STAN LAI AND HIS PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP: THE CHINESE IMAGINATION AND THE TAIWANESE IDENTITY FROM 1980 TO 2000

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores four productions of The Performance Workshop, the most popular performing group in Taiwan. These productions are Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, The Island and the Other Shore, The Red Lotus Society, and I, Me, He, Him, and they illustrate how the Taiwanese dealt with their uncertain relationship with Mainland China from 1980 to 2000. This thesis analyzes these four productions in depth and investigates the relationship between the popularity of The Performance Workshop and the representations of Taiwanese identity that was performed for its audiences.
Dedicated to my grandmother, Tsai-chwen Chen,
for her everlasting confidence in me.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Stan Lai, the founder of The Performance Workshop, is an influential figure in Taiwanese theatre. During the past twenty years, Stan Lai and his performing group made theatre reflect on the daily life of the Taiwanese. Tian-wen Chu reviewed Stan Lai’s productions as essential social activities. “After we leave the theater, we will talk about them [...] they have become subjects for conversations.” Every time The Performance Workshop announced a new production, the Taiwanese audiences flocked into theatres. No one can deny that Stan Lai’s plays reflect social trends, providing valuable information about Taiwanese society. Taiwan experienced tremendous changes between 1984 and 2005, and The Performance Workshop never failed to comment on the concerns of the people. Before I begin my analysis of Stan Lai’s plays and the issues that he presented, it is helpful to place Stan Lai’s biography in its historical context.

Being the second son of a diplomat, Stan Lai had some unusual childhood experiences. He was born in Washington D. C. in 1954 and speaks English more
fluently than Mandarin. Before he came back to Taiwan at the age of twelve, his childhood consisted of endless displacements. As a student in Taiwan, Stan Lai suffered a culture shock and had difficulties adjusting in school because the Taiwanese education system was different from that of the United States. Stan Lai hesitated to accept Chinese culture in Taiwan in the beginning and once complained to his father about his frustrations. His father, then, asked him a question: “Do you want to be a Chinese or an American?” Stan Lai realized that his father wanted him to appreciate his Chinese roots and adjust to his surroundings in Taipei. Looking back, Stan Lai recognizes that his education from high school to college enabled him to benefit from the study of Chinese cultures. After spending twelve years in Taiwan, Stan Lai identified himself as a Taiwanese and he had strong feelings about Chinese cultures.\footnote{See interview, “Experiencing The Theatre of Stan Lai,” (Ching-mei Tao, 2002). Available from <http://dafa.net/htm/culture/2002/0527/2726.htm>}

Stan Lai returned to America in 1978 to pursue graduate studies in Theatre at the University of California, Berkeley.

He obtained his Ph.D. degree from Berkeley in 1983 and chose to return to Taiwan. The National Institute of the Arts\footnote{The name of this institute is now changed to Taipei National University of the Arts.} had just founded its Theatre Department, and there was a need for professors. Stan Lai returned to Taipei and dedicated his future to the development of Taiwanese theatre. At that time, the first wave of experimental theatre had just begun in Taipei, and it was a turning point full of opportunities and possibilities for all. Stan Lai introduced his students and co-workers to the improvisatory techniques that he learned from Shireen Strooker. His
first work produced at the National Institute of the Arts was *We All Grew Up This Way* in 1984.

Stan Lai formed his own professional performing group – The Performance Workshop. This move did not mean that he was not satisfied with college theatre. On the contrary, these two different stages allowed him to use various strategies to exploratory work. The establishment of The Performance Workshop symbolized that Taiwanese theatre had entered a new era. It proved that theatre in Taiwan had receptive audiences who felt that they were participating in a social event. The founding members of The Performance Workshop were many influential figures in contemporary Taiwanese theatre. For example, Shin-jye Jing was a core member of the Lan Ling Theatre Workshop which was the most important performing group during the first wave of experimental theatre in Taiwan. And so was Kuo-shiu (Hugh) Lee, who became the artistic director of the Ping Fong Acting Troupe in 1987.

Stan Lai has produced various famous Western plays and created several original works with his students and group members since 1984. He translated and produced Harold Pinter’s *Old Times*, Carlo Goldoni’s *A Servant of Two Masters*, and Dario Fo’s *Accidental Death of An Anarchist*. These plays were performed on the Taiwanese stage for the first time. Stan Lai even designed the sets for some productions. Among Stan Lai’s twenty-three original works, those of the old Chinese form of performance, known as cross-talking (Xiang sheng) series, received the most feedback. Since *The Night We Became Xiangsheng Talkers* in 1985, The Performance Workshop has continued revealing social conditions through this series.
Look Who Is Cross-talking Tonight (1989), Chinese Comedy in the Late 20th Century (1993), The Complete History of Chinese Thoughts (1997), and Millennium Teahouse (2000) were all sold-out performances. The Taiwanese audience was pleasantly surprised to find the old Chinese form of performing could sparkle through the scripts of Stan Lai. These cross-talking performances were part of his attempt to restore a Chinese performing culture. He tried to establish a foundation for modern Taiwanese theatre because he noticed that some theatrical Chinese forms of performance were becoming extinct.

Some critics perceive Stan Lai as an American Asian because he was born in the United States. Some other critics point out that he focused more on the Chinese influence in Taiwanese society. Stan Lai does not see himself as an American. His father’s attitude was instrumental in defining his national identity and encouraged him to absorb Chinese cultures. In the context of the plays that he dramatized with The Performance Workshop, Stan Lai said that “basically, we aspire to channel the Taiwan experience, and the Chinese experience as a whole, toward the goal of revealing the human condition on a universal level.”

Theatre artists often use performances as a means to criticize social and political situations in their countries. Stan Lai is such a theatre artist. Among the issues that

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3 See Jon Kowallis. “The Diaspora in Postmodern Taiwan and Hong Kong Film: Framing Stan Lai’s The Peach Blossom Land with Allen Fong’s Ah Ying.” In Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender, (Honolulu, U of Hawaii P, 1997).


he staged were dissatisfactions with government, conflicting religious and political
believes, and struggles for a united national identity. Stan Lai's productions are a
good source for understanding the socio-political situation, and its history in Taiwan
in addition to that provided by the mass media. Recently, Taiwan became the focus
of international attention after the presidential election of 2004. The two political
candidates used provocative rhetoric which split the Taiwanese voters into two
camps. The tension peaked during the failed attempt to assassinate the president one
day before the election. What was most unnerving was that the hatred was fueled by
ethnic discrimination. The problem of finding an acceptable national identity for all
Taiwanese has existed since the retreat of KMT (Kuo Ming Tang) government from
Mainland China in 1949. The national identity crisis became a common motif in the
postwar Taiwanese literature, including drama.

Like in other decolonized countries, Taiwanese literary works depict the struggle
to find a "proper" national identity for all the Taiwanese people through self-
discovery and democratization. Five countries have occupied Taiwan: China,
Holland, Spain, France, and Japan. The recent anti-China fad adds one more
colonizing power to the list – the KMT government. The present ruling party, the
DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) in Taiwan, regards the previous KMT
government as a foreign power which represented China. Some nativists equate the
awakening of Taiwanese consciousness with the action of eradicating all of their

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6 The Chinese empire regarded Taiwan as its territory since the third century, but it had never
assigned officials to rule Taiwan. Thus, Taiwan became the aim of western countries in the
seventeenth century. The Dutch ruled the south part of Taiwan from 1624 to 1661, and they competed
with Spanish between 1626 to 1642. Then the Chinese empire took Taiwan back to its territory. The
French force invaded the north Taiwan in 1884 when the Qing empire was too weak to regain it. Later
the Qing empire ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895 after the Sino-Japanese War. When Japanese
surrendered in WW II in 1945, they returned Taiwan to the Republic of China, the KMT government.
Chinese ties while their opponents treasure their Chinese roots. These two different ways of seen Taiwanese history and its relationship with China cause political tensions during elections and divide the Taiwanese into ideological camps. The one camp wants to distance Taiwan from China in order to clarify its different national identity and culture. The other camp argues that it is impossible to deny ties that historically and culturally unite the people of the two countries.

Under such historical influences and political circumstances, many Taiwanese plays deal with the crisis in Taiwanese national identity. Since the Japanese occupation, Taiwanese playwrights have described the feelings of isolation and the orphan-like experience of the Taiwanese on their island. The searches for a Taiwanese identity and for restoring the dignity of the Taiwanese people are common motifs in Taiwanese theatre. Many scholars find that Taiwanese literature and recently Taiwanese movies offer ingenious reflections on historical and cultural manipulations. However, most scholars analyze these thoughts and themes in Taiwanese novels and films, neglecting Taiwanese drama and theatre.

Contemporary Taiwanese drama and theatre are still unexplored territories for Western readers and audiences. The knowledge of Chinese theater for most Westerners is limited to Peking opera. This thesis will analyze several Taiwanese theatrical works in order to better understand the debates over Taiwanese consciousness and identity. First, it will review the history and forms of modern Taiwanese theatre. Then it will examine four productions of The Performance

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7 There are numerous books deal with Taiwanese literature. One representative case is Writing Taiwan: Strategies of Representation, (Taipei, Rye Field Publishing Co., 2000).
Workshop, the most popular performance group in Taiwan, in order to show how the national identity crisis was dramatized and discussed.

A great portion of the political turbulence has been caused by Taiwan’s tenuous relationship with China. These four selected productions focus on how cultural images were transformed from China to Taiwan. In order to show how cultural images of China were altered over time, these four works will be discussed in the order that they were produced.

This thesis will interpret the interactions between China and Taiwan beginning with the play Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, and then continue with the play, The Island and the Other Shore before concluding with The Red Lotus Society and I, Me, He, Him. The thesis will explore the reasons behind the success of these plays and will ascertain the China complex in the minds of the Taiwanese for Western readers.

Due to the long standing tension between the Chinese and the Taiwanese, it is necessary to review their historical and cultural connections. Pining...In Peach Blossom Land satirized the older generation’s impractical longing for China in 1986. The Island and the Other Shore, which was performed in 1989, dealt with an imagined Chinese world that was portrayed in novels of chivalry and the problems the Chinese faced when they met their Taiwanese relatives. The only two movies of The Performance Workshop, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land (1992) and The Red Lotus Society (1994), also searched for a balance between the Taiwanese’s past memory of China and the changing modern Taiwanese society. I, Me, He, Him, which dramatizes events that took place in Hong Kong in 1998, truthfully reflected.
the psychological conflict between a couple – the man from Shanghai and the lady from Taipei.

Most researchers\(^8\) agree that the history of the new Taiwanese Theatre began in 1980 when the Lan Ling Theatre Workshop was founded. Compared with former shows in Taiwan, the shows after 1980 no longer served as propaganda for the government. The performance groups introduced modern western performing theories along with various creative new works. Take Lan Ling Theatre Workshop for example; it used the training methods of La Mama Experimental Theatre Club to emphasize the importance of body movement. Since then Taiwanese performers have paid attention to body movement and to professional training in acting. On the other hand, the group members also dug deep into the traditional Chinese theatre for inspiration. Its first work *Lotus Pearl with a New Match*, which swept all the prizes in the first Experimental Plays Competition in 1980, used the storyline of a Peking opera to discuss human nature. Its success soon attracted many theatre fans who joined its acting workshops, and it thus became the cradle for actor training in Taiwan. From 1980 to 1985, the first wave of the experimental theatre movement in Taiwan focused on revolutionizing the standardized realism of the Taiwanese stage, and in learning from western experiences to innovate.

The second wave of the experimental Taiwanese theatre movement was more concerned about the political issues of the late 1980s. Its first focus was the restriction of artistic and political activity under martial law. The plays protested against authoritarianism. The awakening to environmental issues led to the

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\(^8\) See related works. For example, Ming-der Chung's book *The Little Theatre Movement of Taiwan (1980-1989)*, ( Taipei, Young-ji Publishing Co., 1999).
abandonment of indoor theatres for outdoor spaces. Such changes formed the
dominant features of theatre in Taiwan in the late 1980s: experimentation with acting
forms, imagery, and traditional written texts. Unfortunately, their resistance of
written plays restricted record keeping and disabled later performers from
reconstructing these performances.

The Taiwanese theatre stepped into a new period in 1990 when the socio-
political climate changed. The theatre workers started to show their Western
influence, rediscovered from the traditional theatrical forms, and searched for unique
methods to represent Taiwan. They adapted the Western classics to fit the cultural
and social history of Taiwan. Traditional theatrical forms (like Peking opera,
Taiwanese opera, and puppet theatre) searched for novelty because they were
restricted by the limited repertory they had inherited from previous professionals.
The Contemporary Legend Theater, which adapted Shakespeare’s plays into Peking
opera, is a case in point. Most Taiwanese theatre professionals faced the same
problem: how could they provide a critical view of their society and at the same time
attract enough spectators to their shows.

Among the various theatre groups, The Performance Workshop played a special
role. Its founding principles were to initiate a new style of Taiwanese theater and to
introduce classical Western theatrical works to Taiwan. Founded in 1984 by Stan
Lai and the other professors and students at Taipei National University of the Arts, it
can be regarded as a product of the first wave of the modern Taiwanese theatrical
movement. Like other theatre groups, The Performance Workshop introduced
famous Western works and looked for a fresh perspective to represent Taiwan. It
kept producing at least one new work per year because of its box-office successes. Since most Taiwanese had not developed theercing habits, it is incredible that most productions of The Performance Workshop were sold-out. Unlike other acting troupes whose goal was to change in order to meet the audience's taste under financial pressure, The Performance Workshop proved that experimental theatre could attract enough spectators when the themes of shows explored serious social concerns.

Stan Lai, the founder and artistic director of this group, had a successful strategy that combined popular elements with serious topics. Of course the great commercial success of The Performance Workshop raised some concerns. Nevertheless, it achieved an outstanding status in contemporary Taiwanese theatre. The originality of its productions provided the audiences with several social problems to consider. The Performance Workshop expanded its influence by establishing an affiliate group, called OFFPW, for young performers. According to Stan Lai, OFFPW is a safe heaven where theatre workers free from the pressures of the box-office experiment with new ideas. There is also a foothold, called Bei Theater, in Beijing, for The Performance Workshop to perform Taiwanese plays.

During the past nineteen years The Performance Workshop reached a level of achievement that no other theatre group was able to. Stan Lai feels proud about the contributions that his group made to the history of Taiwanese Theatre. It is the only performance troupe in Taiwan that made a film based on its theatrical work. The

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Performance Workshop even produced a live TV sitcom called *All In This Family Are Humans*. It ran for two and a half years.

The various productions of The Performance Workshop fall under three main categories in its repertory: adaptations of famous Western works into Mandarin (like *Equus* and *Angels in America, part one*); adaptations of traditional Chinese plays and performing arts (like the cross-talking works); original plays about current issues (like the national identity problem).

After The Performance Workshop performed in Singapore, a review that appeared in *The Straits Times* described the performance “like a beautifully woven Chinese knot.” This was the most suitable phrase to describe the inextricable knot that ties the Taiwanese and the Chinese. Following the productions of The Performance Workshop, one can notice the changing attitudes toward China.

*Pining...In Peach Blossom Land*, the second play of The Performance Workshop, is a work which represents the struggles and confusions in the China/Taiwan relationship. The premiere in 1986 used the interaction between two rehearsing groups to criticize the dream of some Taiwanese about returning to China. Most Taiwanese recognized the sufferings of the old generation settlers who were separated from their relatives in China. Their tragedies during the Chinese civil war are a shared memory. What became difficult to understand for later generations was why they were reluctant to identify with Taiwan. Stan Lai suggested that Taiwan was the utopia that these settlers pursued, and there would be happiness as soon as they embrace this utopia. The main character, Old Tao, persists in returning to Wu-ling, his hometown, where he becomes disillusioned. When the Taiwanese
government lifted the travel restrictions to China in 1988, many old settlers, like Tao, went back and visited their ruined homes.

Putting the socio-historical overtones aside, an audience can regard *Pining... In Peach Blossom Land* as a fable which indicates the foolishness of mankind to endlessly search for a utopia. After 1988, the Taiwanese imagination about China shifted from regarding China as the sweet homeland to a paradise for businessmen. However, China has not lost yet its utopian flavor, a fact that explains why this play was so popular in Taiwan. It became a classic on The Performance Workshop’s repertory. It was revived on stage in 1991 and 1999 and was adapted into a film in 1992. Every time Stan Lai altered his approach to this work, the Taiwanese audiences always discovered something new.

If the 1986 version of *Pining... In Peach Blossom Land* can be defined as a single direct projection of thoughts related to Mainland China, then in 1989 *The Island and the Other Shore* provides a record about the interactions between the two long-disconnected countries. After the restriction of travel between Taiwan and China was lifted, the yearning for the “homeland” and for a harmonious relationship between Chinese and Taiwanese was challenged. Those Taiwanese who wished to be reunited with their family members in China became more confused than ever before. The novelist in *The Island and the Other Shore* becomes defensive when his step sister visits him in Taipei. His relationship with his parents, his wife, his mistress, and his step sister undermine his creativity, and he ends up stuck on the island, like the protagonist in his novel.
This play debates whether or not the desire to return to China is a realistic one. The reunion of the Taiwanese refugees from China with their descendants in China causes pain, confusion, and disappointment. Stan Lai owes his ideas that went into the creation of *The Island and the Other Shore* to the disillusionment that the Taiwanese experienced in 1989.

This work has resulted from witnessing the interaction between the Chinese in both countries. It is interesting that the Chinese of Taiwan feel more strongly the pain of separation during the reunion forty years later. They experience a heart-break and unexplainable loneliness and alienation.\(^\text{10}\)

The hope that the reunion would bring benefits to the Chinese on both sides was destroyed when the people from the two countries realized they were misjudged by each other.

Since the imaginative constructions of a chivalric world never ceased in Chinese culture, Stan Lai used the theme again in his second movie *The Red Lotus Society*. In this film the main character Ah-Da looks for a secret club, called The Red Lotus Society in Taipei, whose members master the methods of vaulting. Modern Taipei does not offer Ah-Da any hope, and he prefers the illusory world he finds in Chinese chivalry novels. He learns the lost art of kung-fu in modern Taipei, and he comes to embody the contradictory values that existed in the minds of most Taiwanese. The citizens of Taipei experience an emptiness in their crowded city and they share the same delusion about the world of chivalry to escape reality.

The confusion of this generation of Taiwanese is not the only target. Stan Lai also attacks the stubbornness and inappropriateness of the old generation. Stan Lai

presents this generation which is fading away while resting on past glories and
turning a deaf ear to the numerous changes that took place during the past forty-five
years.

The Performance Workshop uses dream like settings to explore the subconscious
of the Taiwanese not only in The Red Lotus Society but also in another theatrical
work I, Me, He, Him. In this 1998 play, the two protagonists are surprised to see the
embodiment of their unconscious desire reminding them that they were deeply in
love with each other in 1989. This play examines the love relationships among
Chinese who live in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. It is not accidental
that the two main characters are traveling to Hong Kong to discuss a corporate merge.
The British government had just returned Hong Kong to China, rekindling
expectations for a possible reunification between the Chinese of Hong Kong with the
Chinese in Mainland China. But the Cantonese in Hong Kong fear about their
uncertain future and the might of China.

Most Taiwanese have mixed feelings toward this historical event. On the one
hand, they are glad to see Hong Kong finally get rid of its colonial status. On the
other hand, they share the same uneasiness about the abrupt political and economical
change. Will there be a day when Taiwan will become a second Hong Kong? This
question is dramatized in this play. The audience sees the differences between the
two main characters, the woman from Taipei and the man from Shanghai and how
the two economic systems – capitalism and communism – keep them apart.
Most scholars recorded Taiwanese theatre history, such as the little theatre movement, and Taiwanese folk theatre like the hand puppet theatre, and of course the Peking opera adaptations of Shakespearean works. They hardly paid any attention to Taiwanese drama. There exist only two studies on Taiwanese drama: A dissertation written in 1993 by Li-ji Wang who discusses three plays by Hwang Mei-shu from a Zen’s perspective; and a thesis in 1994 that introduces three playwrights – Ma-sen, Yao Yi-wei, and Hwang Mei-shu.

The works of The Performance Workshop have not been studied by theatre scholars in America and in Taiwan. Two dissertations written in English deal with Stan Lai’s films, but no one has focused on his theatrical works. In Taiwan, only four master’s theses were written about Stan Lai’s plays by 2003. Three of them focused on his collective improvisational methods. The most recent one analyzed the play Millennium Teahouse, in which Tai-ze Bai also participated. In addition to Stan Lai’s methods of creating new works, only A Dream Like Dream became the subject of research which investigated the recollection of traumatic experiences.

The depth of studies about Taiwanese drama and theatre will be rectified in the following pages. Stan Lai’s plays reflect the confusion about national identity in

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11 Information can be found from the Chinese studies database of The National Central Library in Taiwan. Available from <http://cts.ncl.edu.tw/topic_91.html>


Taiwan, and express long-standing concerns about Taiwan’s interactions with its “dear enemy,” Mainland China.

The Performance Workshop is celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 2005. It is worth studying how Stan Lai manipulated Chinese pre-conceptions in the four works that were mentioned earlier. The performances of The Performance Workshop provide an excellent record of how the Taiwanese faced serious challenges vis-à-vis a booming economy in China.

In chapter two, “An Unreachable Utopia,” I will examine the play Pining... In Peach Blossom Land. Premiered in 1986 and revived three times in the 1990s, it offers a useful frame to discuss the socio-historical movements in Taiwan during the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter will focus on the China complex from historical perspective. I will indicate the stage changes in its different resuscitations in order to discuss the crucial changes in Taiwanese society at that moment as well any related issues that resulted from those changes. By demonstrating the various productions of this work, I will identify Stan Lai’s intentions in reproducing this play. Did this play symbolize the initial Taiwanese thoughts about China in 1986 or only the director’s version? How did the various revival productions reflect on the changing relationship between the Taiwanese and the Chinese?

Since this play has been revived several times, there must be reasons behind its popularity. Stan Lai’s collective improvisation may indicate the inner consensus of the Taiwanese and will explain the epoch-making status of Pining...In Peach Blossom Land. This classic demonstrates the typical styles and motifs of The Performance Workshop. It can be regarded as the base of all the theatrical works by
Stan Lai. Thus, I will also point out the reappearing themes like the impractical yearning of a utopia, the unsteady personal relationships in modern Taipei, and the changing Chinese imagination.

"An Imaginary World of Chivalric Fighters," the third chapter of my thesis will deal with the two works, *The Island and the Other Shore* and *The Red Lotus Society*. Both works deal with a chivalrous world, a most popular theme in Chinese sword fighter movies. Therefore, I will also discuss two famous films, *Xiaoxiao Jiang Hu* (1990) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). The former movie was adapted from the novel of Jin Yong, the most popular novelist of chivalric literature. The latter film is known to western audiences and exemplifies another trend for making *wu xia* movies. By comparing them with Stan Lai's works, I will discuss the meaning of the chivalric world and its importance to present-day Taiwanese.

What is the purpose behind the productions about the unrealistic chivalric world? Does Stan Lai use this theme to lament for the losing Chinese cultures or to satirize the ambivalent moods of the Taiwanese? This chapter will also ascertain the role of the imaginative constructions of China by the Taiwanese. It will also analyze the identity issue from the angle of social problems in Taiwan, especially the uneasiness facing the chaotic modern Taipei that is depicted in both works. *The Island and the Other Shore* manipulates the definitions of "the other shore." The image originates from a Buddhist proverb: "Turn around, there is the other shore." The proverb implies that one can return to his/her original place by looking back. In the later part of this chapter I will discuss how this idea forms a philosophy of life which can be seen in the attitudes that the protagonists take to apprehend reality.
The fourth chapter of this thesis, “A Mirror With Two Faces,” will emphasize the puzzled feelings towards the historical moment when Hong Kong was returned to Mainland China in 1997. When the Chinese government declared that Hong Kong would not change in the next fifty years, this statement reminded many Taiwanese of the traumas during the years of separation. Accordingly, Hong Kong became a mirror which revealed different reflections to Chinese who were separated by the Taiwan Strait. The Chinese on either side of the strait held several peaceful talks since 1992, and reunification seemed possible. However, the peaceful talks were undermined during the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996.

How did China interpret the situation through the lens of nationalism? What made the Cantonese of Hong Kong to immigrate? Did China’s attitude pacify the Taiwanese? This chapter will discuss the relationship between China and Taiwan and will analyze the meaning of the symbolic merge in this play, in the context of current events.
CHAPTER 2

AN UNREACHABLE UTOPIA

Long before Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) composed his famous work, *Utopia*, about an ideal society, the Chinese poet Tao Ch'ien (365-427) expressed his admiration of pastoral scenes in his famous tale: *The Peach Blossom Spring*. In the original text, Tao Ch'ien describes a fisherman’s journey to a dreamland.

There was a small opening in the mountain and it seemed as though light was coming through it. The fisherman left his boat and entered the cave, which at first was extremely narrow, barely admitting his body; after a few dozen steps it suddenly opened out onto a broad and level plain where well-built houses were surrounded by rich fields and pretty ponds. Mulberry, bamboo and other trees and plants grew there, and criss-cross paths skirted the fields. The sounds of cocks crowing and dogs barking could be heard from one courtyard to the next. Men and women were coming and going about their work in the fields. The clothes they wore were like those of ordinary people. Old men and boys were carefree and happy.¹

In this utopian land, people live peacefully without any worries. Tao Ch'ien’s tale anticipated the mood and thoughts of the Chinese settlers in Taiwan in the 1940s.

They arrived in Taiwan as refugees from the Civil War in China, and Taiwan became their dreamland.

However, the Chinese refugees in Taiwan were haunted by some old memories. During the Cold War era, people from either Mainland China or Taiwan were forbidden to contact their relatives on either side of the Strait. In 1949 The Kuo Ming Tang government promised that Mainland China would be freed from the Communists in a few years. Many veterans of the Second World War who fled to Taiwan did not bring their family along with them. These Chinese refugees spent their entire lives in Taiwan waiting to return home (China) and to be reunited with their families. This chapter will discuss the troubles of these refugees as represented in a famous Taiwanese play, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, which dramatized Tao Chien’s tale.

Pining...In Peach Blossom Land premiered in 1986, and has been the most influential play in contemporary Taiwanese theatre for the past two decades. It has been produced four times during the past eighteen years. Its overwhelming success established the reputation of The Performance Workshop and brought to its director, Stan Lai, the Taiwan’s National Arts Award of 1988. From then on, no skeptic would doubt the possibility that a commercial theatre group could survive in Taiwan. In 1991, the successful revival of Pining...In Peach Blossom Land prepared the making of its 1992 film version and launched the first world tour of this performance group. After showing it in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Hong Kong,

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2 This play is also known as In Peach Blossom Land, which is the title of the 1992 movie version or Secret Love For The Peach Blossom Spring, the translation shown on the website of this performing group. This thesis will use the name which appears in An Oxford Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama.
Stan Lai produced this play again in Taiwan in 1999. The Taiwanese society had changed rapidly between 1986 and 1999, but the problem with China had never ceased. Stan Lai’s aim was still the same – to discuss the present social condition and the relationship between Taiwan and China through the two parallel worlds, the contemporary world of Taipei and its utopian Other.

Many dramatic social and political changes took place on both sides of the Taiwan Strait from 1986 to 2004, affecting the relations and communications between Mainland China and Taiwan. For the Taiwanese, the martial law period ended in 1988, and they gradually enjoyed more freedoms. They were allowed to visit China (under some restrictions) after 1987, to elect the native legislators after 1992, and to directly elect their president after 1996. However, because of other restrictions and pressures that were in place, the Taiwanese society struggled establishing a new Taiwanese identity. The trend of nativism in Taiwan came to its climax after the Democratic Progressive Party won the presidential election in 2000.

During the same time period, the political situation in Mainland China was also changing. The shocking event which took place at Tienanmen Square in 1989 is a good example. Chinese nationalism upsurged after the British government returned Hong Kong to Mainland China in 1997. All of a sudden, Taiwan’s “reunification with China” became believable again. Many Chinese entertained the possibility of

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3 The previous legislators in the Legislative Yuan were elected in China in 1948 before the government retreated to Taiwan. Not until 1992 did the Taiwanese select all the representatives from Taiwan.

4 Present Mainland China leader, Jin-tao Hu, belongs to the fourth generation. Ze-min Jiang, who rose after the Tienanmen event, is the third generation leader. He took the leadership from the second generation leader Xiao-ping Deng in 1993. The first generation leader of China is Tse-tung Mao.
using force to achieve Chinese reunification. It is expected that Chinese nationalism will reach its apex when Beijing will hold the summer Olympics in 2008.

There were few political interventions between Taiwan and China from 1987 to 1993, and both sides were able to calmly discuss postal communication, travel, and investment issues. They had two successful ice-breaking peace talks. The “1992 Consensus,” and the famous Wang-Koo talks which were held in Singapore in 1993. Unfortunately the peace talks were postponed after the Thousand Island Lake tragedy, when more than thirty Taiwanese tourists were killed by Chinese robbers. Mainland China was upset when Taiwanese president Teng-hui Lee visited the United States in 1995 and a presidential election was held in Taiwan in 1996. Both actions were considered to be steps toward the declaration Taiwan’s independence. Mainland China responded by aiming its missiles at Taiwan. When the second Wang-Koo talks took place in 1998, neither side changed its position and the hostility remained.

Stan Lai believes that the independence movement in Taiwan is “a struggle to be independent not from anyone else but from ourselves. This attempt to break away from ourselves constitutes another way of searching to redefine who we are.” So the theatre becomes a medium to consider the extant differences and contradictions in Taiwanese society. Stan Lai who is a Chinese born in the United States of America paid great attention to the Chinese cultures in Taiwan. An important theme of his work is to discover the Taiwanese ties with Mainland China.

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Pining... *In Peach Blossom Land* uses a famous Chinese tale and the story of the Chinese generation of the 1940s to probe into the memory and meaning that China has for the Taiwanese. It is worth considering the reasons for this play’s popularity and frequent revivals. I will focus on how Stan Lai treats Taiwanese memories about China, the nature of the Chinese utopia, and the response of the audiences. I will begin by briefly describing the plot and themes of this play, in the context of the social changes in Taiwan. Then I will explain this play’s success and will analyze some recurrent themes in Stan Lai’s works.

The setting of *Pining... In Peach Blossom Land*, which is styled after Brecht’s epic theatre, is post-modern and experimental. In this play two performance groups accidentally schedule their rehearsals on the same day. Each group attempts to dominate the stage as they rehearse. One of the groups rehearses a melodrama, *Pining*. The other group rehearses a farce, *In Peach Blossom Land*. During rehearsal they compete for space on the stage, and some unexpected and funny theatrical effects take place, especially when the juxtaposed action of the plays becomes interconnected. According to Stan Lai, who directed the show, “each troupe tries to assume authority of the stage by performing fragments of the plays. As it goes, scenes of the tragic and the comic start to interact with each other, and opposite themes and styles begin to mesh and blend.”

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6 Jon Kowallis gives such descriptions in his essay, *The Diaspora in Postmodern Taiwan and Hong Kong Film: Framing Stan Lai’s “The Peach Blossom Land”* with Allen Fong’s “Ah Ying.”: 169-186.

7 Kowallis 174.
The overlapping settings bring out a more surprising outcome. Kowallis described the visual effects: "historical and temporal frames are constantly switched on the audience to an almost irritating degree of frequency."\(^8\) Influenced by the stage design, the audience is forced to appreciate an absurd situation. "Some of the sets are so contrived and theatrical that the audience is continually slapped with the ‘reality’ that life is stage and stage is life."\(^9\) Accordingly, the audience detects the intertextuality between the two plays. The director brings up two important issues to the Taiwanese audiences: the conflicts between various national identities, and the possibility to find a paradise on earth.

At first glance, *In Peach Blossom Land* is just a farce in which Old Tao, a fisherman, accidentally finds a dream world. In this unexpected Shangri-la, he finds fulfillment, but he cannot help thinking about Chun-hua, his wife at home. Old Tao returns home to his wife to take her with him to experience the paradise he has found. But upon his return home, he finds out that his wife is cheating on him. Old Tao feels unable to reclaim his wife, and he decides to return to the peach blossom land. However, he fails to find his way back to the dreamland.

This comedy deals with Tao Chien’s classical pastoral tale, *The Peach Blossom Spring* (A.D. 421), which introduced the idea of a utopia to Chinese literature. Pastoral plays share a significant motif, i.e., people searching for a Shangri-la under the pressure of civil wars.

\(^8\) Kowallis 170.

\(^9\) Kowallis 170.
In Taiwan the first generation of refugees who came from Mainland China after the Communist take over of 1949, shared a similar feeling with Old Tao. Most of them did not regard Taiwan as their permanent residence because they planned to return to China, their homeland. Refusing to identify with Formosa (known as Taiwan after 1624), they idealized China in their memories. *Pining* dramatizes such a tragic story. Chiang, an old man who is in bad health, hopes to see his first lover Yun, with whom he lost contact since the Chinese Civil War. Memories of China, Yun, and their favorite old songs make him nostalgic. He idealizes the past, and he retreats from the modern life of Taipei where he lives. In *Pining*... *In Peach Blossom Land*, the pastoral world and the modern world of Taipei are juxtaposed during rehearsals and the juxtapositions create several absurd situations.

The director of *Pining* always complains that his actors do not meet his expectations. He thinks that there is something wrong about the Shanghai scene because the main actress fails to represent the feeling of “a white camellia.”  

It goes without saying that his intention to reconstruct Shanghai in the 1940s is impeded by the long time span. The audience begins to understand that the actors in *Pining* are actually performing the director’s real life experience – which explains his tendency to indulge into his dream world during rehearsal. In addition to the actors of the two rehearsing groups, there is a stranger (a Girl) who interrupts the rehearsals looking for Tzu-ji Liu, a person in Tao’s original who dies dejected for not being able to reach the peach blossom land. Being unable to link with either troupe, the Girl expresses the confusion of the younger generation of Taiwan. Stan Lai changed and

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reshaped her image in each production, but her character always represents the puzzled Taiwanese on their way to define their identity.

The opening night of Pining...In Peach Blossom Land in 1986 was very successful. The audience members were conscious of the themes that Stan Lai presented on stage. At that time Taiwan “was pregnant with contradictions that were soon to evolve into political confrontations and acute social and cultural changes.” Many Taiwanese people either experienced the same conflict as Chiang about cultural identification, or sensed the same pressure as Old Tao which pushed them to escape. The tragedy of the two divided countries, China and Taiwan, was not only a shared memory for the older generation, but also for the younger generation. Taiwanese law during the Civil War (1949-1987) prohibited any direct connection with Mainland China. It was illegal even to send a letter, let alone to visit China.

Stan Lai’s success can be interpreted as a cultural phenomenon. To some degree, the historical and cultural link with Mainland China is a question that the Chinese diaspora needs to answer. For Stan Lai, who spent most of his childhood in the United States, the Chinese culture has specific meanings. The Taiwanese whose ancestors came from Mainland China, were pleased to see this play during their increased interest in China from 1986 to 1987. This play expressed the Taiwanese difference (or independence) while it recognized the Chinese roots of the Taiwanese.

The emotions of the Chinese refugees of the 1940s are quite understandable to the younger generation of Taiwanese. However, no one had precisely depicted the loneliness and sadness of these refugees. Chiang represents this generation in the

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play because his wife can hardly understand him after their thirty year marriage.

"What I can’t figure out is, how could a person have so much on his mind?" The nurse who takes care of Chiang is so amazed with his devotion, especially because she is the type of person who can hardly remember her ex-boyfriend’s face with whom she broke up three days earlier. As for the director of *Pining*, his persistence to pursue the feeling of a white camellia meets with actor Yuan’s sarcasm during their argument. Contemporary Taiwanese feel like the people in the peach blossom land who cannot understand why Old Tao is obsessed with the idea of coming home. They can understand his nostalgia, but cannot approve of his obsession to return “home.” If the old generation of refugees is aware that Mainland China is no longer the same homeland when they left it in 1949, then why do they still identify with it? From 1987 to 1992, the younger generations of Taiwanese were less appreciative of the self-pity of the older generation of refugees.

When the play was revived in 1991 and was made into a movie the following year, the traveling restrictions had been lifted. In order to rationalize Chiang’s situation, the director turned Chiang’s health condition (the last phase of lung cancer) into the obstacle which prevents his homecoming. Thus, Chiang’s unwillingness to stay in Taiwan became inappropriate at that time; and the foolishness of Old Tao’s persistence to return home was made blatant. Accordingly, the 1992 film version provided solid attacks on the old refugees. Stan Lai added one female assistant in this film version. The subtext is about the relationship between the old director of

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12 Lai, *Pining... In Peach Blossom Land*, 409.

13 Lai, *Pining... In Peach Blossom Land*, 428.
*Pining* and her. Obviously, Stan Lai criticized the old man for neglecting his assistant who is always by his side, for the sake of someone who is impossible to reach.

Mr. Chiang offers another opportunity to examine the older generation of refugees. The character of Mr. Chiang is passive. When he shows up in scene one, he cannot hide his nostalgia for Manchuria. He has been unable to return home for several years because first the Japanese occupied Manchuria, and then after the Second World War Russians took over. Yun keeps telling him that “the war is over. We’re lucky to be still alive. Why keep thinking about unpleasant things?” Chiang simply says that “there are things one just cannot forget.”

The key point of *Pining* is that Manchuria stays in his memory and refuses to adjust to his present reality in Taiwan. Critic Yong-yi Wu sums up Chiang’s dilemma as follows: Like many old generation refugees, he could not choose between the cultural sentiment and the realistic circumstance.

In *Pining* Chiang keeps a large envelope in the drawer. Its contents differ in scene 5 and scene 13. When he comes back to Shanghai in his dream, the envelope is filled with love letters that he wrote to Yun in the past forty years in scene 5. But in scene thirteen, it turns out the envelope contains his insurance papers and the deed to his house which he needs to transfer to his wife before his death. According to

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14 Lai, *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land*, 382.

15 Lai, *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land*, 382.

Wu, the old generation refugees cannot resist nostalgia even though they lead a life of comfort in Taiwan. This point of view helps to explain Chiang's behavior in the dream scene: Chiang runs for Yun without hesitation, but on second thought he is bewildered hearing his wife answering the phone. After a long wondering, he finally comes to Yun.

In the 1992 movie version, Chiang attempts to hand Yun the letters he wrote during the past forty years in the dream scene mentioned above. Surprisingly, Yun's response is hostile. She tears up all the letters immediately and walks out on him. Furthermore, she accuses him of being "only thinking and not courageous, people like you destroy the dream of New China." Mr. Chiang is left heart broken by both his lover and his Taiwanese wife. Unlike the first production in which his wife soothes him after his heart-broken meeting with Yun, in the movie she only stands at the door and gazes at him in deep sorrow. There is no more pity left for the stubborn old man who refuses to identify with Taiwan, the place he should recognize after spending most of his life there.

For Stan Lai, the strange Girl's endless search reflects the confused and rattled modern Taiwanese society in a state of hysteria. In the movie version, the Girl interrupts the rehearsals aggressively, and at the end she controls the stage by threatening the stage manager with a knife. Uncertain of what she is looking for, she responds irrationally to the rehearsing actors and comments sarcastically on the rehearsals. Like the Girl, most Taiwanese men and women in the 1990s could not decide on their political loyalties and their national identities.

17 My translation, these words only appear in the movie version.
Shiao-ying Shen compares the 1986 premiere and the 1992 movie edition. She observes some noticeable changes between the two productions. She argues that Stan Lai intended to remind the audience of the uselessness to seek an imagined paradise at the premiere, and he indicated a crucial idea - to face up the trend of nativism in Taiwan. The audience would detect the positive atmosphere through the whole show, and it was possible to believe in a bright future - as long as the Taiwanese, especially the old generation refugees and their offspring, would abandon their outdated view of China as their utopian homeland. On the contrary, the 1992 revival eliminated the prospect of a harmonious solution among the various ethnic groups. The permission to travel to China did not pacify the historical traumas related from the Chinese Civil War. Furthermore, it caused more uneasiness which strengthened the signified Chinese identities for the Taiwanese, especially those who had traceable connections with China. To the audience, this emotion haunted the whole production of the play, and it forced them to reexamine their attitude toward the Chinese images and cultures presented in the play.

The props used by each rehearsing group intrude into each other's space, especially the background drawings of the peach blossom land which bridge the two rehearsals spaces. Needless to say, the utopian world occupies the whole stage, and the paradise scene brings the audience back to the dreamland in Chinese literature. *In Peach Blossom Land*, the setting is supposed to show the poetic and peaceful image of paradise in the Chinese imaginary. Ironically, there is "a large blank patch

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with nothing”19 on the peaceful Shangri-la painting. The scene designer justified himself that this setting was intended to express the “empty feeling” in traditional Chinese landscape painting.20 Ji-hui Liu discusses the meaning of the China-related images in her essay.21 She points out that this unprecedented scene design explains the gap between reality and the wish to reconstruct an idealized image of China. The peach blossom land does not only mean a retreat for the knowledgeable Chinese people, but it also signifies the dreamland to old refugees like Chiang. In other words, the failure to bring out the ideal Chinese paradise shows the absurdity to search for it in historic China.

“A strange overlapping effect”22 captures us while seeing the Taipei street scenes and Chiang’s x-ray picture projected on the peach blossom land image in scene ten. “It seems incongruous for these slides to be projected on to the landscape painting, and yet in a subtle sort of way the images seem somehow to match.”23 The situation is just as Liu says. Somehow the image of China is imposed on modern Taipei. It reminds them of some familiar experiences. The Taiwanese have been living on the “imagined Chinese territory” for a long time. After the Kuo Ming Tang government

19 Lai, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, 417.

20 Lai, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, 417.


22 Lai, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, 430.

23 Lai, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, 430.
retreated from China to Taiwan in 1949, it renamed the streets of capital with famous place names of Mainland China. While taking a stroll on the streets of Taipei, one can actually travel from Beijing to Canton. However, for Chiang, the utopia of his homeland excludes the present city of Taipei where he lives. The nostalgia becomes a disease that infects his lung. This mindset was no longer acceptable in Taiwan in 1986. From Stan Lai’s point of view, clinging to memories was an unhealthy obsession and needed to be changed.

The 1992 movie version expanded the dialogue about “the empty feeling.” The crew member of In Peach Blossom Land declares that actor Yuan (its director) would appreciate the relationship between the escaped peach tree and the peach landscape painting. Stan Lai indicated the fugitive experience by linking Old Tao and Chiang. In Peach Blossom Land is a comic version of Chiang’s life, and it reflects the subconscious longing of Chiang – to return to China. Moreover, it fulfills his unrealized dream and foretells the tragic ending of Pining. The most interesting part of the whole play appears in scene ten, when the characters in two juxtaposed rehearsals unwittingly respond to the characters of the other group.

Tao: I miss home!
Nurse: You shouldn’t be thinking about that dreadful business all the time!
Woman in White: You’ve been here so long. Why would you want to go back?

[...]

Nurse: And you’re still waiting for her? I don’t think there’s any point!
Tao: I don’t know, maybe she’s still waiting for me. I just want to see whether she wants to come with me.
Woman in White: She might not!
Nurse: When Miss Yun didn’t turn up the first day, I knew she wouldn’t come at all.
Tao: No, she will.

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24 Lai, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, 430-436.
Woman in White: She might have forgotten you!
Nurse: Besides, who knows whether she’s still alive or not? Why punish yourself like this?
Tao: How can you say that?
Woman in White/Nurse: Sorry, I didn’t mean it.²⁵

All of them feel uneasy with the similarity between the two main male characters. Chiang is forced to see the result of his unattainable expectation – going back to Yun. He becomes agitated and angry when Man in White insists that his efforts will come to nothing. Through laughter and tears, Stan Lai critiques such delusions, and examines the meaning of Chinese identity.

Liu interprets the “large blank” on the backdrop painting as a symbol of Taiwan’s disconnection with China. She suggests that through this blank the actors recreate the meanings of the peach blossom land and even China, and they no longer relate with the original meanings. Stan Lai questions the paradise descriptions in the original by manipulating the words in The Peach Blossom Spring. In addition, he produced a new text for the Chinese utopia, The Peach Blossom Land. In Liu’s opinion, this action disconnects this text from the original, and the implications about chaotic Chinese history at the Tao Chien’s time. On the same issue, Shen holds a different opinion about Stan Lai’s interpretation. From her perspective, the director notices the rift in the ideas about China held by the Taiwanese in the present, but he is unable to disconnect or abandon his conception of China.

The pastoral world in this play is the most significant expression of Chinese utopian cultures. Stan Lai cleverly uses this most famous of Chinese tales to question utopian fixations. In Peach Blossom Land presents a poetic imagined world

²⁵ Lai, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land, 433-434.
in which everything is beautiful but unrealistic. The audience can not fully see the entire panorama of this Shangri-la because there is always some mist. People in the peach blossom land seem innocent at first sight, but gradually the audience realizes that they are ignorant due to their isolation. When Old Tao gets used to this mysterious world, he disconnects himself from reality. He lives in his idealized world, and he overlooks the fact that the Man in White and the Woman in White are just like Yuan and Chun-hua. So he lives with them happily. The desire to live in a utopia is like seeking an idealized mirror image by turning his back to reality.

Since The Performance Workshop planned a world tour of Pining... In Peach Blossom Land after its 1991 revival, the Chinese in diaspora had an opportunity to see this play. Stan Lai’s intention to explore nostalgia for the homeland explains the search for a utopia that was transmitted across the strait.

The history of utopian thinking in Chinese literature and culture can be traced to the sixth century B.C., when Confucius generated the first passage about an ideal world:

When the great Dao was in operation, the world was a common one [...] Thus men loved not only their own parents nor fostered only their own children, but ensured that the aged were provided for, the able-bodied employed, and the young brought up. Widowers, widows, orphans, the childless, disabled and diseased were all well cared for [...] Thus schemings ended rather than grew, robbery and disorder never occurred, so that outer doors need not be closed. This was called “Great Unity.”26

According to the Confucian idea about the legendary land, it should be a common place where everyone has his/her occupation, uplifts the virtues, and lives

26 This translation can be found in Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition, p. 55. “Great Unity” is the Confucian ideal of utopia. Tao Chien’s idea of the Peach Blossom Land somehow originates from this description.
serenely. In Tao Chien’s interpretation of this dreamland, the main features of utopia remained, like the carefree atmosphere, but the dream world was restricted to a small community. When Stan Lai attempted to visualize the Chinese utopia, he found that it is a difficult task because Tao Chien did not give many details in his tale.  

It can be any rural village in China, so it is difficult to create a concrete image about the peach blossom land. Apparently the visitors can hardly distinguish this place from the outside world. Old Tao describes his first impression about the peach blossom land, “I seem to have been here before! Impossible! There’s no such place in Wuling!” However, this feeling can be interpreted as the situation when the old generation refugees fled to Taiwan. At first glance, the people and life styles in Taiwan are the same as the Mainlanders, but in fact they are not totally identical.

Before Stan Lai shot the movie version, he declared that “the audience can consider that Wuling is Mainland China, and the peach blossom land is Taiwan, but vise versa.” Stan Lai argued that this play’s subject was limited under the circumstances in 1986. Thus, the aim of the revival in 1991 and the 1992 movie were to indicate the universal and eternal motif in this work like the yearning for spiritual calmness. At that time, critics and scholars like Yong-yi Wu and Shiao-

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28 Lai, *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land*, 421.

29 In this thesis, “Mainlanders” and “mainlanders” have different meanings. I use “Mainlanders” to describe people in Mainland China, and I define “mainlanders” as old refugees and their offspring in Taiwan.

30 Translated from *My Secret Love for Peach Blossom Land*: 31.
ying Shen regarded this comment unpersuasive because no one would accept the reversed assumption. How could Mainland China impress younger generations of Taiwanese, regarding it as a utopia?

Stan Lai took his chances. Nowadays, it is possible to see Mainland China as a dreamland and Taiwan as a forsaken homeland. Since the 1992 Consensus and the first Wang-Koo talks, the Taiwanese were able to invest capital in Mainland China. Low wages and lenient labour regulations in China attracted many Taiwanese businessmen. Performers also flocked to Mainland China because of its huge audiences. Ironically, when The Performance Workshop revived *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* in 1999, for the first time, this performing group changed the actors who played Old Tao and Yuan, the two main characters of *In Peach Blossom Land*. The main reason was that the two original performers, Li-chun Lee and Bao-ming Gu,\(^{31}\) both came to Mainland China searching for more opportunities to act in television shows.

In 1999 the image of China changed again to that of a land of opportunity, especially for businessmen. China expanded its meanings from an unattainable homeland to a dreamland of opportunity for the Taiwanese. Not only the businessmen believe in such a brand new world, but also the bachelors who seek spouses and the people who search for a quiet country life would like to realize their dreams there. China became a utopia again, only this time it is no longer a homeland of memories of an aging generation, but the brave new world for all Taiwanese.

\(^{31}\) Li-chun Lee and Bao-ming Gu were focus members of The Performance Workshop during 1984 to 1995. Recent years they spent more time in China, but they reunified with Shih-jye Jing, the actor of the character Chiang for another theater group's production of *Art* in 2003.
Even though the director altered his focus each time, *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* has a vitality that allows for reinterpretation and revised productions. Its premiere in 1986 emphasized the national identity crisis. Its revival in 1991 demonstrated the drive for absolute liberty. In 1992, the movie provided more resourceful dialogues, which facilitated the audience’s understanding of the two plots. The revival in 1999 showed the Western influence on Taiwan. In the last scene, the Girl collects money for the dead and spreads the paper all over the stage. Her actions can be interpreted as laments about the past and her determination to quit the unrequited search.

Stan Lai revised this play in 1999 on a great portion of ideals and hopes. The director of *Pining*, who could hardly recover from his recollection finds Actor Yuan to console him and to accompany him. Obviously Stan Lai imposed his expectations about the harmony of various ethnic groups upon the production because Chiang’s last action is to lean on his wife and to embrace her while his dream world is crushed. Chiang finally opens his arms to Taiwan. It takes Chiang thirteen years to identify with Taiwan, and he is welcomed and consoled by his beloved wife.

Of course in 1999, the Taiwanese were facing a more complicated relationship with China than the play suggests. On the one hand, they eagerly rediscovered the buried Taiwanese history under Japanese governance and they tried to break away from China in every aspect. On the other hand, millions of Taiwanese flocked into China in search of opportunity. And their dreams varied from commercial...

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32 A Chinese ritual as a sacrifice to the dead people, made with golden and silver color papers. The resemble money appears in *In Peach Blossom Land*. Both Chun-hua and Yuen believe Old Tao already passed away and they were responsible for it.
investment to peaceful life. This phenomenon was described by Anderson:

"Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity, yet of ‘forgetting’ the experience of this continuity [...] engenders the need for a narrative of ‘identity’.”33 There are endless works to oblige later Taiwanese to remember/forget the Japanese occupation and the civil war with the "dear enemy," China. But the present attitude of the Taiwanese toward the China is hostile.

The Taiwanese government’s official history presented a favorable view of its relationship with Japan while it severed its connection with China. Given a choice between China and Japan, some Taiwanese would rather identify with Japan in their quest for identity. Conversely, other Taiwanese feel that the historical and cultural ties with China are impossible to deny or break. Some other Taiwanese who declare that they belong to Taiwan, not China, cannot sever the historical and cultural relationships of Taiwan with its "dear enemy." Even when the old generation refugees are dead and buried, the ties with China will not end. Naivism does not mean a total rejection of historical or cultural links with China. The Taiwanese have acknowledged their dues to the Chinese through direct contact since 1989.

Under the circumstances, Pining...In Peach Blossom Land was suitable to be revived in order to explore whether the Taiwanese adjusted their views about China, and their desire for a utopia. Interestingly, Stan Lai did not update this work much for eighteen years. Reminding the Taiwanese about the uselessness of any attempt to idealize China seemed innovative in 1986, but it became a retelling of an old

memory. Taiwanese regard Stan Lai’s play as a medium to reconstruct the values of Chinese cultures, especially his use of the traditional literary tales. It seems Stan Lai’s position changed from commenting on identity in Taiwan to reminding Taiwanese of their Chinese traditions. Stan Lai said that *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* is a work in which the complex feelings would absorb the contradictions, merge the confrontations, and release the kindness.\(^{34}\) In the future when Taiwanese change attitudes towards China and Japan, this play can walk out of this dilemma.

From 1986 *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* has been reproduced four times by The Performance Workshop. There are several possible reasons which make it welcome: living in a tumultuous society, Taiwanese need such a work to please or laugh at themselves; in modern society the eagerness to find a peaceful land still exists; the themes of this play reflect Taiwan’s insecure relation with China. Taiwan faces many disorders after the martial law being lifted and it is uncertain about its direction under a more democratic system. The arrangement of this play somehow expresses the chaos in Taiwanese society. Below is Stan Lai’s explanation about the play’s success:

The reason of *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land*’s popularity is that it fulfills some kind of hope in the subconsciousness of Taiwanese. Taiwan is a place in disorder, and this play is about to sort out an order from the chaos and disturbances. Putting some non-related things together, then you will find the accordance after a period of time.\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\) Stan Lai’s words can be found in the introduction of *My Secret Love for Peach Blossom Land*, 9.

\(^{35}\) Stan Lai’s comments can be found in the preface in Zi-lin Ye’s novel, *Is The Peach Blossom Land*, which based on the movie script, 6.
What he said in 1992 still rings true in Taiwan. The latest original work *Mumble Jumble*, which was performed in September, 2003, is also a work discussing the divided Taiwanese society. The political anxieties trigger the desire for a dreamland, the second reason *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* was so popular. The old generation refugees, like Chiang, seek comfort in their resemblance of China, but the later generations of Taiwanese go to the other coast in search of a mental paradise. Like Old Tao who becomes a wanderer, being disappointed about his homeland and being unable to return to the peach blossom land, most Taiwanese are also lost in their quest for a utopia.

The third reason behind this play’s popularity is an inferiority complex toward China. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Taiwanese are still puzzled by identity-related issues. A great portion of the uncertainty originates from their relation with Mainland China. The play suggests that instead of escaping Taiwan’s tricky relationship with China, it would be proper to face and handle this relationship. In so far as the Taiwanese will keep defining their identity vis-à-vis China, *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* can always contribute to the discussions.
CHAPTER 3

AN IMAGINARY WORLD OF CHIVALRIC FIGHTERS

According to Allen Chen, who discussed the ambiguities of ethnicity as culture and as identity,

Cultural China consists of three cultural universes – the first encompassing societies populated predominately by ethnic Chinese, such as mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore; the second covering overseas Chinese communities; and the third consisting of intellectuals and professionals generally concerned with the Chinese world – in practice, it refers to a single universe whose common interest in China transcends national boundaries and discourses.¹

After founding The Performance Workshop in 1984, Stan Lai demonstrated his ideas about theatre through two overlapping ways. The success of Pining... In Peach Blossom Land warranted the possibility to dramatize his observations about Taiwanese society on stage as the artistic director of The Performance Workshop. Being a professor at the National Institute of the Arts, he kept introducing Western theories and the classics to the Taiwanese. In the following years, Stan Lai experimented with various theatrical forms which included cross-talking, musicals,

and film. His concerns became distinct by presenting two shows in The Performance Workshop each year.

In the previous chapter I analyzed his classical work, *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land*, which exemplifies most of the main themes of Stan Lai's original works. It is noticeable that the overlapping and intervention between multiple different performances also appear in *The Journey to the West, The Island and the Other Shore* and *I, Me, He, Him.*² The first work combines the Chinese classical legend with the story of the first group of Chinese students studying abroad during the late Qing dynasty and selected accounts from present day students abroad. Similar to *Pining*, the second play reveals the cruel reality behind reunification in 1989 and the Chinese chivalric world. *I, Me He, Him* illustrates the fallibility of memory and the present experiences of both Chinese and Taiwanese — a topic that I will analyze in the fourth chapter.

All of the productions mentioned above elaborate the relationship between Mainland China and Taiwan, through different perspectives, and they articulate Stan Lai's opinions about contemporary Taiwanese society. Another popular performing series of The Performance Workshop, the cross-talk performances, are also famous for their critical perspectives on social circumstances. In addition, the idea of utopia, reappeared in another of Stan Lai's works in 2000, *Welcome to Shangri-La.* Therefore, the detailed understanding about *Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* enables the audiences and readers to better appreciate other original works of The

Performance Workshop. This play can be interpreted as the prototype of Stan Lai’s creative works because it continues to be revived constantly.

However, there is an obvious absence in *Pining* - the absence of the voice from the second generation of Taiwanese. While Mr. Chiang is approaching the end of his life, his son never shows up in the play. The audience cannot pass judgment on Mr. Chiang without his son’s testimony. The second generation is a crucial component in Taiwanese society. It is impossible to summarize the development of the second generation and the conflicts that it caused in Taiwan. Stan Lai, who observed audience responses, addressed the second generation issue in *The Island and the Other Shore*. In this play, second generation family members from both Mainland China and Taiwan confront one another.

Following my analysis in the previous chapter, I will interpret Stan Lai’s *The Island and the Other Shore* (1989) and *The Red Lotus Society* (1994) in this chapter. *The Island and the Other Shore* further explores the disillusionment of the second generation about the Taiwanese reunification with China. Jhih-shing, an author of chivalric novels and his confused fictional mouthpiece, Yun-xia, present how the imaginary world gradually overtakes Jhih-shing’s private suite and his indifferent family. While Yun-xia is constantly posing questions to him, the poor author can not hide his frustration in handling and solving his problems. By constructing an imaginary world, he finds the courage to face reality and curves a path into the future.

On a similar topic, *The Red Lotus Society* dramatizes a modern legend – a young man whose admiration about the world of chivalry lures him to a special journey. After training himself, his wild dream, flying in the sky of Taipei, finally comes true.
But his state of happiness is soon spoiled by a series of problems. His skills in kung fu\(^3\) are useless for his survival in modern Taiwan. The cruelty, temptation, and emptiness that he feels in this rapidly developing society, cannot be reverted into the noble values of earlier times by his spirit of chivalry. Perhaps his name Ah-Da, which represents a person with unique thinking and zeal, suggests why he pursues this impossible dream. *The Red Lotus Society* addresses a number of questions: What are the charms of the tales of chivalry that persuade Ah-Da to participate in the secret world? What are the reasons for composing such stories for modern day audiences? In order to see the significance of the world of chivalry to the Taiwanese, this chapter will also analyze two overwhelming *wu xia* films,\(^4\) *Xiaoao Jiang Hu* (aka Swordsman, 1990) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).

The first goal of this chapter is to analyze the connections between these two movies and Stan Lai’s theatrical works. It is important to observe how the Chinese spirit is shown in this kind of works and the absurdity of the dream to re-establish a world of chivalry in modern society. Most importantly, this chapter will further elaborate the idea of “imagined China” from both a geographic and an ideological perspective. While the stories take place in famous landscapes in China, Chinese philosophies like Confucianism, Taoism, show up in novel of chivalry. Thus, the depiction of the world of the chivalry is a good way to show how the Chinese absorb these ideologies to deal with the mundane world. More precisely, this chapter will

\(^3\) The meaning of kung fu sometimes overlaps with the idea of martial arts. Here it means profound martial arts skills that are obtained through constant physical and spiritual training.

\(^4\) Either action or kung fu, the western genres of films, fails to represent this kind of movies. While *wu* means martial arts or kung fu, *xia* represents the knights-errant.
record and analyze the voice of the second generation of Taiwanese, especially Stan Lai's suggestions given from a Buddhist perspective. The storyline of *The Island and the Other Shore* will help understand the tragic separation of forty years, and how the people on both sides appraised the situation.

Situated in a shabby old apartment in Taipei, the Shih family is a typical settler's family of the older generation. After feeling guilty for leaving his daughter Yu-hong in Mainland China forty years earlier, the father is finally given permission by the government to reunite with her. Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid conflict when his daughter arrives at the modern city of Taipei and meets her father's new wife. At the same time, his son Jhih-shing has a career as a novelist and suffers from an identity crisis. Jhih-shing's special column comes under severe criticism because he writes about scenes that taken place on an isolated island or in a remote cave. Jhih-shing betrays the standards of chivalrous fiction and performance because the world of chivalry in his novel continually intrudes into his real modern world. He experiences the dissolution of his beliefs through arguments with his mistress and discord with his family. When in the end the secrets are revealed, the audience sees the absurdity of modern life because "nothing has its certainty, and there is no reality in lives."

If the intrusions of the knight-errant raised too many questions about the Taiwanese society in 1989, the super-realism in *The Red Lotus Society* perplexed the audiences. This film 1994 was a box-office failure and it discouraged Stan Lai's ambitions in the movie industry. In this film, Ah-Da a young man, who is learning how to fly, tries to retrace the legendary Chinese dignity in the modern society of

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Taipei. His knowledge about the world of chivalry which was built by the unrealistic fables of oral history makes him yearn for the lost martial art and the forgotten spirit of chivalry. Ah-Da neither shows nor experiences any relief after mastering vaulting because, on the one hand, “the highest level of kung fu is not showing it in front of others,” and on the other, his achievement is no longer acceptable in the modern world. At the end, he returns to his common and dull life as an unsuccessful salesman.

As Stan Lai puts it, “While everything changing rapidly in today Taiwan, we [Taiwanese] gradually turn our backs to the past, not even try to lower our heads and see who we are. We have lost the ability of ‘vaulting.’” Stan Lai’s mysterious tale criticized the near-sighted and pretentious modern Taiwanese. The conflicts of traditions and innovations in Taipei oppress the second generation. Like Ah-Da and his friends, the young generations in Taiwan are uncertain about their future. The spirit of the knight-errant fills their feelings of emptiness. As an escape from the chaotic Taiwanese society in 1990s, the world of chivalry mixes hope with imagination, and idealization.

It is not accidental that Stan Lai picked the world of chivalry as a representation of his “imagined China.” Fictions of chivalry have become a utopia, a land where Chinese have entrusted their hopes during their long history. The fables of chivalry

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6 Kung fu means martial art here.


8 Stan Lai, the foreword in The Red Lotus Society, 4.
can be traced back to the Warring States and Early Han Periods (300-120 B.C.E).
There have been numerous popular novels of chivalry since the Qing dynasty (1644 A.D). These fables reflect the deep desire of poor, ordinary people to overthrow corrupt governments in a quest for justice and empowerment. These imagined "justice fighters," who are trained in the martial arts, will stand up to defend China from invasions and to protect the common people from rusty bureaucratic government. Of course, the knights-errant in these tales study Chinese philosophy and religion, and have high moral standards. According to James J.Y. Liu, the ideals of these "justice fighters" include altruism, personal loyalty, courage, truthfulness, faith, honor, and generosity.  

The Chinese produced and consumed these stories on screen in Shanghai from 1930s to the outburst of the Chinese Civil War. The fad of martial arts movies created a special name for this kind of films — wu xia. With the advent of the Cultural Revolution, the publishing of novels of chivalry and wu xia films became illegal in Mainland China for a while. Accordingly, Taiwan and Hong Kong replaced Shanghai and they became in turn the collection and distribution centers of chivalrous fictions. The movie industry in Hong Kong from the 1960s to the 1970s introduced three directors, King Hu, Zhang Che, and Liu Kar Leung, who helped the wu xia film genre to reach its apex.  

While promoting the chivalric spirit, these

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10 Detailed introduction can be found in David Bordwell's Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), under the chapter titled Three Martial Masters.
films were still more entertaining action movies because the audiences were able to see on the screen not only staged fights but also the well-known landscapes of China.

Accounting for the reasons behind the popularity of this genre, contemporary film historians suggested that: "wu xia films, with their specific cultural signifiers, represented a Cultural China that probably never existed for the Chinese in diaspora and, in a way, soothed their nostalgia for home." Since Mainland China was isolated from the refugees in 1949 during the Cold War era, many Chinese immigrants aboard and Chinese living in earlier colonies found their China in wu xia films. Lamenting the lost of traditional Chinese culture in modern Taiwanese society, Stan Lai presents his version of the chivalrous world in The Island and the Other Shore and The Red Lotus Society. The audience can see the "China complex" of the Taiwanese, and can understand the possible solutions to this difficult problem.

In The Island and the Other Shore, each character who represents the younger generation, reflects a different attitude towards the tricky problem on either side of the Taiwan Strait. Jhih-shing builds the image of "Old" China through his writings. Yu-hong (Rainbow), his visiting elder sister from China, firmly believes in the existence of a "New" China. Helen, his self-centered wife, ignores her present life in Taiwan by promoting immigration to the United States. Ming-yue (Moon), his mistress who articulates the Taiwanese consciousness, totally discards any relation with China. Thus, all possible combinations about the China-Taiwan inter-relationship are juxtaposed and their political attitudes are displayed on stage.

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Through the staged conflicts among these characters, the spectators have the chance to listen to different perspectives and to discover their own voices.

“New” China, a term that coined in *Pining*, becomes significant. “New” China is not only a belief held by the older generation who fought against the Japanese. Several second generation Chinese, especially the Red Guard students, are pious followers of “New” China. The character Rainbow has never abandoned the idea of a better China even though she witnessed many tragic events during the Cultural Revolution. On the contrary, she insists that “there is a touching memory in her mind which she relies on to withstand present cruelties.”12 Every time the Shih family argues about the China Civil War, one of its members would seek out his/her past beliefs in China in order to find comforts.

Rainbow: [...] You who did not stay in China then would never understand the touching feeling while seeing the rising sun in the morning. We held a hope that a New China, where the society is out of injustice and poverty, is waiting in the future.

Mother: (mumbles to herself) Ideal...

Father: (points to Rainbow) That was why you and your friend Chang fell into such a miserable condition.

Rainbow: (agitated) Even though we were miserable, we fought for a better China! I don’t think you can appreciate such feeling after living so many years on this small island!

Mother: ... Ideal... We devoted to our country and followed Mr. Chiang to Taiwan. We all swore to be faithful until our death. Regardless of difficulties and obstacles, we sweated profusely as we came to battlefronts with Madame Chiang.13

*The Island and the Other Shore* reflects the various beliefs of the Shih family about the concept of “New” China. While facing disillusionment, they all tend to

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justify their persisting beliefs. The retreat in 1949 is the reason that the Father defends his authority. He argues that the Kuo Ming Tang government did not expect the attack from the Communists right after the end of the Second World War. Sharing his viewpoint, the Mother trusted the KMT government and believed its propaganda. She indicates that the refugees intended to stay in Taiwan only for a while, and that they would liberate Mainland China. As for Rainbow, she can not forget her youthful passions for a better China. Because of her belief that the ideals of Socialism are still possible, she does not blame the Communist government. Ironically, all of these dreams about the “New” China faded out, became a part of the “Old” China.

The search for identity becomes a dangerous quest in The Island because the revelations usually cause more traumas by discovering some long forgotten memory and history. A catastrophe ensues when the main character of the novel Yun-xia begins to master a lost martial art. He flips out and kills his supposed father and sister-in-law, ruining the cave in the seventeenth scene.14 The play reveals the truth later when its author Jhih-shing finally learns that he is an adopted child.15 At the same time, he also has to bear the secret of Rainbow. In the fourteenth scene, his visiting sister confesses to him that she is not Rainbow. In fact, she took her best friend Yu-hong’s name and lived her life according to Yu-hong’s will. Reunification, which was long awaited by the Father during his entire life is only harmful. The old

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14 Lai, The Island and the Other Shore, 130-133.

15 Lai, The Island and the Other Shore, scene sixteen, especially 126-129.
generation would prefer to forget it and the second generation would rather escape from it.

Jhih-shing’s passion about an idealized China has become part of his identity. Thanks to the lessons taught to him by his parents. However, in the late 1980s, what was regarded to be correct suddenly lost its political correctness. Jhih-shing could not escape from the conflicts and confrontations in his present life. It is obvious that his wife, Helen, can not provide any comfort to him because she spends all of her attention to promoting her investments in the United States of America. His recent separation from his mistress, who was his co-author, is discouraging to Jhih-shing in several ways. First of all, Jhih-shing and his mistress hardly communicate anymore. He insists on the importance of their private apartment, but she questions his “safe haven.” Jhih-shing criticizes Moon’s project about oral history and political reviews as “low-class works” because it places a strong emphasis on emotion. He intends to remind Moon that “there is more than one angle to perceive things,”\textsuperscript{16} and the self-pity of Taiwanese is unhealthy.

On the other hand, Moon questions the improper authority of the older refugees and the political correctness of speaking Mandarin for the past fifty years. She argues that Jhih-shing is falling behind the times because he “is careless about his surroundings while living in Taiwan.”\textsuperscript{17} As Chin-mei Tao and Shu-yi Hou comment, “at their private space, they discuss many native consciousness problems which

\textsuperscript{16} Lai, \textit{The Island and the Other Shore}, scene seven, 54-55.

\textsuperscript{17} Lai, \textit{The Island and the Other Shore}, scene four, 39.
would be broadly discussed in later years.”18 The disagreements between Jhih-shing and Moon end their relationship and show how they are drifting apart from the second generation of Chinese settlers from Taiwan.

Yun-xia: Dew, as long as we cannot make sure of anything, why don’t we leave together? Why you still stay here?
Dew: Since I had the wonderful experience once here. Even though it is so fragile that it is more like shadow. [pause] But sometimes I would think about leaving for your hometown, to see the place you lived.
Yun-xia: Don’t you remember anything about your past? You have no impression about your hometown in childhood?
Dew: My hometown? I can’t recall where it is. I just remember the day I was here. I have no clues about when and how did I come here.
[silence]
In fact, I can’t be sure about how people outside this cave would look like. [pause] I almost forget that there are still living people outside.19

Because Stan Lai indicated that the actress playing Moon should also play Dew, it is obvious that Dew is a reflection of Moon. By having Dew say that she cannot remember her past, Stan Lai criticizes those Taiwanese who fully embraced nativism but totally failed to recognize their Chinese origins. Furthermore, he pointed out the dangers resulting from Taiwan’s isolation from China.

At the same time, Rainbow, the visiting sister articulates several views about an ideal China that Jhih-shing had never dared to think. Like the perplexed knight-errant in his novel, Jhih-shing feels “the island that he lives is becoming smaller with


19 Lai, The Island and the Other Shore, 112.
time."\textsuperscript{20} While Yun-xia, his mouthpiece, can not resist the desire to travel to "the other shore," he is not courageous enough to leave his present world. Homeland, once the source of his dreams, loses its meaning when the writer finds out that he is a native of Taiwan. The massacre scene in his novel reveals how his world capsizes. Gradually, he recovers from the shock and resets his life. As a response to Yun-xia's request for salvation from continuous torture, he tells the swordsman that "the suffering from penance is endless, turn around, there is the other shore."\textsuperscript{21} It only appears that he kills this character when in fact he gives Yun-xia a rebirth by arranging all previous encounters as nightmares. According to the Buddhist suggestion of forgiveness, Jhih-shing settles down with a new realization of his identity.

In the end, all these female characters walk out on Jhih-shing. Moon abandons the apartment. When Helen discovers his extra-marital relationship, she leaves the family. Having completed the task of her visit, Rainbow returns to Mainland China. These fearless women, leave him to pursue their ideal. As for Jhih-shing, he begins to look like Yun-xia, the protagonist in his novel, who finds ruins and havoc on the other shore as in his dream. The yearning for an ideal China is not impeded by the people’s attitudes, but their belief in a utopia evaporates with time. In other words, the search for reunification guarantees nothing but the emptiness behind unreasonably high expectations. Stan Lai foretells the discouraging experience when Ang Lee visited Mainland China.

\textsuperscript{20} Lai, \textit{The Island and the Other Shore}, 37.

\textsuperscript{21} Lai, \textit{The Island and the Other Shore}, 138.
I was kind of disappointed. Other than the palace, everything was modern. I didn’t see what I was looking for – it felt as if I were in a big Taipei. I had no thrill because that China does not exist anymore, either in Taiwan or America or here: it’s a history. It’s a dream that all the Chinese people in the world have, an impression. Gone with the wind.22

Ang Lee, the director of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* who grew up in Taiwan, could not hide his depression after his first visit to Beijing. Under the educational system of the Kuo Ming Tang government, he must build some impractical fantasies about the “lost homeland” by studying Chinese geography. The image of China in 1949 and before 1949 was still available thanks to the stories of the older generation. The members of the second generation who had a chance to visit Mainland China after 1987 realized how much the “former” China had changed. However, Ang Lee realized his dream to direct a *wu xia* film. He insisted that his life as film director would not be complete without such an experience. Maybe Stan Lai shared such a view about his stage works. Therefore, visualizing the chivalrous world becomes a primary goal for directors with ethnic Chinese origins. It also helps to explain why even Kar Wai Wang, the Hong Kong director who is famous for his post-modern non-linear style, directed a non-traditional *wu xia* film called *The Ashes of Time* (Dung Che Sai Duk 1994). Not surprisingly, the characters and parts of the script are extracted from Louis Cha’s novels of chivalry.

Louis Cha (Jin Yong) is definitely the most influential contemporary writer of novels of chivalry. From television serials to stage works, his stories about the knights-errant have been reproduced for the past forty years. He has fans in Hong

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Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Mainland China, and overseas. Ni Kuang once commented that "where a Chinese lives, the work of Jin Yong exists." Hence, through the interpretations of his novels, the basic concepts of a Chinese chivalrous spirit are better appreciated. Similar to previous authors of this type of novels, he centers his novels on the Sung, Ming, and Qing dynasties, during which China was invaded or ruled by other foreign countries. The Chinese bureaucratic system was seen as unjust, and the existence of knights-errant became reasonable and necessary.

Another famous theatrical group in Taiwan, the Godot Theatre Company, dramatized Louis Cha's chivalric novel *The Semi-Gods and Semi-Devils* as *Chyao Fong, the End of Destiny* in 1996. Its artistic director, James Chi-ming Liang, said that he was deeply moved by the character Chyao Fong. Under the setting of *The Semi-Gods and Semi-Devils*, Chyao Fong is a tragic protagonist because he is raised in China without any knowledge that his parents are from Liao (the later Manchu). When his origin is revealed, he is no longer qualified to be the leader of the Beggar Gang. Throughout the novel he is searching for his identity. He eventually dies in the battle between Liao and North Sung (the ruler of China between 960-1126 A.D.). His intention to stop the war is guaranteed by the king of Liao, but until the end of his life he is puzzled about his identity. He could not bear to see the soldiers from Liao killing his previous friends, but at the same time, he also worries about the

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23 Ni Kuang is a famous Chinese science fiction writer. Jin Yong has revised his novels two times to respond the readers. There are various editions, including comic books, for readers like children and elder people as well.

24 *The Semi-Gods and Semi-Devils* is a five volume chivalry fiction by Jin Yong (Louis Cha). It describes the stories of three oath brothers: Chyao Fong, Xu Chu, and Duan Yu. They all master particular martial arts and discover their true birth identities through marvelous experiences.
heavy cost of claiming the war for Liao. In such a self-conflicting situation, death becomes the ultimate nirvana.

In Louis Cha’s fiction of chivalry, most protagonists must learn and mature through some painful experience. “In resorting to violence, male or female knights-errant seek to justify their existences on predestined notions of chivalry, gallantry and other heroic deeds.”

Through unusual encounters, the characters absorb the regulations of the chivalrous world and formulate their own philosophies. Jiang hu, the world restricted to knights-errant, is a never-never land. Xiaoao Jiang Hu, the second film selected for discussion in this chapter, was also adapted from a Louis Cha’s novel, Proud Smiling Wanderer. Ling Hu Chung, the story’s main character, is a rookie knight-errant. He accidentally gets involved in a combat in search for a secret martial arts manual. The line between good and evil is so thin that he is unable to tell them apart immediately. Even his master, who is regarded as a disciplined figure in jiang hu, proves to be a hypocrite. However, the knights-errant of a secret clan, turn out to be his faithful friends. With an optimistic attitude about life, Ling Hu Chung is soon relieved from his frustrations and is able to trail a righteous path for himself in a corrupt society.

Even an individual like Ling Hu Chung, who has an unruly soul, must follow some major principles of righteousness in order to survive in a place like jiang hu.

Jen, the spoiled young Manchurian girl in Crouching Tiger, expresses her excitement

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26 Jiang hu is totally different from any existed authoritative systems. It seems as a world full of possibilities, yet it works with its own formulas.
about *jiang hu* during her first meeting with Yu Shu Lien. “It must be exciting to be a fighter, to be totally free! I’ve read all about people like you. Roaming wild, beating up anyone who gets in your way!”

From an opposite perspective, Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien attempt to offer the real panorama of *jiang hu*. “No place to bathe for days, sleeping in flea-infested beds...They tell you all about that in those books?”

Thus, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a film which portrays the life cycle of a knight-errant by specifying the growth of Jen and the guidance she receives from Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien.

*Crouching Tiger* is a self-discovering journey for Jen. Her experiences in *jiang hu* turn an innocent girl into a mature fighter. Showing her desire to live her life to its fullest, she steals Green Destiny to prove her ability in martial arts. At the same time, the stolen sword ruins the retirement plans of Li and Yu. To their surprise, Jen is taught by Jade Fox, the murder of Li’s master. Fascinated by the martial skills of Jen and by the story of her love affair with Lo, they both promise to find Jen. They also try to guide her towards the right direction. While protecting Jen from the attack of Jade Fox, Li finally avenges the death of his master but loses his life. Jen reunites with Lo at Wudan, and she decides her future according to the lessons she learned from *jiang hu*.

*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Xiaoao Jiang Hu* exemplify the elements of chivalric novels and *wu xia* films. These elements are: Chinese landscapes, settings from specific Chinese historical periods, choreographed fight scenes, the

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27 Lee and Schamus 40.

28 Lee and Schamus 41.
pursuit of unification, and a level of awareness on the part of the protagonists. Stan Lai's two theatrical works, *The Island and the Other Shore* and *The Red Lotus Society*, assimilated the elements of this genre, but also questioned the validity of some of them.

Almost all postwar martial arts films that constitute the genre have been produced by and for the Chinese communities outside mainland China. And to this end they can be read as films of mythic remembrance, an emigrant cinema for an audience seeking not only its identity and links with an often imaginary cultural past, but also its legitimization.²⁹

When the *wu xia* film genre reached its climax in the 1970s, China prohibited any communication with other countries. Therefore, film directors did not have easy access to Chinese landscapes. For instance, King Hu, the director of *A Touch of Zen*, went to Korea to find possible locations to shoot his film. Martial arts films were made for overseas Chinese to whet their nostalgia. Verisimilitude, which was a required element for earlier martial arts movies was abandoned because it was no longer necessary to persuade the audience that such heroes and feats had indeed happened in Chinese history. Nevertheless, the spectators were led to believe that they were seeing the landscapes of "real" China, even though no film was ever shot on location. By comparison, more recent film directors are proud of being able to shoot on location in breathtaking Chinese landscapes. James Schamus describes *Crouching Tiger* as a film "bringing together almost every conceivable idea you

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could have of China.” The reasons behind this declaration are that the crew collects Chinese professionals from every field and “this film was shot in almost every corner of China,” including Gobi Desert and the Taklamakan Plateau. Nowadays Mainland China is open to directors and tourists, and the film makers can shoot and sell the real “scenic” spots of China to Western audiences.

Since the Cultural Revolution encouraged the Chinese in Mainland China to abandon the tradition and to espouse the Communist utopia, the Chinese diaspora around the world, especially the one represented by the KMT government in Taiwan, promoted the right to conserve traditional Chinese values. Wu xia films became a suitable vehicle to reclaim the restoration of various Chinese philosophies and religions. A traditional utopia was promoted by the images of jiang hu that make everything look possible. Even though Ang Lee saw how Mainland China had changed, he reproduced a utopian tale in Crouching Tiger as well. “But you can’t remove China from the boy’s head, so I’m finding China Now. That’s why I’m making this movie with these people, to talk about things we know and that practically don’t exist. Good old China.”

Nevertheless, visualizing an ideal China, the wu xia film directors and the writers of chivalric novels run the risk of promoting misleading interpretations. Elaborate locales were combined with fictional historical dramatizations. The wu xia films presented an unrealistic view of China. Critics blame Louis Cha for the many

30 James Schamus, the notes on screenplay, 46.

31 Lee and Schamus 46.

32 Ang Lee, the notes on the screenplay, 40.
historical mistakes in his novels. The exaggerated evil images of Ming dynasty’s
eunuchs in Xiaqao Jiing Hu prove the lack of character developments in wu xia
films. It is common to simplify the struggles of knights-errant by constructing a
dualistic view of the world – virtue against vice. Stephen Teo provides a general
observation of King Hu’s works. “Hu’s heroic characters fight and die for historical-
nationalist causes that entail great sacrifice, conveying the message that individual
heroic action is necessary when the state itself has lost its moral path.”

However, what is described in these novels and films may both be more complex and closer to
historical reality in a different way.

Instead of combating villains, these knights-errant are interested in finding a way
to unite themselves with the Tao/Nature. These justice fighters’ goal is to master the
martial arts, to develop their spiritual world, and to serve the people and legitimate
rulers in need of assistance. Excellence in kung fu is a fundamental requirement for
these justice fighters for self-improvement. Finding the mi ji, the secret martial arts
manuals, was a short cut for them to master kung fu. The quest for mi ji is a favorite
motif in chivalric novels and the wu xia films. All of the four works discussed in this
chapter adapt it at different degrees. Jade Fox, the villain in Crouching Tiger reflects
on the tragedy of many knights-errant – the obsession for secret manuals prevents
them from exploring their spiritual world.

While accusing others of concealing the martial arts manual from her, Jade Fox
does not realize the reasons for her failure. Her jealousy of Jen and long resentment
of Li Mu Bai materialize in her final attempt to murder them. Likewise, Yun-xia

33 Stephen Teo, “Love and Swords,” under the chapter “The Hero’s Destiny.”
vents his anger by killing Dew and his supposed father in *The Island*. The competition for secret martial arts manuals usually results in blood shed. Self-destruction is the most common outcome for obdurate secret-manual hunters. In *Xiaocao Jiang Hu* justice fighters compete with one another for the martial arts manual, and virtually all of them either lose their high status or their life.

The quest for Chinese landscapes in the 1970s was similar to the quest for the secret manuals. The world that these novelists create is only a reflection of an ideal society which historically speaking, the Chinese history failed to attain. Stan Lai used this tradition to remind the Taiwanese about the loss of Chinese culture, but also he noted the impossibility to revive an era that was long gone. The ideal China portrayed in these novels has never existed in the history of the Chinese. Louis Cha, arrived at the same conclusion in his late novels. *Xiaocao Jiang Hu* describes a corrupted *jiang hu* where knights-errant betray their oath and abandon morality. *The Semi-Gods and Semi-Devils* portrays the struggles of the all-virtuous Chyao Fong regarding his Chinese identity. Cha’s last novel, *The Deer and the Cauldron*, tells the story of a dishonest courtier who is not very skillful in martial arts, but can succeed in both government and *jiang hu*.

*Jiang hu*, the mysterious world that embodied all the virtues of an ideal Chinese society gradually lost its utopian face in literature. Interestingly, its by-product, the *wu xia* films, have not lost their force and faith in this utopia. The images of China depicted in this kind of movies speak for a utopian medley Chinese culture. Western audiences scarcely notice this cultural diversity in the *wu xia* films. Observing the success of *Crouching Tiger*, Felicia Chen provides an interesting conclusion.
“Paradoxically then, the film's "Chineseness" is represented by a whole myriad of Chineseness, and it is this cultural schizophrenia that enables Chinese audiences to scoff at the film, while basking in its international success.”

The *wu xia* films continue to represent Chineseness even though they are catering to the tastes of Western audiences.

In the series of King Hu’s movies from the 1970s to the 1990s, such as *Xiao dao Jiang Hu*, the tense fight scenes have always been a story feature in all of the Hong Kong based *wu xia* movies. Their popularity brought out a by-product – the kung fu movies, with leading stars like Bruce Lee, Jackie Chen, and Jet Lee. However, the more recent approach to make *wu xia* movies has changed. The success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* proved that a *wu xia* film can attract audiences even though the fighting scenes rely more on choreography than on real martial arts prowess. *Hero* and *The House of Flying Daggers*, two of the latest Chinese blockbusters follow the more recent approach. Martial arts movies have begun to pay more attention to discuss the ideas of Zen and Taoism, and to emphasize psychological conflicts rather than physical conflict.

This phenomenon illustrates the dilemma faced by the producers of traditional movies of chivalry: the legends of swordsmen are fictions, and their fights are hollow and bereft of spirituality. Individual heroes can never save an entire nation, and the actions of many heroes remain unmotivated. Traditional Chinese virtues are alluded to by the delicate costumes and beautiful landscapes of China in the most

recent *wu xia* films, but the lack of “realistic” *kung fu* scenes disappoint Chinese spectators. What disappoints them even more is the disappearance of heroic images. In *Crouching Tiger*, Jen is cast as an antagonist rather than as a protagonist. Nevertheless, Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien embody the knightly spirit of Confucianism. When it comes to Yimou Zhang’s two latest martial arts films, loyalty and faith receive an overwhelming emphasis. When Nameless quits from assassinating a notorious tyrant in Chinese history, the last vestiges of any nostalgia evaporate.

Long before the *wu-xia* films expressed any disillusionment, Stan Lai foresaw that the escapist chivalrous world would be collapsed by the concerns of modern Chinese society in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Stan Lai elaborated on the absurdity of *The Island and The Other Shore* and *The Red Lotus City*. Yun-xia, the knight-errant in the former theatrical work never meets any external enemy. His enemies and conflicts are internal and psychological. When the heroic posture is abandoned, the loss of faith in knights-errant as savers in the injustice world is also abandoned.

Ah-Da, the leading character of *The Red Lotus Society*, keeps reminding himself that “it is not allowed to display mastery in any particular kind of kung-fu.” His resistance to the temptation of showing his martial arts prowess in front of others becomes a major responsibility for these justice fighters. The primary mission of traditional knights-errant was to right wrongs and to help ordinary people. This mission is no longer possible and these modern justice fighters hide themselves in modern cities, where they earn a living as massagists, cooks, and businessmen.
Justice fighters have become an endangered species and a tall tale told by the old settlers who lament the loss of traditional Chinese values in Taiwan.

The first of these spatializations is rooted in a fundamental reformulation of the nature and conceptualization of social being, an essentially ontological struggle to rebalance the interpretable interplay between history, geography and society. Here the reassertion of space arises against the grain of an ontological historicism that has privileged the separate constitution of being in time for the past century. 35

During the process of searching for the meaning of life, the spatiotemporal position of the changing modern city of Taipei was questioned by Stan Lai’s works. Ah-Da’s home is located in one of the villages of military dependents, which were built in Taiwan for refugees from Mainland China. Fifty years later, this shady village seemed dark and crowded in the core of the city of Taipei. The civic government planned to demolish the houses of this village for the sake of a blueprint of an orderly modern city that no longer cared about the history of such villages and the human rights of the residents. These refugees who fled their homes in China half a century earlier, were now forced to abandon their second homes in Taiwan. These homeless settlers experienced repeated wanderings like the drifter knights-errant in jiang hu.

The “journey” of the old generation settlers from Mainland China to Taiwan was not pleasant. Fifty years later, they traveled in the opposite direction, but the reunification with their “Old” China was thwarted. They were left hanging between two worlds because neither Taiwan nor Mainland China healed their deep sense of loss and homesickness. In addition, the rising of nativism in Taiwan contributed to

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the decadence of the good “Old” China. During the Cultural Revolution, many valuable ancient relics were burnt. The Taiwanese saw their communities as symbols of laggards, but even though they attempted to preserve traditional Chinese values and cultures in Taiwan, their Chinese roots dried up. It is this void that novels of chivalry and wuxia films fill.

“The film is a kind of dream of China,” wrote Ang Lee, “a China that probably never existed, except in my boyhood fantasies in Taiwan.”36 In the screenplay of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Ang Lee started his foreword by discussing his dream about China. No doubt Stan Lai had views about China in his mind when he was growing up. His father’s sudden death made Stan Lai stay in Taiwan and learn about Chinese cultures before he studied at Berkeley. From then on, he had to fit into the Taiwanese educational system which he found to be more strict and dull than the American educational system. Ironically, when he came back from the United States, he found out that several traditional Chinese cultures were fading out when the old settlers began to die. Accordingly, he began reconsidering the meaning of Chinese cultures in Taiwan and he revived the art of cross-talking.

In an interview, Stan Lai lamented the scarcity of traditional Chinese cultures among his contemporary Taiwanese. The Taiwanese were paying attention to superficial souvenirs instead of preserving the collective memory of a lost generation of settlers. Consequently, the link with traditional Chinese cultures became fragile.

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36 Ang Lee, the foreword on the screenplay, 7.
and no Taiwanese could trace them spontaneously. Thus, the search for Chineseness is always a concern in Stan Lai's works. From a true admirer of Western cultures to a keeper of Chinese cultures, the struggles and conflicts within him are worth discussing. Even though *The Island and the Other Shore* and *The Red Lotus Society* abandon the Chinese landscapes, the yearning for the "imagined" chivalrous China is still obvious. But what Stan Lai searched for is neither the changing Chinese landscape nor a utopian world that had never existed. Being a pious Buddhist, he emphasized the core thinking and spirituality of the knights errant. In his works, the protagonists lose their traditional terrain, and try to adjust to the modern world by learning how to redefine themselves.

So far in this chapter I have discussed the similarity of form and the ineffectuality of the knights-errant in modern society that are apparent in two Stan Lai's works and *Xiaosao Jiang Hu*. I will now focus on the spiritual and religious concepts in *The Island and the Other Shore*, *The Red Lotus Society*, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Regardless of the implications of the Chinese landscapes, novels of chivalry and the *wu xia* films teach their readers and spectators how to perceive themselves in an unfair society. J. Heath Atchiey observes the religious meaning of the self-searching process in *Crouching Tiger*. According to the Buddhist image, "enlightenment is an object only for those of us on this side of the

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river.” Obviously, the title and the whole play of *The Island and the Other Shore* interpret this Buddhist image.

Stan Lai’s Buddhist background and his suggestions about the changing Taiwanese society become valuable if his thinking is better understood. Since their lives are full of suffering, they find comfort in philosophies and religions. “Within Buddhist enlightenment one ceases to be the slave of an existence that always comes up short; instead one masterfully recognizes and enjoys existence for what it is.”

Most Taiwanese and Chinese need to heal the traumas they suffered from western invasions, the Second World War, and Chinese Civil War in 20th century. Thus, the quest for the ultimate spiritual life was not only a quest for knights-errant but also for ordinary people.

According to the standards set in *jiang hu*, justice fighters would be able to be united with nature when they endorsed the Chinese virtues. However, in the novels of chivalry and the *wu xia* films hardly any of the main characters achieves this goal. Usually, the cost of passing all the tests is too high and beyond the means of an average knight-errant. Most knights-errant drift in and out of *jiang hu* during their entire lives without ever attaining sublimity. Such an uncertain world makes it obligatory for the martial arts practitioners to develop cogent philosophies of life. In most cases, they were inspired by the philosophical thinking of Confucius, Lao Zi,

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39 Atchley, passage fifteen.
Zhuang Zi, Mo Zi, Mencius,\textsuperscript{40} or religious dogmas like Buddhism and Taoism. Since the world of chivalry is composed of so many different belief systems that are followed by clans and groups, it is often perplexing to the new jiang hu wanderers. In order to keep the novices on the right path, they are encouraged to belong in a faction or a leading master. The fastest way for novices to become accustomed to the rules of the world of chivalry is to follow an honest and sincere master.

\textit{Crouching Tiger} uses many principles from the sect of Confucian knights-errant. Li Mu Bai keeps the mission of avenging his master's death in mind, and he provides Jen a chance to be his pupil. Li's belief was being modest and loyal to his position in society. Li shows his interest in Jen by teaching her some important principles to help her adjust to jiang hu. "No growth without assistance. No action without reaction. No desire without restraint. Now give yourself up and find yourself again. There is a lesson for you."\textsuperscript{41} The requirement to discard one's ego and to humbly bow in front of a master is a mode of thinking that originated from Confucian philosophies. As Jen will come to better understand the secret society, she will recognize how rebellious her soul is and how defiant her actions are, making her unfit for the world of the knights-errant. The education that she took from Jade Fox molded her into "the poisoned dragon" that capsizes jiang hu. Her talent in martial arts makes her too arrogant to put her pride aside and to learn Li's lessons. Jen's uncooperative attitude snuffs out her guiding light.

\textsuperscript{40} Confucius and Mencius appreciate the world from Humanity perspective. Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi promote the philosophy of reuniting of Nature, which originates the Taoism. Mo Zi encourages people to found groups in order to magnify individual's power to improve the world.

\textsuperscript{41} Lee and Schamus 80.
Even though justice fighters usually master the skill of vaulting, they fail to elevate their souls. There are too many attachments which restrict them from reaching sublimity. Their responsibility for the suffering common people, their persistence to obtain earthly fame, and their feelings for close friends and relatives become major obstacles on their way to the enlightenment. Li Mu Bai, the famous swordsman in jiang hu who has been trained at the Wudan Temple, experiences this problem:

Li: During my meditation training...I came to a place of deep silence...I was surrounded by light...Time and space disappeared. I had come to a place my master had never told me about.
Yu: You were enlightened?
Li: No. I didn’t feel the bliss of enlightenment. Instead...I was surrounded by an endless sorrow. I couldn’t bear it. I broke off my meditation. I couldn’t go on. There was something...pulling me back.42

Li’s restrain of his feelings for Shu Lien prevents his mind from attaining the required freedom. Li’s dream to quit jiang hu, however, is destroyed by his mission of revenge and his concern about Jen. Jiang hu, the place where everything seems possible, becomes a labyrinth with no exit. Even Fong Ching Yang, who taught Ling Hu Chung to be an expert swordsman, hides himself from the chivalric world disguised as a beggar. His “hiding” is a self-exile, but it is a far cry from quitting jiang hu altogether. It is hard for a knight-errant to be as optimistic and magnanimous as the character Ling Hu Chung. Perhaps the nearest one gets to attain sublimity through the martial arts is shown by Li Mu Bai’s death. As he is searching for the sublime, the justice fighter forgot to analyze himself, and this “forgetfulness” is the key for understanding one’s relationship with infinity.

42 Lee and Schamus 30.
Like the frustrated knights-errant, the modern Taiwanese have embarked on an endless wandering. In the foreword of The Red Lotus Society, Stan Lai comments that the modern Taiwanese have lost their ability to understand themselves and to improve their spirituality. When Ah-Da suffers from the stress of the Joint College Entrance Exam and from finding a suitable profession, he escapes into the fantasy of the world of chivalry to find relief. He believes that mastering vaulting will bring him the dignity that he cannot earn in the modern city life of Taipei. Ironically, Ah-Da’s teacher is blind. “The essence of vaulting is floating. World is a thing which hovers over there. When you fail to see this idea, you cannot fly high. But as you perceive the concept, it does not matter whether you can vault or not.”\(^\text{43}\) As Ah-Da is trying hard to fly higher, his master has already predicted the futility of his efforts.

Following the principles of the Red Lotus Society, Ah-Da suppresses his affections towards his neighbor and friend, Ah-Dan, because he believes that their relationship will distract him from his martial arts training. However, his mastery of kung fu does not have any tangible benefits. He is not allowed to use his martial arts skills in the presence of others, so he witnesses the death of his beloved. His master once reminded him about the loneliness after he had acquired the leaping skill. “If one day you learned something visible, it is still forbidden to tell others because they cannot perceive it.”\(^\text{44}\) Ah-Da’s journey in the movie brings him back to the point of departure. He is drifting in the streets in Taipei trying to earn a living. The

\(^{43}\) Yang Ming, the novel of The Red Lotus Society, 100-101.

\(^{44}\) Yang Ming 72.
destruction of his past and the restrictions placed on the modern justice fighters disable him.

"Turn round to the shore! This world is not the same world that you know! The wheel of history will grind you into ashes." Being a revolutionary Red Guard student until the end, Rainbow's last words to her father illustrate the relentless effects of the unstoppable time wheel. An individual's life seems insignificant in a timeless universe. The settlers and refugees who left Mainland China began an endless journey. Even though the revolution has ended, their wanderings continue.

Kim-Chew Ng explored the definition of *jiang hu*, and concluded that "at a certain level, the phrase 'the knights-errant in *jiang hu*' portrays the wandering and homeless feeling for any individual in the infinity." By using the popular themes — such as the search for secret manuals and the mastery of long lost martial arts, Stan Lai reveals the restlessness of modern Taiwanese. Like the chivalrous heroes and heroines who can hardly find peace in novels and the *wu xia* films, many Taiwanese lost their direction in modern society. Where is the place for the eternal peace of mind? Both the knights-errant and the ordinary people fail to find it. The dialogue between Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien reveals their deep desire to find eternal peace.

Li: Shu Lien... The things we touch have no permanence. My master would say... there is nothing we can hold on to in this world. Only by letting go can we truly possess what is real.
Yu: Not everything is an illusion. My hand... wasn't that real?

[...]


Li: Giang Hu [jiang hu] is a world of tigers and dragons, full of corruption...I tried sincerely to give it up but I have brought us only trouble.
Yu: To repress one's feeling only makes them stronger.
Li: You're right, but I don't know what to do. I want to be with you...just like this. It gives me a sense of peace.\(^{47}\)

In this endless quest, it was as difficult for the twentieth-century Chinese to find where they belong to and to find peace of mind as it was for the knights-errant. The Taiwanese find that Western influences impede their steps for reconciliation with modern China. Modern China bears no resemblance to the China depicted in wuxia films. Western suspicion of Communist China magnifies the difficulty.

Even though Mainland China announced the formula “one country, two systems”\(^{48}\) for Hong Kong and Macau, the citizens of Hong Kong and Macau could not hide their fear of unification with modern China. A lot of people have sold their estates and have immigrated to England and Canada since the 1980s. To allay their fears, the Chinese government promised that “Hong Kong would not change in the following fifty years.” The Taiwanese are witnessing this historical change and estimate the losses and gains from a possible unification with Mainland China in the future. Will Hong Kong keep its glory as “Oriental Pearl” or will it lose its competitive ability with the Chinese ruling?

During the period of Wang-Koo talks, Stan Lai and the Ping Fong Performance Troupe dramatized symbolic reunifications between the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders. Taiwanese projections of utopian wishful thinking about the peach

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\(^{47}\) Lee and Schamus 110.

\(^{48}\) The “one country, two systems” formula provides the rights for the past colonies to keep their democratic political and economical institutions.
blossom land and its chivalrous world are unrealistic distortions of history – both past and present. The next chapter will discuss how the two opposite sides of the Taiwan Strait observe each other's attitude through the social change occurring in Hong Kong.
CHAPTER 4

A MIRROR OF TWO FACES

According to a BBC news report that was broadcast on 29 January 2005,

Direct commercial flights have resumed between historic foes China and Taiwan for the first time in 55 years. [...] The resumption of the service marks a rare agreement across the Taiwan Strait, but underlying tensions between the two governments still remain. [...] Taiwan and China remain political foes. Beijing sees Taiwan as a breakaway province, and it will not deal with the government of President Chen Shui-bian, who is traditionally seen as pro-independence.¹

Right before the Chinese New Year of 2005, the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China improved thanks to the historic agreement for direct flights between the two countries. Many western media regarded this agreement as a milestone in cross-strait communication and commerce between Taiwan and China. Ironically, this agreement was implemented with the death of Mr. Koo, the Taiwan representative at the Wang-Koo talks.²


² Wang-Koo talks is the official name according to Mainland China. Taiwan names them as Koo-
The peace talks caught the attention of many Taiwanese who were hopeful for developing a friendly relationship with China. It was not accidental that the Taiwanese performing groups produced two works, *Three is a Company? 3 ~ The Fork of the Road*³ and *I, Me, He, Him*, right after the Wang-Koo talks. *The Fork of the Road* was one episode of the *Three is a Company* series created by the Ping Fong Acting Troupe, which used comedy to satirize recent events. It premiered in 1993, when the Taiwanese struggled to find an acceptable new order following the government of the Chiang family.⁴ Stan Lai expressed his thoughts in *I, Me, He, Him* in 1998, following the unification of Hong Kong with Mainland China. What do the two sides expect to obtain by the reunion?

This chapter will use *The Fork of the Road* and *I, Me, He, Him* to analyze Taiwanese attitudes towards the Wang-Koo talks. It will first explore the subtext of *The Fork of the Road*. A close study of *I, Me, He, Him* will follow. The case of Hong Kong, the Oriental Pearl, functions as a double-sided mirror that allowed Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese to perceive themselves and each other by observing the reactions of the Cantonese.

Both plays treat the Strait problem in complex ways. They portray businessmen who travel all over Asia. The locales are not restricted to only Taipei, Hong Kong.

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³ My translation.

⁴ Taiwan was ruled by the Chiang family since the end of Chinese Civil War. General Chiang Kai Shek resumed his presidency in 1950, and his governance continued until his death in 1975. Soon his son Chiang Ching Kuo started his leadership. Under his hands the Martial Law came to its end in 1987. His demise in 1988 declared a new democratic era and the close of the ruling of Chiang family.
Singapore, or Beijing. The separation ended when the lease of Hong Kong by the British expired.\(^5\) The Mainlanders who poured into the streets of Hong Kong to experience the wonders of capitalism, also wondered when they would be able to visit Taiwan.\(^6\) The Forbidden City and the Oriental Pearl were unveiled when the masks built by historical separation and militant threats were removed. The Chinese of the diaspora could now see their relatives. The Taiwanese began investments in Mainland China and hoped for a friendlier Chinese-Taiwanese relationship.

*The Fork of the Road* deals with three families who come from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China. They all share a concern about the uncertain future of ethnic Chinese. Situating their final family reunion in Singapore, where the first Wang-Koo talks took place, this play satirizes the difficulty of finding a politically neutral country where talks about the cross-strait relationship could be promoted. Singapore was not a neutral ground, and the political manipulations behind the scenes took place in a “foreign” country. Kuo-shiu (Hugh) Lee, the artistic director of Ping Fong Acting Troupe, questioned the belief about a better tomorrow in 1993. Contrary to hope fueled by the upcoming “Chinese century,” the political reality led the hopefuls down a different path.

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\(^5\) Hong Kong is composed by several parts. In Qing Dynasty the Chinese government gradually lost them. The ninety-nine year lease only dealt with New Territories, it started from 1898 and ended by June 30, 1997. The British government decided to return also Hong Kong and Kowloon Peninsula to Mainland China at the same time. In fact the Chinese government ceded Hong Kong to England, and the lease of Kowloon Peninsula is perpetual.

\(^6\) After the second Wang-Koo talks in 1998, Taiwanese government allows small groups of Mainland China travelers entering Taiwan now, but travel agents must provide detailed personal information which are required to be filed in advance. Recently this policy is under evaluation for common escapes from visiting groups have already become a main source of illegal immigrants.
They slightly feel that they live in stifling surroundings. And they strongly sense that they are only puppets which are not allowed to have personal opinions. Wish is the only source that puppets can rely on to maintain their body, breath, and thinking."\(^7\)

Hugh Lee directed the fifteen roles of *The Fork of the Road* in one big household. A Taiwanese architect called Peter has an extramarital relationship with Mary, the Hong Kong representative of a satellite company. Mary has just divorced her husband, Joseph, in 1997, and is planning to meet her real father. Mary shares her father with Paul, an illegal businessman in Mainland China. Paul’s elder brother, Ding-yuan Chan, turns out to be the lost brother of Peter’s father-in-law. So, Peter’s father-in-law brings his entire family to Beijing, while Mary tries to reunite her separated parents. Their first meeting in Beijing is a disaster because of their different life styles and political beliefs. Another family reunion is set up in Singapore where they take family snapshots. However, the three main characters, Peter, Mary, and Paul share feelings of emptiness behind the “happy” facade. Many problems remain unsolved behind the seeming reunification of the family members.

Numerous demolitions of historic buildings in the early 1990s wiped out landmarks of cultural memory. Peter’s father-in-law laments the loss of this collective memory along with the disappearance of memorable buildings.

This place is a space which has existed for a period of time. The impacts of time and space become our emotions and memories, right? Now we choose to demolish this place rather than to preserve it, how can we establish any feelings of belonging? How can we keep our memories?"\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Hugh Lee, 33.
Peter and his family experience a shock when subways substituted railroads in Taipei. The Chan family has a similar experience in Beijing when the government will raze to the ground their family house, a historic building, for the Olympic games.9 The lack of respect on either side of the Taiwan Strait for their cultural treasures and the torn cultural identities became serious obstacles for any reconciliation.

The lifting of travel restrictions in 1987 consequently improved communications between the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders. Many of them were excited to visit the legendary “other shore” for a period of time. Their quest for the long-lost past led to the attitude in favor of a unification. Direct contact helped better understanding and cooperation among them. The rebirth of the idea for a united China and the establishment of commercial partnership stimulated the imaginations of the Chinese about the future of the Taiwan Strait. Reunion intoxicated both Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese in the early 1990s. Both sides searched for ways to establish strong links through capital investments.

Nevertheless, the situation remained unsteady because of the nature of the Taiwan Strait issue. When militancy tensions escalated, the treaty became flimsy. In order to appease any ill sentiments caused by the Tiananmen Square massacre, Mainland China showed a peaceful front to the world, reassured everyone that Hong Kong would remain the capitalistic paradise it was, and the long-time enemy, Taiwan, will be a newly made friend. The Taiwanese, on the other hand saw the promising huge market that China offered, and pursued their agenda of finding their cultural roots and

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9 Hugh Lee 45. The play mentions the Olympic games of the year 2000, which was the original plan of Chinese government.
liberating the “suffering Chinese.” However, the first elation caused by the achievements of the first Wang-Koo talks in 1993 soon abated.

“Facing such a reunion, why we bothered about getting together from the very start?” The epilogue in The Fork of the Road reflected the confusion of the main characters. The noble intention of bringing all Chinese together seemed hopeless. When Ding-yuan Chan finally recognizes that Peter’s father-in-law is his long-lost brother in Singapore, the first reaction of Peter’s father-in-law is to out of incredulity. He tells his daughter to be cautious about Chan’s intentions. “Don’t listen to him. Beware of the Communists, they lie all the time!” Distrust is difficult to uproot after fifty years of separation and military competition. If brothers do not trust each other, how can Mainland China and Taiwan be reconciled? Hong Kong and Singapore had also a dubious relationship with China. Hugh Lee also refers to the Chinese of Hong Kong and Singapore in The Fork.

Mary and her relatives in Hong Kong are the most puzzled of the characters in this play. Mary compensates for her uncertainty and confusion by seeking sensual pleasures and by piling up wealth. “All time in Hong Kong is borrowed time,” Mary’s friend, Boa says. She tells everybody that they should seize the day. This was probably the reason that the Cantonese was criticized as a realistic moneygrubber. When Peter’s family visits Hong Kong, they feel the coldness of the distressed Cantonese. “Once we headed down to the airport, everyone was asking for money.”

10 Hugh Lee 166.

11 Hugh Lee 158.

12 Hugh Lee 61.
Peter's wife has a bad opinion of the Oriental Pearl. Her complaints hit the core of the crisis of 1997. "When rich people immigrate to Western countries, the people left behind continue reaching for money to allay their fears. [...] These Cantonese seem unrealistic." Many inexorable factors determined the future of Hong Kong: the laissez-faire manner of the British, the collapsing health of Xiao Ping Teng, and the capricious approach of the Taiwanese government.

Since nobody could guarantee a happy solution to the Taiwan Strait issue, economic growth became the panacea for all concerned. This attitude told by the tale of Four Asian Dragons was also destructive according to Hugh Lee. It maintained that, regardless of social and political factors, economic development could eventually bring all of the Chinese to the threshold of commercial paradise. With this belief in mind, Hong Kong and Singapore reinforced the plan for communications between Taiwan and Mainland China. In 1993, the first Wang-Koo talks were held in Singapore spearheaded by Kuan Yew Lee, then prime minister of Singapore. Singapore itself is a complex country as Hugh Lee teased it in the script:

'It is an interesting country. There are four main ethnic groups, and seventy percent of the population is Chinese. Their official language is English, and they despise traditional Chinese cultures. I feel it is the most democratic country under autarchy on earth.'

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13 Hugh Lee, scene eight, 128-131.

14 Teng was still regarded as the controller after his retire. The promise that Hong Kong would not change in following fifty years was made by him. His last wish - to see Hong Kong reunite with China - was unable to achieve because of his earlier death in January 1997.

15 In the early 1990's, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea were called Four Asian Dragons for their rapid GNP growth.

16 Hugh Lee, *The Fork of the Road*, 139.
Obviously, in Hugh Lee's mind, the backgrounds of these countries which served as the platform for peaceful communication, were undermined by the very choice for the locations of Wang-Koo talks.

None of the four sites could escape the shadow of colonialism: Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, and Taipei. In Singapore for example, the government embraced Western methods from the British and abandoned the Chinese standards of its ancestors. Singaporeans encouraged the Taiwanese and the Chinese to improve their relations because any war hostiles between China and Taiwan would affect the Singaporeans.

Hong Kong can hardly escape the shadow of war because Hong Kong has always functioned as a bridge between the two sides. In *The Fork of the Road*, Mary's case exposes the precarious situation of the people in Hong Kong. Mary embodies the cowardice of her parents. Her mother, who represents the British, lost her voice after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Like the British government, she looked the other way when Mary tried to reconnect with her Chinese father. Her Chinese father feels happy to reunite with his lost daughter, but he cannot hide his guilt for Mary's hybrid identity. He also fails to understand what exactly Mary really wants from him. Mary is pregnant, but the father of her child is not Joseph, her impotent ex-husband. The father of the child is Peter, whose Taiwanese wife has just given birth to their first child. Peter understands Mary's anxiety about the future, he sympathizes with her situation, but he will not fight for her. Peter defines himself as a passenger who has no
feeling for Mary when his wife and father-in-law learn about his adultery.\textsuperscript{17} His relationship with Mary is only a one-night stand, and he can abandon her at any time. However, it is Mary, not Peter, who ends this extramarital relationship.

The approaching end of the colonialism required a sense of self-reliance on the past of the Cantonese in Hong Kong. Playwrights like Hugh Lee were sensitive to this issue and illustrated it in \textit{The Fork of the Road}. According to the Cantonese, they were intimidated by the atrocious oppression at the Tiananmen Square in 1989 that cast a shadow over Wang-Koo talks in the 1990’s. Stan Lai, too, combined the motif of the peace talks and brutal oppression in his 1998 work – \textit{I, Me, He, Him}. A year after the British returned Hong Kong to China, this theatrical work dramatized the reactions of the Cantonese, and the efforts between Mainland China and Taiwan to find a balance, as well as the failed second Wang-Koo talks.

Most people in Hong Kong disconnected themselves from both the Chinese and the British. In the rest of this chapter I will discuss how the Taiwanese see themselves after they witnessed the new identity for the people of Hong Kong. Except for the Chinese government in Mainland China, the other Chinese governments “overseas” feel that it is easier to disown their Chinese origins than to restore or rebuild bridges with Mother China. Reconciliation is only a mirage when the Chinese government in Mainland China fails to embrace the version of the Other governments that are entangled in this historical knot.

When the Chinese government oppressed the demonstration at the Tiananmen Square in 1989, it underestimated the psychological impact that such an action would

\textsuperscript{17} Hugh Lee, scene four, 74-75.
have on the Chinese “overseas,” especially the Cantonese. As a result, the Hong Kongers resisted to the upcoming reunion with Mainland China. Teng Hui Lee, the Taiwanese president who visited the United States, undermined the foundations of the peace talks.\textsuperscript{18} The Taiwanese government withdrew from any serious decision-making regarding Mainland China. Furthermore, the Taiwanese investments in Mainland China were regulated while the Taiwanese investments in Southeast Asia were unregulated. Stan Lai’s play \textit{I, Me, He, Him} recorded these dramatic changes and examined the meaning of the peace talks.

It has been a long time since the first generation refugees and immigrants fled from the Chinese Civil War and took refuge in Taiwan. Many of these immigrants had passed away, but their political influence was still strong on the second generation in 1998. \textit{I, Me, He, Him} uses the suffering second generation for its main characters and satirizes the socio-political situation between Mainland China and Taiwan. Stan Lai suggests in this play that the future belongs to the next generation of both Chinese and Taiwanese who have not experienced traumas like the Cultural Revolution. For these new generations, the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 is not a part of their experience.

\textit{I, Me, He, Him} takes place in Hong Kong where the two main characters begin their talks in 1998. Ru-jing Jian, a woman CEO from Taiwan, tries to keep her

\textsuperscript{18} The visit which took place in 1995 irated the Chinese government. The scheduled second Wang-Koo talks at that year was postponed. It was not until 1998 that Mainland China and Taiwan returned to the table continuing communication.
company afloat after an unsuccessful investment in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{19} Mo Shen, the CEO of a Beijing-based Chinese company, attempts a take over of Jian’s company. Their talks advance on the naïve premise that only the present reality is meaningful to either of them. They repress the history of their passionate love affair in 1989. The memories about Tiananmen Square play a crucial part in this fatal love relationship.

Jian and Shen met in 1989 when they despised money and questioned authority represented by the Chinese government and Jian’s father. The young lovers temporally believed that they may bridge the gulf between Mainland China and Taiwan. Their hope to relocate to Hong Kong and make it their new hope was disappointed by the Tiananmen Square massacre. Also, Jian’s father intervened so powerfully that he broke up the affair. Thanks to a car accident, they became ruthless and realistic businessmen by 1998. They decide on the future of Jian’s company, and spend the night together, motivated by profit rather than love. Shen promises to give Jian two years before his Chinese company takes full control of her company. Surprisingly, the following morning both Shen and Jian are removed from their positions as CEOs. Hugh Lee attacked the myth that was promoted by the Wang-Koo talks; Stan Lai expressed a greater dose of irony about it in \textit{I, Me, He, Him}. The protagonists fail to recognize each other, even their doubles.

\textbf{Ru-jing Jian: Should I recognize you?}
\textbf{Another Woman: Yes, You should.}

\textsuperscript{19} The failed investment in Indonesia provides several references here. One is the Asia Economy Crisis in 1997, which led to dramatic falling of currency values of Asian countries. The outbreak of violence rebellions in Indonesia in 1998 was the byproduct. Many Indonesian vented their anger to Chinese by robbing and burning all the properties and estates owned by Chinese. “Investing in Southeast Asia,” the policy of then Taiwanese President Lee Teng Hui was undermined.
Ru-jing Jian: Maybe we have met each other, but I can’t recall. Well, it doesn’t matter, we can be introduced to each other again.  

Stan Lai expressed deep concern about the loss of history and the presumption of peace. What happened at the Tiananmen Square in 1989 was meaningful to both Chinese and Taiwanese, and the emotions that it generated could not be repressed. The serene facade of the peace talks for a practical solution to the issue was cracked by the emotional memory of history.

Since the talks about the merging of the two companies in the play symbolized the tug of war between Mainland China and Taiwan, the dialogues in *I, Me, He, Him* have overtones. “We have been separated for so many years that now we finally have an opportunity to talk face to face. We have to confront with our history together, and this is our only chance, or we will forever be incomplete.”  

Jian’s double, Another Woman, encourages her to discover her lost memory by referring her to the love history with Shen. But Shen and Jian lack the courage acknowledging their weakness and they keep meandering away from the suggestions of their doubles.

Ru-jing Jian: Well, Chiarman Shen, how about we return to the starting point and then resume our talk?
Mo Shen: There are so many agreements piled one upon the other. Please tell me how can we remove all these thoughts and return to the beginning.
Ru-jing Jian: Since we aren’t responsible for the previous parts, it’s not a loss that we discard them at this moment.
Mo Shen: It isn’t helpful at all for us to know the past events thoroughly. Ru-jing Jian: It’s unnecessary for us to take the responsibility on our shoulders, and they might cause more burdens for us.

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At the crucial moment during the talks about the merger, Jian and Shen try their best to ignore the presence of their doubles standing next to them. They erroneously think that future is in their hands just because they agree to forget the past and focus on the present. Ironically, the harder they suppress their common history, the more embarrassed they feel when the truth surfaces.

Puzzled about her identity, Jian lives under the shadow of her father who is still able to manipulate her emotions over the telephone.\(^{23}\) She has been an obedient daughter to her father for nine years, and it is difficult for her to accept that she has failed. She can not break away from her father. Her father who now lives in the United States, sells Jian's company regardless of her efforts. What is more humiliating to her is that Little Huang, who always stammers in her presence, becomes her successor.

Little Huang is described as a university graduate from Japan. Stan Lai alludes to the rising nativism in Taiwan in 1998. It would seem that the disassociation of the Taiwanese from Mainland China led to the rediscovery of the value of the Japanese colonization. This attitude was a reaction that protested the Kuo Ming Tang government's projection of "the imagined China" upon the Taiwanese cultures. Most Taiwanese in 1998 found that it was more reasonable for them to embrace the once despised native language and history. However, the growing Taiwanese identity crisis also led to the other extreme, i.e, to sever all the Chinese ties by suppressing the Chinese origins of the Taiwanese and a history of two hundred years. According to

\(^{23}\) Lai, I, Me, He, Him, scene eight, 322-323.
this new ideology, the peace talks were “harmful” to the Taiwanese, and the
Taiwanese businessmen who invested in China were regarded as traitors.

During an interview, Stan Lai articulated his observations and opinions about the

crisis of the Taiwanese identity.

The “past” is always a reference to see who we are. It is the most obvious
motif at contemporary time. [...] Taiwan is facing the identity problem. The
second generation Chinese immigrants like us is witnessing the end of an era
The first generation that our parents represent is disappearing, and it is blatant
that Taiwan has created its new identity. Then who we are under such
situation? Maybe the answer can be found from the past. [...] I search for
answers upon my methods. But many people eschew to face the question by
promoting nativism. [...] We still have a shared root, and some mutual
memories are remained.24

Stan Lai revived cross-talking in his play to show how shared cultural roots remain
meaningful to the Taiwanese. He also indicated the importance of history in unveiling
present myths and illusions in politics, religion, business, and arts.25 The Taiwanese in
the 1990s failed to understand themselves because of the filter of constructed beliefs.

Mo Shen, the Chinese representative in I, Me, He, Him, can be evaluated from the
same perspective. There are two things that Shen tends to deny: his devotion to the
Cultural Revolution and his rebelling thoughts related to the Tiananmen Square
incident. In contrast to the wealth and power that he inherited from his father-in-law,
his earlier youthful ideals now seem unreal to him. The economic boom leads the
Mainlanders into forgetfulness. While the hope for a socialist equality is forsaken, the
deprivations caused by Communism are also ignored. Shen visualized the burgeoning


25 Jiao 87-88.
Chinese nationalism in 1998. When Jian points out that her talks with Shen lack an element of trust, Shen reacts strongly. "If you don’t want to reunite with us, why are we having this meeting?" "It is out of care that we want to merge with your company, to take care of your growth."²⁶

Interestingly, Shen and Jian overlook the fact that their talks take place in Hong Kong where their dreams were smashed nine years earlier. One thing remained unchanged for Shen and Jian from 1989 to 1998: their fascination for Hong Kong. Being outsiders, they both have failed to see beneath its glitter. In 1989, there was no better place than Hong Kong for Shen and Jian to hide from their past. However, the break out of demonstrations at Tiananmen Square undermined their unrealistic expectations about the Oriental Pearl. Their youthful revolutionary fervor sparkled for a brief moment and it dissolved like their love affair.

On the contrary, many Cantonese in Hong Kong put their fear aside, stood up to denounce Mainland China, and fought for an independent future. Hong Kongers’ demonstrations on the fourth of June became an annual activity in memory of those students at Tiananmen Square. Shen and Jian saw only the Capitalist side of Hong Kong either in 1989 or in 1998.

Stuart Hall described "identifications as a construction, a process never completed-always 'in process.' It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost,' sustained or abandoned"²⁷ from a discursive approach. Hong Kong is still in

²⁶ Stan Lai, I. Me, He, Him, 317.

the process of fumbling for a secured identification. As Stephen Teo observed the Hong Kong movie industry manipulated the “China Syndrome” since the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{28} The filmmakers raised many questions about the conflicts between Chinese identity and Hong Kong dignity. “The separateness of Hong Kong lies in this very ambivalence, despite the fact that its residents speak mostly Cantonese and adhere to Chinese customs.”\textsuperscript{29} Being a part of the Chinese diaspora, Hong Kongers have a complex relationship with Mainland China. Thus, the images of the Mainlanders in the films of the Hong Kong movie industry vary. They range from that of nostalgia for Shanghai in the 1930s, with its gangsters and stupid “cousins,”\textsuperscript{30} to that of concern for poor boat people who fight for their daily sustenance.

The different forms of Chineneseness reveal the line of questioning for the Cantonese of Hong Kong. Mainland Chinese and the Chinese diaspora changed dramatically in the twentieth century. The imaginative construction in films and plays that were designed to replace the forbidden homeland failed to present the “real China.” While the Hong Kong film industry made produced martial arts and kung fu movies, it also disassociated itself from the traditional region that China represents. Mainland China is not daunted by the resistance of the diaspora thanks to its robust economy. Its lack of respect for the ethnic cultures of its neighbors also undermines the acceptance of Chineneseness.

\textsuperscript{28} Stephen Teo, \textit{Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions} (London: British Film Institute, 1997).

\textsuperscript{29} Teo 212.

\textsuperscript{30} For Cantonese in Hong Kong, the usage of “Cousins” originally meant to express friendliness to Mainlanders. Gradually it became a sarcastic usage.
Central to the diasporic paradigm is the theoretical axiom that Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content—be it racial, cultural, or geographical—but operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora.\footnote{Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diaspora Paradigm,” in \textit{Boundary 2} 25 (Fall 1998): 225.}

Xiao Ping Teng’s promise about an unchanging Hong Kong for fifty years since the reunion has already been violated. It is clear that the Chinese government intervened by implementing the Article 23, which repealed freedom of speech and religious beliefs.\footnote{The design of this article is related with the rebellion of believers in Falun Dafa, a religion repressed by the atheistic Chinese government.} Mother China, the victim of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century, is now reestablishing its national dignity by having Hong Kong and Macau returned to her.

On the other hand, the behavior of the present Taiwanese government is also unwarranted vis-à-vis the developments regarding nativism. The KMT government and its supporting Chinese cultures were under close examination. At the same time, the conflicts under Japanese colonization are totally ignored. In order to question the authority of Chineseness, the present Taiwanese government is trying to better understand the concept of Chineseness. As Rey Chow suggests, the idea of Chineseness can be challenged through a detailed study.

Only with such close study, we may add, can Chineseness be productively put under erasure—not in the sense of being written out of existence but in the sense of being unpacked—and reevaluated in the catachrestic modes of its signification, the very forms of its historical construction.\footnote{Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” in \textit{Boundary 2} 25 (Fall 1998): 24.}
Stan Lai reveals his pessimism about the solution of the Taiwan Strait problem in *I, Me, He, Him*. His foresight was proven true in the following years. Before the “doubles” leave the stage, they wish that their existence ends. Mo Shen and Ru-jing Jian cannot be fully reconnected with their past history. Their decisions are revoked by their successors, Little Huang and Miss Song. Their successors’ plans are closer to the native ideologies which seek self-expression and representation. Little Huang and Miss Song seal the future of the reunification.

**Miss Song:** In addition to the business, we can have a talk about some other issues.

**Little Huang:** I can’t figure out what else can we discuss once we leave the table.

**Miss Song:** Ah, we can discuss the possibility of Taiwan’s unification with Mainland.

**Little Huang:** I’m sorry. Chairperson Song, I don’t want to talk about something impossible on earth.  

Little Huang and Miss Song understand their inability to forge a union because they are only puppets. Hence they absolve themselves from all responsibility resolving the Taiwan Strait issue. In 1998 the second Wang-Koo talks in Shanghai, lacked credibility and sincerity led it nowhere. When Mr. Koo proposed that the next meeting should be held in Taipei, he never expected that this meeting would be delayed for seven years. His death in January 2005 gave Mainland China and Taiwan leeway to reconsider their peace talks.

The Wang-Koo talks have their place in history, and illustrate the problems surrounding the Taiwan Strait issue. Recent hostilities benefited neither the Chinese nor the Taiwanese. In March 2005, China fractured the fragile relationship with

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Taiwan by formulating the Anti-separation Law, and bind restricting Taiwanese from declaring their independence. Facing the present tension, the Taiwanese can find some answers from Stan Lai’s plays that suggest a way to begin to address the problem of the “Chinese knot.”
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Under Stan Lai’s guidance, The Performance Workshop established a unique position in modern Taiwanese theatre. The foreign press regards The Performance Workshop as an eminent example of Taiwanese theatre. *Far Eastern Economic Review* values The Performance Workshop as “the most exciting theater in the Chinese-speaking world.” Likewise, *Newsweek* claims that Stan Lai’s works are “creating the boldest Chinese art in Asia today.” Stan Lai’s influence is not limited to modern Taiwanese theatre, however. His works were also staged in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The Performance Workshop on tour provokes strong responses from its audiences. Stan Lai dramatizes many problems that concern the Chinese of the diaspora.

*Pining...In Peach Blossom Land* has become a favorite piece in university theatre departments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. The popularity of this play is probably the reason why it was chosen by the editors of *An Oxford Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama* to exemplify the diversity of modern Chinese theatre.
Since the script and a pirated VCD reached the audiences in Mainland China, Stan Lai was invited to cooperate on a project with theatrical workers in Beijing in 1998. During an interview with Stan Lai, Ching-mei Tao, a Beijing theatrical worker rediscovered the role of theatre in social movements.¹ Facing multiple cultural influences, nowadays China is similar to Taiwan in the 1980s. In the atmosphere of uncertainty, everything is possible in the minds of uneasy people. For the past twenty years, The Performance Workshop showed how theatre can make audiences reflect on social issues.

However, The Performance Workshop had its critics, too. Stan Lai often invited famous singers or performers, who did not have any experience of performing in live theatre. The Performance Workshop was also criticized for showing major concern about box-office income and that this concern has undermined the artistic value of its productions. In order to diversify and carry out the Workshop’s mission, Stan Lai founded the OFFPW where young artists can produce experimental works. His recent seven hour experimental work, A Dream Like A Dream, proves that the audiences go to Stan Lai’s shows because of their quality. Most important of all, the success of The Performance Workshop, even as a commercial theatre, demonstrates the good prospects of the performing arts in Taiwan. When other performing groups in 1980s gradually disappeared from the market stage, Stan Lai and his company remained and prospered.

Next to the criticism about Stan Lai’s commercial success, another kind of criticism focuses on Stan Lai’s stance and authority to speak about the problematic

relationship between Mainland China and Taiwan. It is hard to ignore how the complex backgrounds of his works interweave with the identity issues in Taiwan. Being an American Taiwanese, Stan Lai can not escape close inspections of his own identity, especially when he supports cultural interactive activities with Mainland China. He is often accused of being a mouthpiece of the mainlanders. For example, Shiao-ying Shen summarizes Stan Lai’s plays as “fertile ground for an exploration of ‘the foreigner.’”

Lai’s plays habitually engage topical subject-matters that relate to the historical past of the mainlanders in Taiwan, examine what constitutes the Chinese identity, and embody a high sense of anxiety towards the coming of an ominous catastrophe.

Without a deep understanding of his collective improvisational method, Stan Lai can easily be misinterpreted as a person who is deaf to the rising local voices. In fact, many significant performers in The Performance Workshop are Taiwanese who have no relations with the refugees of 1949. Since his collective improvisational method emphasizes contributions from participants, it is unfair to see his works as being restricted to mainlanders. When he staged his seven hour epic, A Dream Like A Dream, Stan Lai again said that “the message is that all the people in this world are interrelated. I hope the viewers will come out with more concern for the other people and the world.”

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3 Shen 84.

Stan Lai's works deal with the traumas and sorrows in life in Taiwan, and he offers solutions he finds in his faith in Tibetan Buddhism. According to Stan Lai, life has a rhythm that the contemporary Taiwanese fail to detect. Therefore, they are driven in many directions and they neglect the most important thing of all – the calmness of spirituality. Stan Lai's religion acquits him from the false accusation that he is promoting a reunification with Mainland China. As a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, he denounced China's oppression of Tibet.

Stan Lai did contribute some interesting insights into the cross-strait relationship. Memory and forgetfulness have formalized the interactions between Mainland China and Taiwan. The Chinese on both sides of the strait remember the things that they ought to forget, and ironically, they forget the things that they ought to pay attention to. For instance, there has been hardly any formal memorial activity about the Tiananmen Square event since 1989 whereas many naïve beliefs about "Old" China and the "New" China coexist in various forms. Disrespect towards history will not gain China or Taiwan the mutual understanding it is required for peace talks.

The obsolete Taiwanese fascination with the "great" Chinese cultures that were promoted during the Chiang dynasty should be reexamined. Mr. Chiang, the protagonist of Ping-Pong...In Peach Blossom Land presents an image that overlaps the two Chiang presidential figures in Taiwan. Stan Lai questions the legitimacy of the slogans about liberating Mainland China from the Communist, the imprecise geographical descriptions of Mainland China, and the nostalgia to return to Mainland China. He does not embrace the idea of a "great" China, but also he questions the motives of Taiwanese nativism. The rising Taiwanese nativism calls for an
examination of anything related with China, which is seen as the dangerous, brutal, and backward enemy. At the same time, the crimes of the Japanese during the colonization of Taiwan are forgiven and remitted due to the close economic ties between Taiwan and Japan. The complex knot of the strait issue cannot be solved by one singular viewpoint.

Stuart Hall believes that “ethnicity is the necessary place or space from which people speak.” But he also indicates a possible danger behind the discovery of local ethnicities: “a rediscovery of identity that constitutes a form of fundamentalism.” Under the trend of nativism, the Taiwanese neglect to pay equal respect to both Taiwan and Formosa and the many juxtaposed cultures on this island. The dominant Taiwanese identity rejects China, and of all Chinese cultures in recent years. Taiwan is at a crossroads, at a most crucial moment of its history. Since history itself can hardly be neutral, an individual should not seek healing for his/her traumas while ignoring the painful experiences of other or while despising the cultural treasures of others.

Due to ignorance, some recent politicians in Taiwan declare as nativism, some local cultures that actually originated in China. For example, the early immigrants from the Fu Jian region came to Taiwan. Even the most popular dialect on the island, Taiwanese, can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. Prasenjit Duara points out that some pan-Chinese myths “provided a medium whereby different groups could

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6 Hall 184-185.
announce their participation in a national culture even as they inscribed their own interpretation of the myth.”7 Being a part of the Chinese diaspora, the Taiwanese cannot credibly claim a total difference from the Chinese. Refusing to acknowledge pan-Chinese myths is not the best of the strategies. What Stan Lai proposes is for the Taiwanese to face their historical and cultural connections with China.

From the premiere of Pining...In Peach Blossom Land in 1986, The Performance Workshop constantly challenged the beliefs of the Taiwanese audience on many issues. The first myth to be challenged was the existence of a utopia, neither Mainland China nor Taiwan can be a permanent dreamland. Both societies have their own problems, and there is no one-way solution to the cross-strait issue. In March of 2005, China drafted and passed an anti-separation law, that, in fact, increased the tension between the Taiwanese and the Chinese.

In addition to the above-mentioned concepts of “Old” China and “New” China, Stan Lai finds the belief in the peace talks to be unrealistic. The Wang-Koo talks could not meet the high expectations that people on both sides had. Moreover, as I, Me, He, Him suggests, the talks could not proceed smoothly because of a lack of trust between the teams due to their history since 1949. The self-centered and arrogant protagonists in the play suffer from their blindness and distrust. Stan Lai emphasizes the hybrid of identity of the Chinese and the Taiwanese. The final decision should be made through a referendum by the people, not their politicized representatives.

The last and the most complex myth that Stan Lai discussed in his plays is the imagined chivalric world that has never existed. Seeking comforts from chivalric novels or the *wu xia* films may seem absurd today. However, this literary and cinematic tradition has grown in the minds of the Chinese of the diaspora. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* shows respect to King Hu’s *A Touch of Zen* by setting the memorable fight scene in the bamboo woods. It is obvious that some Chinese cultures have already established a place in the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese.

Tsai Ming Liang, a Taiwan-based director from Malaysia, provides an interesting perspective with his 2003 movie, *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*. The film tells a story about an abandoned movie theater which screened another of King Hu’s works – *The Dragon Inn* – during its last show. The projectionist finishes his job in a responsible manner even though he knows that the audience is not paying any attention to the show.

King Hu and martial arts films are part of the Chineseness that the Taiwanese deny. As theatre and film artists revive these shared Chinese cultures with Mainland China, they acknowledge that the Taiwanese are unlikely to separate themselves from the Chinese diaspora in Taiwan.

Stan Lai’s believes that self-indulgence is as dangerous as the obsession with the past. *Pinning... in Peach Blossom Land* and *The Island and the Other Shore* tell the story of the refugees in 1949 and their descendants. His later works discuss the puzzled Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. The arrogance of the nationalistic Chinese government in Mainland China makes it deaf and insensitive to
these voices while it is lifting a nationalist flag of unification. The diversity of the Chinese diaspora is downplayed, driving minority ethnic groups away from China. Similarly, the Taiwanese may be more isolated and marginalized if they overlook the international influence of Mainland China.

Interestingly, Stan Lai began close cooperation with Chinese theatrical workers when the peace talks between Taiwan and Mainland China fell through in 1998. However, Stan Lai withdrew from his favorite motif, the cross Taiwan Strait issue, when he started his Bei Theatre in Beijing. In other words, his discussions about the Chinese imagination in Taiwan temporarily ceased as the audience in Mainland China finally had an opportunity to see performances from Taiwan. Of course, Stan Lai continually comments on contemporary social and political issues in Taiwan, but he probably cannot find any way out of this tense situation, especially when the freedom of speech on the live stage still restricted in China. Stan Lai’s suggestions recently seem less incisive than his thoughts in the 1980s and 1990s.

This thesis has shown that the productions of The Performance Workshop provide significant information about the social and political problems in Taiwan. With the publication of Stan Lai’s original plays in 1999 and 2005, it is easier to refer to his ideas. According to Stan Lai, the Taiwanese identity would not be singular. What he promotes is similar to Stuart Hall’s definition of “a new space for identity”:

It insists on difference – on the fact that every identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history. Every statement comes from somewhere, from somebody in particular. It insists on specificity, on conjuncture. But it
is not necessarily armour-plated against other identities. It is not tied to fixed, permanent, unalterable oppositions. It is not wholly defined by exclusion.\textsuperscript{8}

During the past twenty years, The Performance Workshop specified how Taiwanese struggled to clarify the relationship with Mainland China. By reading Stan Lai's plays, the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait can avoid repeating the same errors in the future. Better understanding of diverse voices will eventually lead both China and Taiwan to find the right direction of the cross-strait relationship.

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