by the privatization of the industry, which led to the penetration of China's influences through capital investment, with these elites playing a major role in this process. Media industries that promoted pro-China agendas were financially supported by the Chinese state, leading to the formation of a new patron-client dependency between pro-China capitalists and the Chinese state (Hut 2013). Second, with the regime's loss in 2000, the KMT officially took up the strategy of "Allying with Communist China to Fight against the Pro-Independence DPP Party" (*liangong zhi taidu*) in 2006. The support of China in winning presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 meant that a significant part of the KMT's agenda was to promote economic and cultural integration with China, resulting in the revisibility of "traditional Chinese culture" in education and media.

Culture played an important role in this process. The Chinese state, the KMT state, and cross-strait capitalists promulgated a cultural-economic concept of the "Chinese language market" for political purposes. In this discourse, what bound China and Taiwan is Chinese culture: "Taiwan's strength is its Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics. It is its best niche in the world" due to its more sophisticated and advanced media industry (Ma 2010). Proponents of this view in Taiwan were mostly Mainlanders who occupied significant positions in the creative industries in Taiwan (such as Wang Wei-chong) and political positions (such as Long Ying-tai, the minister of culture in Taiwan) (Yang 2015). As a discourse of power, the concept of the Chinese language market gained hegemony and laid the groundwork for the articulation of the "Chinese Wave."

The Birth of the "Chinese Wave" and Chinese Drama

If the Greater China and Chinese language market are discourses of globalization via regionalization that aim to cross national borders, the Chinese Wave is the product of the internal contradictions of global capitalism in that it is predicated on economic nationalism (Harvey 2005). However, what is ironic about the term *Chinese Wave* is that it is embedded in the politics of imperialist gaze, which, in turn, is taken as the self-identity of the

colonized. It was first coined by the Japanese, who viewed its ex-colony's television drama *Meteor Garden* through the lens of nostalgia. Through nostalgia, Taiwan was positioned in the past as “unsophisticated, naïve, innocent, backward,” while the Japanese fans saw themselves as living in the present modern time. The popularity of *Meteor Garden* was constructed by the Japanese as the beginning of the Chinese Wave (*Hualiu*), which had the potential to compete with the Korean Wave (Chou 2012).

The term *Hualiu* was taken up by Taiwan's media industry as a placeholder for the desire for capital through regional expansion, even though the term *Chinese* (*zhonghua* or *hua*) stimulated different debates and interpretations due to Taiwan's conflicts over national identities. The initial claim of *Tai-liu* (Taiwan wave) over *Hualiu* by the pro-independence newspaper *Liberty Times* soon gave way to “Chinese Wave” as the Chinese Language market gained authority. However, there are two interpretations of the Hua/Chinese, based on two different economic nationalisms. The first interpretation is promoted primarily by the Mainlander elites in Taiwan and cultural producers from China, with the institutional support of the Taipei City government under Hao, Long-bin's administration.⁴ In this discourse, culture is the instrument for political unification, but this is legitimized through economics. What is promoted is “cultural consensus” (*wenhua gongshi*),⁵ which can be achieved through coproduction, with an emphasis on traditional Chinese culture, as it is the shared consensus and heritage across the strait. Central to this discourse is the notion that market is power, and China's market is the foundation of the Chinese Wave. The Taiwanese are best equipped to work with the Chinese through coproduction in developing creative industries, not only because they share with the Chinese the same culture/language and blood/race (*tongwen tongzhong*) but also because they are creative (Chen and Shao 2014).

The second discourse shares with the first discourse the neoliberal notion of culture as economic resource and China as the primary market for the Chinese Wave. But what is different is that it does not claim unifica-

4. This discourse is promoted by the Taiwan Cultural and Creative Industry Association, which aims to “create a platform for the creative industries to work toward mutual benefits” between Taiwan and China. One of the founders is Li Yong-ping, ex-vice mayor of Taipei City. The aim of this association is to provide policy advice for the government. Accessed January 20, 2015. <http://tccanet.org.tw/tcca-intro.html>.

5. The concept of cultural consensus is promoted by Shao Yu-ming, a Mainlander elite who served as the director for the Information Bureau during the authoritarian regime. He is now the general manager in charge of the National Public Television station.

tion but operates through Taiwanese economic nationalism, even though this “Taiwaneseness” is conflated with “Chineseness” as a result of the KMT’s Chinese nation-building. In this discourse, Taiwan’s competitiveness in developing creative industries lies in its unique cultural heritage: multiculturalism centered in Chineseness and Chinese language. “Taiwan has multicultural elements. Its culture is influenced by Japan, Holland, and America but the primary cultural gene is Chinese culture DNA. Chinese culture is recreated in Taiwan” (Wu and Hung 2003: 133). “Taiwan’s sensitivity to Chinese language is leading the trend, it is better than HK and Singapore.” As such, “for Mainland China, Taiwan is a model student of Western culture, for the West, Taiwan is the spokesperson for Chinese culture” (133). The histories of colonization or domination are rewritten in a way that is emptied of exploitation, struggle, injustice, and the shedding of sweat and blood, but filled with the halo of “multiculturalism,” which then gets turned into economic competitiveness. This “Taiwanese” economic nationalism expressed through cultural production aims to compete not only with the Chinese but also the Japanese and, in particular, the Koreans (Yi 2014).

The central figure in articulating the Chinese Wave dream and putting it into practice is Chang Rong-hua, San-li TV station’s manager, who embraces the second discourse. Chang launched a “Chinese Wave project” in 2011, aiming to use Chinese Drama to create the Chinese Wave: “San-li hopes to use Chinese Drama to trigger the Chinese Wave cultural phenomenon and export Taiwan’s culture and lifestyle in order to position Taiwan in the lead. Faced with the large number of Korean dramas which make up the core of the Korean Wave worldwide, Chang said, you need quantity in order to make trends, you can’t just have quality, quantity matters” (Cheng 2012: 9).

However, to make the Chinese Wave in the context of Taiwan means to shed oneself of one’s mother tongue and culture. As the Mainlander elites won the battle in hegemonizing the Greater China discourse through the neoliberal rhetoric of “internationalization,” Chang had to denounce his ethnic origin in order to reach the privileged signifier of Chineseness, now cloaked as the Chinese language market. According to the interview in *Business Weekly*, Chang established the San-li TV station in 2004 and used “restaurant shows”⁶ to gain a foothold in the TV industry. “Moving

6. “Restaurant shows” (*Chanting* shows) refers to a genre of live variety shows performed in restaurants. With the invention of video technology, San-li station also distributes this genre in VCD format. The shows aired on television from 1985 to the 1990s. This genre is

to Taipei and meeting those elites from the political and business world, Chang realized the ‘vulgarity’ of his shows.” Moreover, “for a country bumpkin like Chang Rong-hua, to make San-li into the mainstream is like eating French food for the first time. He takes a peek at other people for proper table manners and imitates them. Of course, he will receive contemptuous looks from them.” To eradicate the stigma and improve his status, he canceled these shows in order to establish San-li as the “Kingdom of idol dramas,” a drama genre that features Mandarin and is a better-quality production than Hsiangtu Drama because of its ability to reach the overseas market (Lin 2010). The second move was to “upgrade” idol drama production to Chinese Drama production. This was considered to be “making progress for the station.” However, as the aim of Chinese Drama was to reach China’s market, Chang had to cancel a popular political talk show (*dahuasinwen*) that was critical of the KMT and the CCP; the Chinese state considered such criticism the main obstacle in reaching China (Sun 2012).

In mapping out the conditions of possibilities that make Chinese Drama visible in this particular historical conjuncture, I emphasize how the global(ization) discourse of Greater China is appropriated locally for domination. If the Greater China discourse, as Harding states, subsumes political, economic, and cultural dimensions, what this mapping illustrates is how these three dimensions intertwine with each other to privilege the already powerful. Economically, the integration of Greater China is centered in China, and this allows China to be constructed as a big market, hence the desirability of the Chinese language market. Politically, this discourse is used to forestall independence and suppress democratization and even to hinder political dissents in Taiwan. Culturally, through the neoliberal rhetoric of culture as economic resource, traditional Chinese culture becomes an asset in developing the Chinese language market as it is constructed to be shared by all Chinese. However, traditional Chinese culture has been used as a tool for domination in the KMT’s Chinese nation-building since its occupation in Taiwan. The KMT Mainlander elites have used traditional Chinese culture to create divisions within the nation by asserting its superiority over Taiwanese languages and cultures through the implementation of policies and the control of the culture industries. The birth of Chinese Drama is implicated in these political-economic and cultural processes. If the mainstream narrative of producing Chinese Drama

known for its vulgarity, not only because of its use of Tâi-gí as the primary language but also its dirty jokes.

is constructed as “progress,” this “moving up” to Chineseness is entangled in the divisive politics of cultural hierarchy formed through inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization, but masked under the rubric of Taiwanese economic nationalism.

Visibility as Aesthetics

How does Chinese Drama, a product of the cultural economy, which operates through Taiwanese economic nationalism but aspires to Chineseness, reconcile with the incompatibility of Taiwanese-ness and Chineseness in the context of Taiwan? I argue that it is through aesthetics that the unequal division between Chineseness and Taiwanese-ness is reconciled and made natural and national. This section uses *Inborn Pair* (2012), the first Chinese Drama, as a primary example of this genre, to investigate how *hsiaochinghsin* sentimentalism (to be discussed later), as “a historically constituted regime of perception and intelligibility,” comes to be defined as the “national” aesthetic and how this aesthetic relies on the employment of commonsense “Tai” (Taiwanese) images to produce and reproduce a hierarchical social reality that privileges Chineseness.

What constitutes Chineseness in aesthetic terms? Chang Ron-hua, the founder of Chinese Drama, invoked a historically constituted commonsense cultural hierarchy to identify and differentiate Chinese Drama. The family, according to him, is the defining feature of Chinese Drama, as distinguished from *Bentu* (native) Drama but on a par with Korean drama, except that the “everyday life culture” in Taiwan is different from that in Korea. For Chang, the family is the site where everyday life is enacted, and at the core of the family is love, both romantic love and familial love. Love differentiates Chinese Drama from *Bentu* Drama as it is “positive, warm, and aspiring and thus, suitable for family viewing,” and Taiwanese audiences “need to adapt to this new mode” (You 2012). Chang notes that both Chinese Drama and Korean drama are about family matters, but what distinguishes Chinese Drama is Taiwanese food and lifestyle, and he has made it his mission to export this “Taiwanese-ness” (Yi 2012; You 2012).

In this discourse, there is a slippage between Taiwanese-ness and Chineseness. On the one hand, Chineseness is to be distinguished from Taiwanese-ness or *bentu* (the native), which connotes vulgarity historically, as a result of KMT rule. On the other hand, Chineseness is seen as Taiwanese-ness through food, which can be made for pleasure and profit. Moreover, what Chang does here is to identify a particular kind of Chineseness

that is constructed as unique to Taiwan—the *hsiaochinghsin* aesthetic—with an emphasis on positive, warm, and aspiring feelings. This is, I will argue, a particular kind of “Chinese sentimentalism in Taiwan.”

In discussing “Chinese” sentimentalism, Chow traces two theorizations of sentimentalism: European and Anglo-American feminist thought. The first conceptualizes sentimentalism in temporal terms—that is, sentimentalism is about the irreversibility of temporal differentiation or the passing of time. It is a nostalgia and sentimental feeling toward nature—“the condition of simple and sensuous wholeness”—toward that which has been destroyed in modernity. Anglo-American feminist thought, on the other hand, sees sentimentalism as a form of power struggle in that socially marginalized groups, in particular, women, find empowerment through cultural forms (women’s genres) that are themselves being marginalized but at the same time deal with women’s experiences of subordination. Through an explication of the two kinds of sentimentalism, Chow argues that sentimentalism should be rethought as a “discursive constellation, . . . one that traverses affect, time, identity, and social mores, and whose contours tend to shift and morph under different cultural circumstances and likely with different genres, forms, and media” (Chow 2007: 17).

This move allows Chow to appropriate Western sentimentalism to describe Chinese sentimentalism, *wenqing zhuyi*, with an emphasis on warmth and moderation, and, hence, it can be read as “a mode of endurance, . . . whose contours tend to remain fuzzy rather than sharply delineated and whose effects may easily be apprehended as (a prevailing) tone” (18). The family is central to the imagination about sentimentalism, as the family marks the boundary between interiority and exteriority; it is through the construction of the inside as a refuge away from the outside challenges that the family becomes the embodiment of imagination about desire, emotion, and belonging. “The sentimental is ultimately about being accommodating, and being accommodated, about the delineation and elaboration of a comfortable/homely interiority, replete with the implications of exclusion that such delineation and elaboration by necessity entail” (19).

In mapping the specific content of “Chinese” sentimentality, Chow includes filiality, domesticity (the preparation, consumption, and sharing and/or offering of food), poverty (the condition of economic deprivation and social powerlessness), childhood and old age, the sight or knowledge of the exertion of physical labor, togetherness and separation, a preference for familial/social harmony and reconciliation, and self-restraint and self-sacrifice (qualities that are essential to group unity). Despite Chow’s

emphasis on the open-endedness of “Chineseness” as a way to repudiate the centrality of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and validate the claims to Chineseness from various diasporic Chinese in different locations (24), this mapping, in using the term *Chinese*, should be seen as a discursive event to define the aesthetics of (pan-)Chineseness as the aesthetic objects chosen cross the boundaries of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

What distinguishes Chinese Drama in Taiwan from this pan-Chinese aesthetic or sentimentalism is *hsiaochingsin*, a tone that emphasizes happiness and lightness as opposed to the heaviness of Chinese sentimentalism (poverty, exertion of physical labor, and so on). *Hsiaochingsin* is the embodiment of Chineseness in Taiwaneseeness and has therefore become constructed as the national aesthetic in the discourse on Chinese Drama. *Hsiaochingsin* refers to both “small-budget production” as well as “everyday life” associated with triviality and lightness, dressed up as a kind of warm, positive “lifestyle.” *Hsiaochingsin*, I argue, in the rhetoric on the Chinese Wave and Chinese Drama, is involved in the double gaze of “imperialist nostalgia,” to use Renato Rosaldo’s term, as well as in the contemporary cultural strategies of commodification of differences for social control. In terms of imperialist nostalgia, as I pointed out earlier, the concept of the Chinese Wave was first discovered by the Japanese who, through television drama, saw its ex-colony as embodying nature and backwardness, in this case, simplicity and innocence. Taiwan was placed in the projected, imaginary temporal past, which signified plenitude, a past that had been destroyed by modernization in Japan and could now be found in Taiwan. With the rise of China and the predominance of Chinese language market discourse, *hsiaochingsin* was constructed to address the demands of white-collar workers in China, as they now had to face the effects of modernization, and hence their longing for a premodern simplicity: “Taiwan’s pursuit of the *hsiaochingsin* lifestyle also satisfies the rise of a massive number of white-collar Chinese. On the one hand, it heals the pressures of competition that are experienced by them; on the other hand, it offers them a sense of comfort and quietness in life in the age of information overflow” (Huang and Yen 2013).

This imperialist gaze gets turned inward and constructed as national (Taiwanese) competitiveness in the age of globalization. The historicity of “nationalizing” this *hsiaochingsin* aesthetic as common sense in Taiwan is a process of sinicization, a process of mythmaking, to use Roland Barthes’s term, in the sense that Chineseness, with the support of institutional and military power, comes to occupy the signifier of Taiwaneseeness while at the

same time, it empties out its original meaning by a process of exclusion and devaluation. A brief foray into the historicity of the *hsiaochinghsin* aesthetic is necessary in order to address the politics of Chinese Drama.

The *hsiaochinghsin* aesthetic, characterized by small-budget production as well as an emphasis on positive, warm, and aspiring feelings in content, can be traced to the “healthy realism” of the early 1960s (which was transformed into a “healthy variety” in 1968) and was later taken up by the New Wave in Taiwanese cinema in the 1980s. The genre of healthy realism, invented by Gong Hung from Central Motion Picture, is the ideological product that aims to support the KMT’s project of Chinese nation-building in Taiwan. The “healthy” in *healthy realism* is defined as adherence to “the government’s political purpose in illustrating the bright nature of human being in all cultural works. Realism is used to appeal to the market and consumer taste. . . . Healthy realism revolves around neighborhood, family, familial ethics and relationships” (Lee 1997: 122). Huang further illustrates the concept of healthy realism as the triumph of good over evil in family matters: “More forgiveness will bring us more peace and happiness in our society. Gong Hung makes it the primary mission of healthy realism to guide people to inspire to do good. . . . Healthy realism is characterized by *bentuhua* and *hsiangtuhua* [nativization, meaning the use of the contemporary background for plot purposes] and is most suitable to carry out the film industry’s propaganda mission in promoting the Provincial Government’s *bentuhua* policy” (Huang 2011).

The government’s demand for “healthy realism” was also written into television policies when television became the predominant mode of family entertainment in the 1970s. In 1976, the Information Bureau implemented the first Broadcasting Law, which declared that the mission of television was to promote Chinese culture, ethics, and tradition. When translated into policy terms by way of restrictions on drama content, traditional Chinese culture meant: no more than one quarter of the content could describe the dark side of life; there could be no depiction of the triumph of the villain over the hero or of ethnic/racial tensions; no negative portrayal of the rich or the upper class as immoral or as using their power to exploit people; no positive portrayal of the lower class or ordinary people as possessing a better sense of justice; no description of antifamily values and no negative portrayal of military or government officials; and no depiction of people as possessing super powers (Chiang 1979: 67–68).

The migration of healthy realism from film to television not only reflected the government’s demand for social control; it was also the result

of the migration of talent from film to TV, which was also implicated in language policies and politics. On the one hand, scriptwriters and producers brought the healthy variety genre to television, making healthy variety the predominant mode of the women's genre in the prime-time slot. One example is Chiong Yao, whose literary works were adapted into healthy variety genre films in the 1960s and 1970s, and later to television, transforming into prime-time productions in the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, the promotion of healthy realism in the film industry also marked the dominance of Mandarin films and the decline of Tâi-gí films (the previous mainstream, as Tâi-gí was the language spoken by the majority of the population) in the 1960s (Lee 1997). Many Tâi-gí-speaking actors and actresses moved to television in the 1970s, but, unlike the Mainlander producers such as Chiong Yao, who monopolized prime-time productions, these entertainers could only appear in marginalized slots with limited broadcasting time or minor/clown characters because of their bad Mandarin. This is further reinforced by the language policies that decreed "dialect programs should not exceed 16 percent of all programs" in 1972; "a gradual reduction of dialect programs each year" in 1976, and "each network was allowed to broadcast Tâi-gí/Minnanyu programs for no more than one hour each day" in 1979 as part of the project of promoting traditional Chinese culture (Yang 2015).

The tracing of this history of *hsiaochinghsin* as "national" sentimentalism expressed through aesthetics aims to bring about the politics of "nationalism": how Tâi-gí cultural production is marginalized, excluded, and devalued in order for Chineseness (the embodiment of traditional Chinese culture) to become the privileged signifier in Taiwan. This Chineseness, cloaked in the name of traditional Chinese culture, turned itself inward through the imperialist nostalgic gaze dressed as global capital/Chinese language market, is narrated as Taiwan's comparative advantage, and thus becomes the ground for Taiwan's economic nationalism. *Hsiaochinghsin* sentimentalism functions ideologically to solve the contradictions and divisions within the nation while simultaneously engaging in a power struggle that privileges Chineseness, a concept promoted both by the PRC and the KMT Ma regime.

Chinese Drama has to reconcile the imperialist nostalgia for an innocent and simple past and the Taiwanese present reality. Its strategy is to use "traditional Chinese culture" to satisfy the imperialist gaze and contemporary Taiwanese multiculturalism for Taiwanese audiences—an official discourse on Taiwanese identity during the Democratic Progressive Party

(DPP) regime from 2000 to 2008. In *Inborn Pair*, “traditional Chinese culture” is manifested in three ways. First, the old practice of “betrothal when still in the womb by parents of both parties” is the primary motive that drives the plot. The young couple, despite their dislike of each other, is forced to fake their marriage because the male protagonist’s grandmother fakes a terminal illness and wishes to see them married before her death—a promise she made to her benefactor years ago when the young couple were both still in the womb. This old marriage practice is meant to convey that love is destiny, an idea also supported by folk religion. The couple first meet in a temple when each of their elderly grandparents takes them to the temple to pray for marriage. The plotting of these “premodern” cultural practices means that the couple will get married first (before sex), to be followed by the conventional formula of romance and courtship—love lost and gained, obstacles conquered, and final union guaranteed.

Second, the notion of filial piety is emphasized, as is the traditional/“premodern” big family. The female protagonist, Yu-jie, marries into Wei-hsiang’s family, and within this family, the focus is on a hierarchy based on age, generation, and gender, with filial piety and obedience functioning as rules of conduct. For example, the grandmother is the matriarch and has absolute power over everyone. Out of filial piety, the couple is forced to fake not only marriage but also pregnancy. Moreover, rather than promote the nuclear family popular today, the family featured here is multi-generational, consisting of three and even four generations. This allows the show to bring in more complicated family interactions, such as featuring two more couples’ love lives as subplots (in this case, the male protagonist’s brother and sister).

Third, a “traditional” gender order is guaranteed through the ideological closure of a happy ending. Despite all the obstacles, the show ends happily. Happiness is about the attainment of “family”—marriage and children. The three couples not only stay married (after divorces, but the women remarry the same men), but all give birth to sons and daughters. And women, despite their initial ambitions, all give up their careers and become full-time mothers.

The discourse on multiculturalism as Taiwan’s present unique reality is also incorporated into *Inborn Pair*, but this multiculturalism, mediated through *hsiaochingsin* sentimentalism, serves to affirm the privilege of Chineseness. First, as stated previously, the mission of Chinese Drama is to sell Taiwan’s lifestyle, represented through food culture. In *Inborn Pair*, the grandmother is allowed to eat only healthy, though bland, food because

of her fake cancer. But she desires Taiwanese snacks so much that she sneaks out for a good meal and is later caught misbehaving. In addition, the show emphasizes how love is expressed through food—the female protagonist’s mother makes chicken soup for her because she misses her, as she now has to live in her in-law’s house. As a sign of reconciliation, the daughter-in-law helps the mother-in-law cook. And so on and so forth. Multiculturalism is defined in terms of food, which is symbolic of familial love and warmth. This feeling of sentimentalism about food is made to generate profit, which is in accordance with Taiwan’s official policy to promote food tourism. According to the Tourism Bureau, Taiwan’s culinary culture is composed not only of “foreign food from all over the world” and Taiwanese snacks but also “fine authentic cuisine from all the different regions of China” (Taiwan Tourism Bureau 2015a). And Chinese cuisine, with its constructed glory through “traditional Chinese culture,” is again positioned as the center among a variety of food cultures: “Chinese cuisine goes back to ancient times and achieves its present level of excellence through the accumulation of thousands of years of practical knowledge and experiences in cookery” (Taiwan Tourism Bureau 2015b).

Multicultural reality is also narrated through plot arrangement and the employment of historically constituted commonsense images. Chinese Drama, like its predecessor, idol drama, follows the convention of the Cinderella love formula. In *Inborn Pair*, the female protagonist, following the generic convention, must come from an “ordinary” family and speak good Mandarin to de-ethnicize herself so as to ensure that the audience identifies with but does not laugh at her. The ethnicized “Taiwanese” mother, played by Yang Li-yin, is essential to the female protagonist’s family, along with a sidekick grandfather (played by Chen Bo-cheng), a minor figure who is associated with the mother and the female protagonist. The male protagonist, in addition to being handsome and tender, must come from a good family, ethnically marked as Waishengren/Mainlander. The father of the male protagonist in *Inborn Pair* is the owner of a big corporation (an amusement park), and the mother is an elegant, well-educated, but spoiled housewife, played by Yang Chie-mei. The *hsiaochinghsin* sentimentalism is expressed via the commonsense image of the Taiwanese mother figure and her sidekicks, with an emphasis on their Tâi-gí–accented Mandarin and their physical vulgarity.

These commonsense images are historically constituted and, I argue, are the legacies of KMT semicolonialism in Taiwan, which aimed to construct the superiority of Chinese culture and the inferiority of Tai-

wanese culture. First, the ethnically marked male sidekicks can be argued as representing resistance to the state's imperative of healthy and positive principles (Lee 1997). In the 1970s, when healthy realism/variety was at its peak, Hsu Buliao, a Tâi-gí comedian, was the embodiment of "vulgarity" because of his emphasis on physicality and his jokes about "out-of-placeness"—meaning those who do not follow social norms. This vulgar Tai figure can be traced to *Wangge Liuge You Taiwan (Brother Wang and Brother Liu Tour Taiwan)*, a Chaplin-influenced Taiwanese film. In the film, both the skinny and the fat protagonists speak Tâi-gí and are uneducated. They won the lottery and now travel around Taiwan; hence, the film is about the imagination of the Republic of China (ROC) nation. It is about the country bumpkins' (the Taiwanese) encountering modernity (Taipei) and the Other (indigenous people). What makes the film funny is the actors' physical clumsiness, their sincerity, their simplicity, and their backwardness when they meet civilized people, the urbanites in Taipei and the wealthy of the modern city. Their slapstick comedy style constitutes the vulgarity of Tai-ness. Through repeated productions and reproductions of these images, which make up our sense of reality, these images become common sense and a signature of Chinese Drama. Chen Po-cheng, a constant figure in Chinese Drama and its predecessor, idol drama, plays such a character. In *Inborn Pair*, he is the grandfather of the female protagonist and is sincere, nice, but uneducated and unsophisticated (sometimes stupid). In the idol drama *My Queen (Loser Dog Queen)*, he plays a temple guard who is in pursuit of the female protagonist's mother. In this role, he is superstitious, and dances and dresses in ways that are tawdry and vulgar so as to arouse laughter. These are the Tai characters, as opposed to the middle-, or upper-middle-class Waisheng fathers, who are doctors, lawyers, professors, or owners of multinational corporations—professions that command respect in Taiwanese society.

Lin Mei-Hsiu and Yang Li-yin are the embodiment of Tai mothers in Chinese Drama. They are portrayed as simple, unsophisticated, optimistic, sometimes stupid, but always loving and caring toward their children. Yang plays the mother of the female protagonist in *Inborn Pair* and *Mommy's Boyfriends*. In *Inborn Pair*, her love for her daughter exceeds her rationality so that sometimes she gets into fights with her son-in-law's mother. Her love toward her daughter is shown in a direct and simple way. In *Mommy's Boyfriends*, the mother raises her children by herself and is very forgiving, but sometimes also stupid enough to make big mistakes. In *My Queen*, the mother, played by Lin Mei-hsiu, sells sweet potatoes (the metaphor for

Taiwan). She is obese and has hemorrhoids, which cause her to act in a physically exaggerated manner. These images contrast with the Waisheng mothers, who are “princess” figures: elegant, educated, and cultured but need to be pampered and taken care of (as in *Inborn Pair* and *Mommy’s Boyfriends*).

These commonsense images have been discursively constructed to demonstrate the superiority of Chinese culture and hence *Waishengren* over Taiwanese culture and Tâi-gí-speaking people. This is the “double vision of the white [in this case, Chinese] eyes through which they are seen,” which Stuart Hall refers to when critiquing the colonizers’ representations of the Other (Hall 1995: 22): the simultaneous glorification and demonization of the Other. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on simplicity, purity, innocence; on the other hand, such simplicity descends into ignorance, stupidity, and vulgarity. This historically constituted “image reality” is now constructed as the essence of Taiwanese-ness and has become Taiwan’s comparative advantage in the Chinese language market:

Minnan culture is one of the reasons why the Chinese like Taiwanese dramas (in particular, the role of the mother). . . . We can use Minnan culture to express Taiwanese-ness because Taiwan’s culture comes from Minnan and Minnan culture is rooted in Taiwan. . . . Her most impressive characteristics are optimism and simplicity, which give the audiences time to breathe and even laugh. . . . They have nothing to worry about except their children; they have naturally become optimistic and simple. . . . What characterizes Minnan women is their ability to endure hardships and their domesticity. . . . Minnan women’s natural inclination toward domesticity won’t be changed because of their social status or educational level. Taking up domestic responsibility is in their bones. (Yuan 2014)

In this narrative, the ethnic difference constructed to legitimize the authoritarian KMT regime before democratization is now incorporated into the Greater China narrative by linking Taiwan’s cultural origin to China, while positioning China as the de-ethnicized center. But this time, the process of ethnicization is made to conform to the ideological imperative of the CCP and the KMT elites for unification in the name of Taiwan’s comparative advantage. Chang Rong-hua’s promotion of Chinese Drama through Taiwanese economic nationalism, by way of the ethnicization and commodification of the figure of “Minnan woman,” works to legitimize the political purposes of the CCP and KMT elites.

Conclusion

This essay approaches the emergence and ascendancy of the Chinese Drama genre through two ways of conceptualizing visibility: the epistemic sense of visibility, and visibility as aesthetics. The first perspective situates Chinese Drama within the dynamics of the intertwining of global, regional, and local forces. The globalization via regionalization discourse of Greater China paved the way for the emergence and dominance of the Chinese language market, facilitated by technological changes, which came to regulate the field of cultural production in Taiwan. Supported by global capital, this discourse was used to engage in ethnic dominance by Mainlander elites in the TV industry when they faced the threat of democratization in the early 1990s. With the changes in Taiwan's politics, an alliance between CCP and the KMT elites was formed, and the Chinese language market became the economic and cultural tool for their promotion of unification since the 2000s. The hegemony of Chinese language brought about the privileging of "traditional Chinese culture."

The birth of the Chinese Wave and Chinese Drama is implicated in these layers of struggles. On the one hand, there is the political struggle over national identities through ethnicization; on the other hand, national identities have to reconcile with the hegemony of the neoliberal ascendancy of culture as economic resource. The Chinese Wave, therefore, is constructed through either Taiwanese economic nationalism or Chinese nationalism. Chinese Drama is produced and promoted as a form of Taiwanese economic nationalism; however, the hegemony of the Chinese language market makes it imperative for Chinese Drama to reconcile Chineseness with Taiwanessness, as it is made in Taiwan but targets China's market.

Aesthetically, this battle is waged on two levels, conjoined by *hsiao-chinghsin* sentimentalism: traditional Chinese culture for China's market and Taiwan's present multicultural reality. *Hsiao-chinghsin* sentimentalism is essential in buttressing the KMT's semicolonial ruling in that it is involved in the process of ethnicization in Taiwan by upholding the superiority of Chinese culture and marginalizing and devaluing Tâi-gí cultural productions. However, this colonizing sentimentalism is made into Taiwan's "national" aesthetics via the double gaze of "imperialist nostalgia" in the age of globalization/regionalization—first by Japanese fans and later by China's white-collar workers. But this turning inward is made possible by a desire for Taiwanese economic nationalism, in particular, to compete with the Korean Wave.

Chinese Drama embodies this national sentimentalism through a focus on the family, in which traditional Chinese culture and Taiwanese multicultural reality are negotiated. On the one hand, traditional Chinese culture narrated for the Chinese language market includes outdated marriage practices, filial piety, family hierarchy, and patriarchal gender norms. These are meant to satisfy the demand for nostalgia for imagined, premodern “good old days”—a simple social/familial order. On the other hand, food and ethnicity come to signify Taiwan’s multicultural reality. However, this multicultural reality as the dominant discourse on Taiwanese nationalism is appropriated in ways that recenter the privileged status of Chineseness constructed by the KMT regime.

Cultural critic bell hooks describes the commodification of contemporary multiculturalism through the metaphor of food: “ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (hooks 2006: 366). In Chinese Drama, not only is Chinese food constructed as the epitome of Taiwanese food; Taiwanese ethnicity, constructed according to commonsense images, is essentialized and minoritized. In the discourse of the Chinese language market, Taiwanessness as ethnicity, as difference, is now the economic resource for profit-making. While operating through the rhetoric of Taiwanese economic nationalism, this essentialization and minoritization feeds into the narrative of Chinese nation-building, both on the side of the CCP and the KMT. In Hal Foster’s words, “Difference is thus used productively . . . difference is often fabricated in the interests of social control as well as of commodity innovation” (Foster 1985: 167; hooks 2006: 369). The production and reproduction of commonsense images to construct ethnicity as difference, first by the KMT and then by the CCP with the aid of global capital, poses threats to Taiwan’s decolonization project, as this perspective always takes Chineseness as the de-ethnicized center and ethnicities as different.

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