

The Impossibility of Being Taiwanese in Chi Wei-jan's *Utopia Ltd.*

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Utopia Ltd., written by the important Taiwanese playwright Chi Wei-jan and produced by Creative Society in December 2001, dramatizes the gradual dissolution of a production company named *Utopia Ltd.* This play explores factors shaping Taiwanese identities and the impossibility of constructing a coherent grand narrative in postmodern, globalized Taiwan. The work stands out among allegories examining post-martial law Taiwan by capturing the complexity of identity formation in Taiwan. The play dramatizes how Taiwan's colonial past, ethnic tensions, globalization, and relations with China and the United States all work together to shape the national imagination of the island.

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During Taiwan's martial law period (1949–1987), many people born and raised on the island knew little about this place and its history. From the first to the twelfth grade, every Taiwanese student studied Chinese literature, recited the five-thousand-year Chinese history, and memorized details about Chinese geography.¹ As a result, most of these students not only were ignorant of the island but ironically forged a common nostalgia for a place they had never been to—an imagined homeland across the Taiwan Straits on the Chinese mainland. Only with the lifting of martial law in 1987 did they gradually begin to realize that Taiwan could and should be at once a subject of study and

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an agent determining its own identity and destiny. For the following two decades, people on the island enthusiastically examined Taiwan in every public sphere, inevitably provoking heated debates about who they are and what Taiwan is. Such a phenomenal obsession with Taiwan was a reaction to its long peripheral status in history as an appendage to colonial powers and imperial China, particularly when viewed through the China-focused lens imposed by the Kuomintang regime (or the Chinese Nationalist Party, hereafter KMT). From 2000 to 2008, during the presidency of Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), the first president from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (hereafter DPP), “A deliberate nation-building project” was launched (Lynch 2004: 513) and Taiwan witnessed the peak of ongoing *bentuhua* (本土化, “Taiwanization” or “nativization”), which quickly transformed a postcolonial identity quest into a type of Taiwanese nationalism against China’s claim over Taiwan’s sovereignty (Hsiau 2005: 263). The core questions of this post-martial law identity quest have evolved from what some have called identity crisis—“Is Taiwan Chinese?” and “Am I Taiwanese, or Chinese?”—in the 1990s to the pursuit of what comprises unique Taiwanese culture in the twenty-first century.²

In this explosion of thinking about Taiwan, modern theatre in Taiwan (Western-style spoken drama, as opposed to traditional theatrical genres),³ like other cultural imagery, eagerly participates in, occasionally appropriates, and consciously critiques this collective reimagining of a new nation. Inevitably, theatre also reflects the transformation of identity issues. Echoing the stage of identity crisis in the 1990s, the “little theatre” movement⁴ sought to redefine Taiwan by attacking the Greater China myths constructed by the KMT and by recovering the island’s repressed history. Meanwhile, the little theatre movement was simultaneously occupied with the fundamental questions of the Taiwanese identity crisis: “Who am I?” “Am I Taiwanese? Am I Chinese?” “Where are we going?”

Utopia Ltd. (*Wutuobang Ltd.*, 烏托邦 Ltd.), first performed in December 2001, can be seen as a transitional work in the exploration of Taiwanese identity. It not only continues the theme of identity crisis that was prevalent in late twentieth-century theatrical works, but, more importantly, it starts to interrogate the new Taiwanese national narrative that had gradually gained momentum and was continuing to evolve. This play, simultaneously exploring the various factors shaping Taiwanese identities and the impossibility of constructing a coherent grand narrative in postmodern, globalized Taiwan, stands out among the throng of national allegories in post-martial law Taiwan, many of which focus on only one aspect of Taiwanese identity. In this article, I will first give a brief introduction to the production team and the

playwright, followed by a short summary of the play, and then focus on examining how *Utopia Ltd.* intriguingly captures the complexity of identity formation in Taiwan by dramatizing how Taiwan's colonial past, ethnic tensions, globalization, and relations with China and the United States all work together to shape the national imagination of people on the island.

The Production Team and Playwright of *Utopia Ltd.*

Utopia Ltd. was produced by the Taipei-based Creative Society, a successful theatre troupe founded in 1997 and dedicated to staging new Taiwanese plays.⁵ The six performances staged in Taipei's Novel Hall for Performing Arts, a venue with 993 seats, enjoyed box office sales of about 70–80 percent of capacity (Li Huan-xiong, personal email, 12 December 2013). It is important to note that in Taiwan, there is no commercial theatre in the American sense and that the show's run is common for an "art theatre" or little theatre of the size of Creative Society, as opposed to so-called big theatre or mainstream theatre.⁶

The show's director, Li Huan-xiong (黎煥雄, b. 1962), and playwright Chi Wei-jan (紀蔚然, b. 1954) are both founding members of Creative Society. Even before his involvement with Creative Society, Li was an astonishingly energetic director-playwright, active in the little theatre movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. While working with his Rive-Gauche Theatre Group, which had evolved from a college poetry club, Li became known for the poetic style of his productions centered on the untold history of Taiwan. After joining Creative Society, Li continued his involvement with the Rive-Gauche Theatre Group, directing several of his own works from 1998 to 2004. Currently, Li serves as artistic director of the Mr. Wing Theatre Company (人力飛行劇團), which he started in 2007 with the ambition of providing a new platform for producing experimental works characterized by avant-garde playwriting, the use of new media techniques, or multigenre and multicultural synthesis. His recent works include the wildly successful musical trilogy adapted from the works of the famous Taiwanese illustrator Jimmy Liao (幾米). As I shall discuss in detail below, Li's emphasis on stage image was a salient feature in his production of *Utopia Ltd.*

Chi Wei-jan, author of *Utopia Ltd.*, returned to his native Taiwan in 1991 after earning a PhD in English literature at the University of Iowa and has since published seventeen stage plays, three screenplays, assorted works of fiction, and several collections of essays. The winner of numerous awards, most recently the prestigious National Award for Arts in playwriting in 2013, he has been recognized as one of the most important contemporary Taiwanese playwrights by Taiwanese critics and scholars.⁷ It is worthy of mention that Chi is the only prominent

writer in Taiwan known primarily as a playwright, not as a director and producer of his own plays. For lack of venues in which to stage their plays, Taiwanese artists interested in playwriting are usually forced to establish their own troupes and direct their own plays. Once the troupes are established, almost without exception, they produce only Western plays and new Taiwanese plays written by their own playwright-directors or through collaboration of the troupe members. Most of their scripts are never published.⁸ In this context, Chi is exceptional in having two troupes that regularly stage his works: Creative Society, a little or art theatre troupe, and Ping-fong Acting Troupe, a popular mainstream theatre troupe that was founded by Li Quo-xui (but that, following his 2013 death, plans to ceased producing after 2014). Furthermore, all of Chi's plays have been published, almost all of them before their first performance. His plays examine cultural phenomena and social issues in Taiwanese society. Chi has been acclaimed as "the master of parody" and "the magician of language," and his subtle linguistic playfulness is the foundation of his unique satiric humor, a humor that at times seems at odds with his palpable disillusionment with society and the possibility of its changes, so evident in many of his works.

Utopia Ltd. was the first of Chi's plays to directly explore national identity, a theme he would return to in *Mad in Taiwan* (瘋狂年代, word-play for "made in Taiwan"; 2008). Among the nine plays by Chi that Creative Society has produced, *Utopia Ltd.* is, if not the best known, surely the work that most creatively and deeply explores identity issues in Taiwan. Accordingly, *Utopia, Ltd.* occupies a unique and important position in the history of Taiwanese theatre.

A Short Summary of the Play

This seven-scene play dramatizes the gradual dissolution of a TV commercial production company, called Utopia Ltd., founded by two old friends, Old Ji (老季) and Director Li (李導), both now in their early forties. Together with their Assistant Director (副導), whose name the audience never learns, a female art designer named Xiaoji (小吉), and a newly recruited errand girl called Virus, Li and Ji have long hoped to achieve their ultimate goal of making movies. However, after a decade of operation, with the studio still only marginally profitable, the team's movie-making dream now seems unattainable, especially after repeated failures to gain government funding and secure corporate sponsorship. One day, Old Ji secretly reveals to Director Li that he has decided to withdraw his investment, an action that will lead to the company's closing down. However, he soon changes his mind when he is offered a lucrative and high-profile PR account with the Justice Party. To his consternation, what Old Ji considers great news

does not arouse excitement, but instead provokes a heated debate and acrimonious fight among the members of Utopia Ltd., revealing their clashing national identities and ambivalence about making art on the one hand or making money on the other. Meanwhile, the hidden truth about this seemingly united family is laid bare with the revelation that each member has, even before learning of the news of the studio's potential shutdown, been secretly planning to leave Utopia Ltd. for a future elsewhere.

Intended as a microcosm of Taiwan, the studio includes five members of different ethnic backgrounds and generations, factors that lead each of them to think about Taiwan in a different way. Understanding these characters properly requires some knowledge of Taiwan's astonishingly diverse population. If defined by blood ties or culture, ethnic composition in Taiwan is largely homogenous, composed of a slim minority (currently only about 2 percent)⁹ of Malayo-Polynesian Aborigines who settled on the island more than six thousand years ago and a vast majority of Han Chinese settlers from the Chinese mainland. Beginning in the seventeenth century, these Han settlers—most belonging to the subgroup called Hoklo (河洛人) and to that called Hakka (客家人)—arrived in successive waves of immigration. As each wave integrated more or less successfully with the one before it, the island's inhabitants began to form a mutually tolerant, albeit diverse, whole. However, following the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949 a massive influx of refugees and KMT soldiers from the mainland swept over Taiwan. Tensions began to arise between the new arrivals and those who were already settled on the island. With these tensions came new labels for the various groups. Those who arrived after 1949 were called "Mainlanders" (外省人 *Waishengren*, people from outside the province), while those who had settled on the island before then were styled "Native Taiwanese" or simply "Taiwanese" (本省人 *Benshengren* or *taiwanren*, people from inside the province). In the early post-martial law years, the pursuit of a Taiwanese identity, as opposed to a Chinese identity, one supported and indoctrinated by the KMT, caused tensions on Taiwan, mainly between the more pro-China Mainlanders,¹⁰ who are now about 14 percent of the island's population, and the Native Taiwanese.

In the play, the ethnic contrast is highlighted primarily in the arguments that arise between Old Ji and Assistant Director. The former is a second generation Mainlander, while the latter is portrayed as a Native Taiwanese with strong Taiwanese nationalist consciousness, or nativistic stance. They rarely see eye to eye, especially when their conversation touches on national identity. Virus, a twenty-four-year-old Hakka woman, does not care much about such serious topics as

nationhood. As the amusing English name she gives herself indicates, she has a very unconventional way of thinking and represents the viewpoints of the younger generation. In the 2001 production, she dyes her hair red and wears black fishnet stockings to go with brightly colored clothes. Also of the younger generation is Xiaoji, the thirty-year-old female art designer, who has short hair dyed partially blond and is costumed sexually neutral, always wearing pants. By contrast, the older characters—Assistant Director (aged thirty-nine), Old Ji, and Director Li—are all costumed according to their ages and job titles. Generational differences, an important point of exploration in some of Chi's other plays as well, also serve as a key perspective from which to look at identity issues. The ethnic backgrounds of Director Li and Xiaoji are not clearly specified, but it is likely that both are of the majority Hoklo people. The former avoids politics, as many Taiwanese families that lived through the height of White Terror¹¹ in the 1950s taught their children to do, while the latter, having received an orthodox Chinese education, is wrestling with an identity crisis, starting to question every discourse. These five characters broadly represent the Taiwanese people, although the aborigines, who are the real natives of Taiwan, are left out. In fact, remarkably few modern plays include any aboriginal peoples in their national imagination.

Although the characters represent diverse ethnic backgrounds and generations, they all belong to the same social class. The setting of the play is the capital city, Taipei, and all the characters are educated urbanites. The highly metropolitan nature of the play's setting is far from surprising, for most of the inhabitants of this small and densely populated island live in cities. However, the representation of one relatively homogenous social group of characters, the urban middle class, in a play about national identity seems to on the one hand suggest that class is not as important as other factors in shaping Taiwanese identity, and on the other hand come from Chi's preference for metropolitan settings and urban characters.

Narrating Nostalgia and Narrating the Nation

In the preface to *Utopia Ltd.* (titled "A Country with Its Myths Shattered") Chi writes, "If every country needs heroes, then what people need is a shared myth. Yet we are in an age with shattered myths. . . . As long as a country does not have shared myths, the question of identity naturally turns into identity crisis" (2001: 5). Chi's emphasis on myth accidentally recalls the constructivist theories of nationalism and especially the notion of the nation as "a form of narrative" (Bhabha 1990: 2). In *Utopia Ltd.*, narrative plays out in various layers. The team of *Utopia Ltd.* sells ideas and dreams to others by constructing narra-

tives and creating images. In a sense, they are myth makers and utopia builders for Taiwan's consumers. Meanwhile, they construct a narrative of the company as a big family and imagine themselves to be bound together by a shared dream—movie making. Most important, their divergent notions of how to evoke Taiwanese nostalgia reveal that a coherent narrative of a Taiwanese nation is impossible.

A narrative of the nation, often constructed as linear, progressive, and coherent, builds on using the past to trace the mythical origin of the people, emphasizing golden periods and founding heroes, and downplaying or even erasing the undesirable elements. Nostalgia, evoked by the longing to return to an imagined, idealized past, illuminates which of the possible golden ages can be used to shape collective memories and be woven into a narrative of the nation. In the characters' multiple accounts of nostalgia, Taiwan's past is also subtly reexamined and the post-martial law reinterpretation of colonial history satirized.

Following the first scene, in which the characters are shooting a commercial outside, scene 2 finds them sitting in a circle chit-chatting about nostalgia, a topic that becomes an undercurrent throughout the play, especially in scenes 5 and 6. Their talk is sparked by Assistant Director's nostalgic mention of the old banyan tree in his hometown, where he met his childhood sweetheart. Each character experiences a different form of nostalgia. Old Ji's nostalgia is in fact a yearning for a "future homeland," the place where he plans to retire. It lies across the Taiwan straits in his father's hometown in China, Qingdao. However, how Old Ji praises the beauty of the city reveals that his longing stems not from a genuine desire to return to a place he misses, but instead from a latent dissatisfaction with the island's environment. He says, "The air was so fresh that it made you feel you were always in an air-conditioned room. . . . Not only was there no air pollution, but the people looked nice and especially their accent sounded familiar" (Chi 2001: 26). Paradoxically, in his praise of Qingdao, Old Ji does not mention any "Chineseness," except for the accent of the people, but attributes the beautiful design of the city to the Germans. He describes it this way: "The architecture is kickass. Some old houses built by the Germans look so elegant, reminiscent of strong European style. Plus, the foundation of Qingdao, be it the irrigation system or the sewage system, was all laid out by the Germans" (p. 26). Obviously, Old Ji is attracted to the exoticness of the city, its European flavor, which he can conveniently enjoy without any language barrier in China. The history of the city's colonization by the Germans does not evoke any criticism or negative comments from Old Ji. Does Old Ji really identify with China, as Assistant Director will later accuse him of doing, or does he rather identify

with the hegemonic colonizer that brings modernity and shapes his utopian imagination? Qingdao as a future homeland due to its colonial legacy, therefore, complicates and reflects the ambivalent relations between the colonizer and the colonized.

On the other hand, the praise of Qingdao's German legacy implies a positive reevaluation of the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945) by the Taiwanese nationalists in post-martial law Taiwan. One purpose of this reinterpretation, called “the politics of comparing colonial periods” by some scholars, is to show that the KMT regime that accepted control of Taiwan following the Japanese surrender after World War II was no different from, and perhaps even worse than, the Japanese colonial administration that preceded it. The new discourse stresses that the Japanese administration laid the foundation of modernization for Taiwan, establishing a new educational system and building island-wide infrastructure, including railroads and irrigation systems. The other purpose is to highlight the Japanese colonial period as the watershed that carried Taiwan down a different path from China and made the Taiwanese less Chinese. Contrary to traditional Chinese nationalist discourse, which stresses eight years of strenuous resistance against the Japanese invasion of the Chinese mainland and foments hostility toward the Japanese, this new positive perspective presents a different narrative, one that has provoked the protest of Chinese nationalists. In failing to acknowledge the oppressive side of colonialism, Old Ji's praise of Qingdao's German legacy can thus be read as a subtle critique of any one-sided interpretation of the past.

Virus, representative of the younger generation growing up in a global age, seems not to care about nostalgia. She says, “I don't have nostalgia. Nostalgia is a burden that I despise” (p. 26). However, she experiences an imagined nostalgia, an ephemeral longing evoked not by the loss of experienced things and historical memories, but by images either spread with American and Japanese popular culture or created by the mass advertising networks of global commodity culture. Virus admits, “I was once obsessed with Japanese products and then fell in love with an ancient Egyptian civilization. Yet, it is like being touched by a movie and I soon forget about the feelings” (p. 27). Such nostalgia, shallow and artificial, can thus be easily cured and quickly replaced.

The other character of the younger generation, Xiaoji, does not have an answer for her nostalgia, but poses questions. She states, “Speaking of nostalgia, I am *confused* [English in the original text]. I can't find the answer. Some long for the land across the straits, some even want to return to, for heaven's sake, the Tang dynasty, some want to go back to the period of Chiang Ching-kuo [president from 1978 to 1988], some to the Japanese colonial period, and some to the period before Han

Chinese settled in Formosa and the Portuguese sailed past this island” (p. 28). Xiaoji’s statement specifies those periods that might be seen as ideal by a certain ethnic group and thus may potentially serve as “golden ages” that can be woven into the national narrative. However, the history of Taiwan, a settler society, is that of oppression of old settlers by the newcomers, along with foreign colonization. Each “golden age” is inevitably problematic and contested. As a result, the characters cannot find a shared idealized past.

In addition to Taiwan’s long history of colonization by various alien powers, the rapid transformation of its landscape, a landscape as protean as any of those created by global media, also seems to contribute to the impossibility of a common nostalgia. In one conversation, Old Ji brings up a Hollywood movie called *Forever Young*, which, despite its mediocrity, touches him tremendously. In the movie, the lead character wakes up from being frozen for forty years and returns to the old restaurant where he used to dine with his girlfriend. Virus cannot understand why the movie is touching. Old Ji explains that one could never find such a restaurant in Taipei and he asks, “Where in the hell can one find ‘forever’? What happened to the old banyan tree?” (p. 28). Old Ji’s explanation again reveals his frustration with the present, projected onto the longing for something old and unchanged. Challenged by Assistant Director, who dismisses the movie as nothing but a myth created by Hollywood, Old Ji argues that a myth can be created only with some reality. He states: “Whenever I go to America, I find little has changed. But after I come back from America, I find Taiwan god-damn changed a lot. Shit [English in the original text], in fact, I can feel Taiwan is changing every day without having to go abroad” (p. 28).

American scholar Ban Wang vividly describes the same change: “Taiwanese society, with its speedy economic takeoff in the 1970s and into the circuit of global capital and the world market, has virtually compressed the two hundred years of industrial modernity in the West into a few decades” (Wang 2007: 373). With this “compressed modernity” come the dramatic, radical changes of the familiar landscapes and lifestyles, changes so astonishing that those who lived through the transformation can hardly express, or even comprehend, what they have witnessed. These changes evoke Assistant Director’s nostalgia for the rural past as opposed to Old Ji’s alienation and projection of his utopian longing for the world beyond Taiwan’s shore. Although responding differently, members of the older generation, such as Old Ji and Assistant Director, are prone to experiencing nostalgia because they have been forever separated from “the anthropological place,” where they could find memory, history, and identity tied to the locale through “organic” face-to-face daily social interactions (Augé 1994: 94). For example,

Assistant Director's banyan tree in the village is remembered as a social place in which the children played in the daytime and the adults chatted together in the evening after a day of hard work. On the contrary, for Virus, the changing landscape, like the images in the global media, is the norm; in both worlds, things do not exist long enough to create shared memory. Receptive to and influenced by global trends, Taiwan's consumers typically rush from one craze to another in pursuit of popular culture and commodities. The brevity of each craze and the sharp contrast between fervent enthusiasm and complete forgetfulness leaves the younger Taiwanese generation incapable of nostalgia. Immersed in the fleeting and the ephemeral, Virus has never truly developed affection for a particular place and time. She cannot experience nostalgic longing like those of Old Ji and Assistant Director. Generational differences are clearly contrasted.

Ironically, in *Utopia Ltd.*, the collective memory of old-fashioned and even tasteless TV commercials both forms a kind of shared nostalgia for the older generation and engages the younger generation. In scene 6, during the Christmas party, as Old Ji casually brings up an old and "cheesy" TV commercial about an over-the-counter drug (Wufenzhu), he says, "How could the person that does not have feelings for Taiwan ever remember 'Wufenzhu, ouch, I had a headache; Wufenzhu, ouch, I had a stomachache?'" (Chi 2001: 71). Such popular old commercials then become the only noncontested past that the older generation remembers and finds endearing. Together they eagerly reenact the farcical commercial for Virus and they further include an excited Virus in their demonstration of another old commercial, called "wetting the bed." As all five members discover their shared fondness for the old commercials and playfully reenact them, they appear for the first time truly harmonious (Fig. 1).

Different perspectives on the past, dissatisfaction with the present, and the impact of global media lead to five different types of nostalgia among the group. These five different types of nostalgia, whether of the idealized past or utopian future, further symbolize their different attitudes toward Taiwanese identity. Playwright Chi Wei-jan specifies them as "nativistic, immigrating, illusionary, confused, and fluid," represented respectively by Assistant Director, Old Ji, Director Li, Xiaoji, and Virus (Ji 2001). To avoid confrontation in interpreting the past and evade the painful clashing of their different views of Taiwanese identity, the characters find common ground in the old commercials—simple, playful, and nonpolitical—which enable them to escape from facing the unsolvable question.

Noticeably, in scene 2, the different understandings of nostalgia held by the various characters are reinforced by the stage image



FIGURE 1. Assistant Director, playing the husband, avoids the kiss from his wife, played by Xiaoji, while shouting “Divorce.” Old Ji will walk forward with a wine bottle, saying, “To get rid of bad breath, please use Listerine mouth-wash.” (Photo: Courtesy of Creative Society)

of dividedness, which also suggests the real nature of the company, precarious and fragmentary. The members sit far apart on chairs in a circle facing outside, with the one who is talking occasionally turning to the member he addresses (Fig. 2). There is little eye contact, and the characters seem at times to talk to themselves or ponder aloud some difficult questions. This staging is a directorial choice, for the stage directions in the script read simply “sitting on the floor in a circle.” Similarly, the set design looks “simple and cold,” as specified in the play, but the set includes even fewer pieces of furniture than described and becomes unrealistic and more imagistic. Three big scenery drapes, with light green color on the upper part and complemented with seismograph-like geometric lines on the bottom part, are used throughout the production to form the big studio. The central back drape has a rectangular dent with short stairways, suggesting an office on a second floor. Several simple chairs are used in some office scenes, and a big table is added for a Christmas party scene. The sparseness of stage props and furniture further highlights the coldness and anonymity of the place. Envisioned as a paper doll’s house, seemingly perfect but in fact unreal and brittle, the set not only indicates that the company can be easily restructured, but provides a dramatic irony to the claims of the characters.



FIGURE 2. In scene 2, when the five members are chatting about nostalgia, the stage image is not that of harmony, but dividedness. They sit far apart and rarely look at each other. Contrary to the claim that Utopia Ltd. is like a family, the set design does not evoke the warmth of a family, but is simple and cold. (Photo: Courtesy of Creative Society, photographer Lin Sheng-fa)

Questioning a New Master National Narrative

In *Utopia Ltd.*, the banyan tree becomes a metaphor for a potential master narrative, narrated and advocated by Assistant Director. In scene 5, when informed that his proposal featuring a nostalgic theme with a banyan tree has been chosen by the client, Assistant Director takes it for granted that a banyan tree will evoke nostalgic sentiments from all viewers.

However, his belief that banyan trees and their associations with a childhood sweetheart are a shared experience¹² is immediately challenged and contested. Virus argues that there was no such a banyan tree in her childhood, while Xiaoji provides a parodic version of the banyan tree. She gives an account of how she accidentally spied her father on top of her mother in their bedroom, both naked. Shocked and confused, the young Xiaoji rushed out of the house only to be greeted by another terrible scene. A military officer with a leather whip was once again beating his son, Xiaoji's classmate, who had been tied to an old banyan tree. Her parodic travesty intentionally subverts Assistant Director's narrative, mocking its seriousness and recasting it in a different perspective. It may not go too far to read Xiaoji's narrative of banyan trees, associated with brutality and confusion, as a metaphor

for the untold history of White Terror,¹³ which started to be gradually revealed only after the lifting of martial law. Xiaoji further reminds Assistant Director that his banyan tree is no more representative of the experience of the Taiwanese than hers. Questioning a grand narrative and yet exhibiting her longing for one that can represent all voices, Xiaoji is trapped and doomed to suffer under the burden of her identity crisis.

Virus refutes the belief of Assistant Director in a way different from Xiaoji's. Although considering Xiaoji's "version" of the banyan tree "more brilliant" than Assistant Director's, she insists on having her own experience and making her own statement, just as she got a neck tattoo as a birthmark that she gives herself instead of "inheriting" from her parents. In making this claim, Virus renounces the conventional understanding of identity as tied to a place and an origin. Instead, she "loves the feeling of transience," evidenced in the fact that in two years she has changed jobs five times because she does not want to be trapped by jobs, by Taiwan. When she has money, she will travel all over the world. Virus envisions herself as a nomadic, multicultural, and postmodernist subject that lets go of an identity rooted in a place and sees border crossing as a norm. To use Caren Kaplan's concepts of exile and displacement, Virus's constant roaming is not the exile of the modernist, who suffers from anxiety and estrangement due to dislocation and thus longs to rediscover a lost past in which lies coherent unified identity (1986: 84–100). Instead, her persistent wanderlust exemplifies the displacement of the postmodernist, celebrating rather than being traumatized by multiple locations and cultural encounters.

While Xiaoji deconstructs and Virus discards Assistant Director's understanding of the banyan tree, Director Li further romanticizes it. He indeed remembers a banyan tree, but his banyan tree stirs memories of unrequited love, which he considers beautifully innocent. He recalls that in his college days, while sitting under a big banyan tree on campus, he saw the girl of his dreams on a bike. After a futile attempt to ask her out, he started to write her a letter each day, writing a total of 123 letters before he graduated. After the talk of nostalgia in the studio, Director Li starts to think about this girl, who for him epitomizes ideal beauty and innocence.

Assistant Director, Director Li, and Xiaoji all share memories of banyan trees, but the tree, a metaphor for a period of the past, means something different to each. What a banyan tree represents is only one of the many "versions," a telling word used by all the characters to refer to their own stories. As the plot unfolds, the question of version (版本 *banben*) becomes increasingly complex. Upset by the fact that Virus, of Hakka descent, does not care at all that she does not speak Hakka,

Assistant Director comments that he is fed up with those Taiwanese who claim that they do not speak Taiwanese (or Hoklo) with a sense of superiority. He concludes, “The inferiority complex causes forgetting the roots (忘本 *wangben*).” Xiaoji questions, “What if your *ben* is not my *ben*?” The word *ben* here serves as a pun, referring to both roots (*genben*) and versions (*banben*). Virus, not into serious topics, playfully and jokingly plays with the word *ben*, saying “Your *benji* (畚箕 *dustpan*) is not my broom,” completely dismissing the question of *ben* (Chi 2001: 57).

Assistant Director insists on the universality of his experience of banyan trees, which to him symbolize the idealized rural village imagined as the origin of authentic Taiwanese culture and identity. His view of banyan trees is flawed, however, because it requires simultaneous remembering and forgetting. For Assistant Director, the banyan tree indicates an ideal period when a bowl of plain noodles cost only two dollars (ca. 1960s), but Xiaoji reminds him that “it is also the period of Chiang Kai-shek [President from 1950 to 1975]” (p. 57). Xiaoji’s mention of Chiang Kai-shek raises the question of forgetting and eliminating undesirable elements involved in shaping a narrative. What is a mere “stain” to Assistant Director is a traumatic memory for those who have experienced White Terror.

The five characters’ feelings of nostalgia for such different places and times serve as a metaphor for the impossibility of a grand narrative in contemporary Taiwan and the difficulty of forging a coherent national identity. No grand narrative, such as that of the banyan tree, can ever be formulated without being examined, questioned, and challenged. In this conscious interrogation of performing and narrating a nation, *Utopia Ltd.* raises three questions. After the old myths and narratives of a Chinese nation are debunked, is it possible to construct an all-inclusive narrative of a Taiwanese nation without diminishing minority groups and voices? If not, is it desirable to have a coherent unified narrative? Shouldn’t people like Assistant Director simply accept small narratives as the norm, resisting the urge to formulate a single master narrative of Taiwan?

Envisioning the Dissolution of Utopia Ltd.

Sharing a dream of raising funds to make feature films, the members of Utopia Ltd. can set aside their disagreements over political issues. As the plot progresses, however, the mask of this harmonious united family gradually dissolves, washed away by the upcoming disbanding of the company and the imminent exit of its disillusioned members. For three years in a row, the studio’s application to the government-sponsored Domestic Film Fund has failed, and to make things worse, an entrepreneur has backed out of a potential investment in

Utopia Ltd. because of an economic recession. Seeing no prospect of success for the studio after a decade of futile attempts, Old Ji tells Director Li that he has decided to withdraw his share. Shocked, angered, and without capital, Director Li can only accept the fact that the company will be closed soon, but they decide not to tell the employees.

The founders' secret plan to disband the ill-fated Utopia Ltd. seems to reflect their silent acceptance that they must desert their dreams and staff members. But the staff members have secrets of their own, secrets that are accidentally exposed through Virus's answering of incoming phone calls. The phone calls disclose that the employees' degree of commitment is hardly as strong as they have claimed. Virus, who joined the company only three months ago and has enjoyed her experience, is looking for another job opportunity for no clear reason. Like a nomad, she seems to have to be compulsively on the move. Xiaoji, who has decided to take a break from work, is seriously considering an attractive offer to work as a director in another company. Assistant Director has been preparing to study in America to earn an MA, which he believes will open doors for him. With the exception of Director Li, none of the members is truly devoted to the company. Utopia Ltd. is Taiwan incarnate and *Utopia Ltd.* reveals a dystopian view of post-martial law nation building in Taiwan.

As a microcosm of Taiwan, the fragile and fragmentary Utopia Ltd. embodies a nation at stake. Looking back, one cannot see a shared past to which all the characters all want to return. Looking into the future, there is no dream to tie the people together. Through the gradual revelation of the members' tenuous commitment to Utopia Ltd., the playwright also subtly satirizes those who manipulate the discourse of "loving Taiwan," a discourse that becomes the subject of his farcical play *Mad in Taiwan*. With the rise of Taiwanese consciousness, "loving Taiwan" has become a popular phrase to express a Taiwanese identity. As former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) argues, "To be a New Taiwanese is to identify with Taiwan, love Taiwan, and be willing to struggle for it" (1999: 77). Since then, "loving Taiwan," equivalent to identifying with Taiwan, has become a prefix attached to numerous types of public activities, both official and nonofficial, including such diverse activities as volunteer work, political protests, and art exhibitions. This phrase has been further turned into an empty commodified sign appropriated as a political gesture by politicians and as a part of marketing strategies to sell products and ideas.¹⁴ The members of Utopia Ltd. exemplify those Taiwanese who claim to love Taiwan, but in reality plan to seek their future elsewhere.

The two characters with clearly different political tendencies, Old Ji and Assistant Director, repay closer examination. Old Ji repre-

sents those who have dual citizenship, usually privileged elites, who choose to emigrate whenever Taiwan is faced with a crisis.¹⁵ Yet, Old Ji's status as one of the two heads of Utopia Ltd. makes his plan of going to America and lack of concern about deserting his staff and company a reference to the KMT's sojourner mentality of seeing Taiwan as a "transition" or a springboard but never a homeland. This plot arrangement captures the anxiety and doubt of the people, who cannot help asking: How can those at the center of state power see the interest of the nation and its people as their priority when they can *always* choose to leave?

Equally ironically, Assistant Director, the only character dramatized as a Taiwanese nationalist who sees himself as loving Taiwan most, gives an ambiguous answer to Virus's question: After you get your degree, will you stay in America to find a job as Ang Lee did? He says, "Basically, I will come back for sure. However, sometimes, heaven has its will (人算不如天算 *rensuanburutiansuan*). Get it?" (Chi 2001: 50). This portrayal seems to suggest that both Old Ji and Assistant Director put their self-interest above the company/island.

Assistant Director's answer also exposes his contradiction without his realizing it. His intention of staying in America contradicts a previous remark, indicating that "if an artist is separated from his roots, it is impossible for him to produce something good" (p. 59). The characterization of Assistant Director as a flawed person not aware of the discrepancy between his judgment of others and his own behavior prevents the audience from completely identifying with him, serves as a critique of the potential danger of new Taiwanese discourses, and may even imply that Old Ji and Assistant Director are simply two sides of one coin.

Unfortunately, Director Li, who truly wants to hold on to his dream and the studio, does not have Old Ji's capital or Assistant Director's talent and ardent passion. His sense of helplessness is pitiful. Old Ji, expecting a fight from Director Li after having revealed his intended withdrawal and encountering none, tells Li that he would curse vehemently if their positions were exchanged. With this provocation, Li murmurs a curse, only to be mocked by Old Ji. In the play, none of the members is spared an examination regarding their commitment and none, except for Li, is proven devoted to Utopia Ltd. Still, Li is powerless to hold the group together. The implied message reveals a bleak vision of contemporary Taiwan.

Playwright Chi Wei-jan is not satisfied with simply exposing what is under the utopian disguise, confronting the members of the audience with the situation of Taiwan and tempting them to ponder which character they are like. He also intends to rip off the mask of ethnic

integration to reveal ethnic tensions in Taiwan. The five members of Utopia Ltd. appear to work harmoniously together for their studio until disagreements about whether to take over the public relations work for the Justice Party brings ethnic tensions and identity issues to the surface. According to the playwright, the Justice Party does not suggest any real party in Taiwan (Chi, personal email, 6 December 2013).¹⁶ In my opinion, it functions as a catalyst, comparable to campaign periods when the whole island is in a hyperpoliticized frenzy, forcing its people to confront issues related to their identity.

Among the members, Assistant Director is the only one who adamantly insists on not accepting the account no matter how alluring the profits look. He does not share the political viewpoints of the Justice Party. Ironically, the Justice Party has chosen to work with this studio precisely because of his commercial film called “Revolutionary Bloods” for advertising sanitary pads. Dismissed as an “inside joke,” the film is mistakenly put together with other commercial films and given to Director Liu, head of the public relations department of the Justice Party. As if empowered by the recognition, the voice of Assistant Director becomes dominant; like a machine gun, he fires out his repressed dissatisfaction and anger toward stances other than his own.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Your political stance is the same as the fucking stinky ass of the Justice Party. People of your kind, honestly, are below dogs and pigs. You think you are superior, high-class fucking Chinese. With some achievement, you want to emigrate and retire in Qingdao. What do you think Taiwan is?

OLD JI: Taiwan is not yours. Stop mentioning Taiwan this, Taiwan that. Everyday, you talk about *bentu*. Damn it, is Taiwan presentable or visible in the world? By the way, the TV program *Tieshi Youlinglong*¹⁷ you recommended; are you joking? What the hell is that?

XIAOJI: Please do not insult the only TV program that is worth watching.

VIRUS: The program is just fantastic, although I don’t understand the language.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: (*Imitating Virus*) “Although I don’t understand the language.” People of your kind like to emphasize that you don’t understand Taiwanese (Hoklo) or Hakka. What kind of mentality is this?

DIRECTOR LI: Drop the subject. It’s getting ugly.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: What are you afraid of? Since I was in this trade, I’ve been your assistant. I admire your persistence, but I can’t bear your pretension of not being *involved*. You consider yourself superior, but if you don’t get involved, how can you create works that spark enthusiasm? . . .

- DIRECTOR LI: Gosh, as somebody admires your work, so you're on cloud nine. Suddenly, I'm not qualified for making art?
- ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: You are too mild, so your stuff is too soft. We see only your love for art, but I can't see your passion for life.
- XIAOJI: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."
- ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: What the hell is all the pretension to be so erudite? Being confused is the best. That is exactly you. You are perpetually "confused." You are fucking superior! (Chi 2001: 91-92)

The dialogue shows that only Assistant Director and Old Ji directly confront the issues of national identity, and their viewpoints clash. Yet, the comments of the other members, although not on identity, also greatly irritate Assistant Director and provoke his criticism, as he interprets their remarks through the lens of identity, and, based on his nativist criteria, finds their stances unacceptable and politically incorrect. Assistant Director is self-righteous, but he is also full of "passionate intensity" for the island. Such characterization draws attention to the danger of extreme nationalism, which, in the desire to build a cohesive nation, inevitably leads to an intolerance of competing views of identity, the same intolerance that is at the heart of opposition to colonial regimes.

The members' confrontations take a turn when Old Ji says to Virus that her generation is the least eligible to make comments. Assistant Director seems to agree, responding that "unfortunately, they are the future master of the nation." Xiaoji questions: "What about your generation? Some have dreams, but are unable to act. Some are simply occupied with the thought of emigrating. Some think that they are the only ones that can speak for Taiwan," referring to respectively Director Li, Old Ji, and Assistant Director (p. 94). Xiaoji again highlights the totalizing, self-righteous aspect of the nativists. After all, who can speak for Taiwan? On the other hand, not only political stances that reveal one's national identity but also generational differences can become boundaries that tear this group of five members apart. It turns out that nobody can speak for Taiwan since as a signifier, it is not unified, but fragmented in many different ways. Those who attempt to speak for Taiwan with a grand narrative such as Assistant Director are inevitably met with scrutiny and objection.

Unlike Xiaoji, who questions the self-legitimization of Assistant Director, Old Ji reveals his anxiety over the military threat from China that the nativist's stance might evoke. After his last failed attempt to persuade Assistant Director and Director Li to take the project for the Justice Party, Old Ji upsettingly concludes that "this is a madman's

house” (p. 95). Assistant Director appropriates Old Ji’s metaphor by saying that Taiwan can never be saved because it is filled with madmen. And he again repeats his condemnation of the other characters’ stances. Old Ji answers: “Right. Only you are the savior of Taiwan. Let me tell you. Wait until the day when Taiwan sinks into the ocean, the moment when you breathe the last breath, and you will still be blind to the fact that it is people like you that trigger the missiles” (p. 95). In the case of Taiwan, the other not only emerges forcefully from within cultural discourse, but also powerfully lies outside, across the strait in China. The criticism of Assistant Director by both Xiaoji and Old Ji reflects the problems that attend establishing a Taiwanese nation from within and without.

The irreconcilable viewpoints of Old Ji and Assistant Director eventually explode, leading them to ethnically charged outbursts. Assistant Director insists that what he wants is dignity, regardless of the destruction it may cause. He condemns Old Ji: “What dignity do you have? You are disloyal to America and do not identify with that regime either. Don’t you find dignity by denying Taiwan? You fucking want to emigrate! Get out now!” (p. 95). They curse each other, each using the particular scatological terms of his own ethnic group, and inevitably hurl ethnic remarks, calling each other “vulgar *taike*”¹⁸ and “Mainlander rascal,” also “cockroach” and “pig”¹⁹ (pp. 95–96). In the fight, their political differences are irrationally turned into an ethnic problem, recalling traumatic memories with the discriminatory ethnic terms they use and complicating the identity issue that has haunted the island in the post-martial law period.

The stage image in this climatic seventh scene again emphasizes the sense of inability and dividedness. Previously, when Old Ji reveals in scene 3 that he is going to withdraw his share to Director Li, the rest of the characters stand still inside the office on the second floor in the dark, skillfully filling in the relatively empty stage and more importantly suggesting a sense of inability. Similarly, near the end of scene 7, when Assistant Director and Old Ji almost get into a fight, the other three members spread out facing the audience, making no attempt to ease the intense tension, which is reinforced by red lighting (Fig. 3).

Without a shared dream, however unattainable, to hold them together, the members’ conflicts are laid bare and Utopia Ltd. is doomed to shut down. Utopia deteriorates from a family boasting of its democratic ambience, a utopian workplace with members striving to achieve their dream, into an ill-functioning company to which only one of its members is truly committed, a madhouse where people fight with hurtful ethnic curses. At the end of the play, there is neither dream nor illusion, but a bitter, sad realization of the truth of Utopia Ltd.—what it

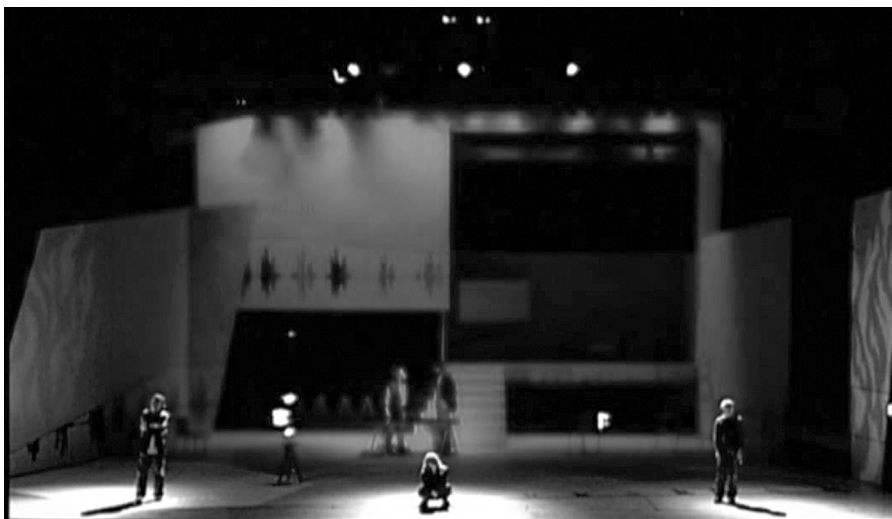


FIGURE 3. Sensing that there is no way to resolve the arguments between Assistant Director and Old Ji, the other three members cannot do anything but stay silent. The stage image evokes a sense of helplessness. (Photo: Courtesy of Creative Society)

is and who its members really are. Director Li, who does not want to be embroiled in political debates and believes himself to be above them, is not spared from disillusionment either. In what could be the punch line of a cruel joke, Director Liu, the publicity manager of the Justice Party, turns out to be the very girl he first saw while sitting under the banyan tree in college.

America as a Nation and Destination

In the casual conversations among these educated urbanites, the United States appears not as the alienated other, but instead as a familiar point of reference, through which this group of people define themselves. The complex view of the United States in Taiwan springs from the close relations that have developed since the Cold War period, when Taiwan served as what General Douglas MacArthur called the United States' "unsinkable aircraft carrier" in the Pacific Ocean. Taiwan would become a fortress to contain communism while relying on US monetary aid to develop its economy and military. Their relationship remains close as Taiwan must depend on the United States for arms sales and observance of the Taiwan Relations Act to maintain national defense against China's military threat.

More important, the United States plays a significant role in the

Taiwanese imagination, as American popular culture pours onto the island through the Internet and airwaves, while a constant influx of US products floods every Taiwanese convenience store. Characters in *Utopia Ltd.* meet at Starbucks, watch Hollywood movies, and play American music at parties. They sprinkle their conversation with English effortlessly. The penetration of American culture and this familiarity with “deterritorializing imagery” influence the Taiwanese people’s identity formation, creating a paradox pointed out by Xiaoji: “We don’t find America foreign and instead, we feel Taiwan alienating” (p. 28). In a global age, one’s cultural identity may go beyond the boundaries of the place where one is rooted to become borderless through the ceaseless iteration of all the “repertoires of textual locations” that one encounters through media (Tomlinson 1999: 119).

This group of characters is not completely unaware of the hegemonic cultural power of the United States, but they cannot find ways to combat it, as evidenced in their discussion of Ang Lee’s critical and commercial hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). At the Christmas party, Xiaoji first makes fun of the bad acting of Zhang Zhen (張震), the only main actor from Taiwan, playing the lover of one of the two female leads, Zhang Ziyi (章子怡). Assistant Director’s comment turns the playful into the serious, arguing that “Zhang Zhen is what Ang Lee uses to disguise his dismissal of Taiwan” (Chi 2001: 74), hinting at the fact that Ang Lee, the pride of Taiwan,²⁰ cast only one main actor from Taiwan in this film. A Pinterian pause ensues until Director Li attempts to shift the focus to the script, which he considers the weakest part of the whole film. Then their discussion turns to the hegemony of the Hollywood industry, epitomizing American popular culture:

VIRUS: Some friends of mine went to see the movie. They loved it and I did, too, but I find people in related fields in Taiwan seem reluctant to admit that it was a good movie.

OLD JI: True. It’s a case of sour grapes. Why fuss about the movie’s American capital and Hollywood flavor? It is the only way for us the marginalized to fight back the mechanism of Hollywood hegemony.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: This is not called fighting back, but being swallowed up.²¹

OLD JI: Only by being swallowed up can one combat with voices from inside.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Yes, making such noises as glu-glu in the stomach. (p. 75)

Old Ji and Assistant Director represent two different views of the old questions regarding colonial legacy, including those about

language and culture, in postcolonial countries. Old Ji will retain the master's tool in order to dismantle his house, while Assistant Director is afraid that the operating mechanism embedded in the tool will inadvertently lead to assimilation or absorption. Even though there is no easy answer, and no conclusion reached, their discussion demonstrates the struggle and recognition of US hegemonic power.

Meanwhile, the characters' talk of the film provides a superb example of how Western recognition of people relevant to Taiwan is intertwined with Taiwan's anxiety over identity issues at home and abroad. Faced with the rise of China as a world power, Taiwan is increasingly invisible from the world stage. Therefore, how these people identify and how Western media describe their nationality always gains wide Taiwanese media coverage and the attention of the people on the island. As this film won numerous prestigious international awards, it raised the international profile of Taiwan and boosted national pride. Taiwan-born Ang Lee was admired as a national hero gloriously returning home when he visited Taiwan. However, the way the *Utopia Ltd.* characters speak of his achievement betrays how they identify themselves. In the play, Old Ji concludes that "Anyway, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is the pride of the Chinese," to which Assistant Director provocatively responds, "That is why IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH TAIWAN" (p. 75). The confrontation of these two different cultural identities, Chinese versus Taiwanese, causes embarrassed tension and uncomfortable silence until the other three discard the subject totally and ask them to have a drink.²²

America is also Old Ji's new destination and Assistant Director's planned destination, which may turn into his nationality. Perhaps Assistant Director and Old Ji's disagreement about being Chinese or Taiwanese is of no importance if both of them may eventually become Americans. In the end, they may find their common ground in a shared utopia beyond Taiwan in America, and yet identify themselves differently in their hyphenated identity as Chinese-American and Taiwanese-American.

In the play and in reality, America exists as a phantasmic hero that Taiwan desires and imagines itself to be. Willingly standing under the panoptic gaze of its distant idol, Taiwan shapes its identity and defines its national heroes. As it gazes down from its commanding position on the world stage, America has become the cultural ideal against which Taiwanese reality is measured. America is the yardstick. For example, Xiaoji naturally describes Luo Da-you (羅大佑), a Taiwanese pop star she used to like, as Taiwan's Bob Dylan. And just as Xiaoji seamlessly compares a Taiwanese pop star to Bob Dylan, so director Li Huan-xiong imbued his production of a play about Taiwan with dis-

tinctively American music, including jazz, pop, and even a show tune. Most of this music is heard by the audience during scene changes and is not part of the action, but Chi's script calls for the characters to listen to, and even sing along with, Sting's "Fragile" during the Christmas party scene. Implying the positive reception of the American music by Taiwan's typically young theatregoers in Taipei, theatre critic and scholar Chen Zheng-xi (陳正熙) describes the music's effect as forming a wonderful "audial landscape," rarely present in the Taiwanese theatre (2002: 58). In the context of the 2001 performance, the director, writer, audience, critic, and characters, all of whom are educated urbanites, seem to reflect Xiaoji's understanding that "We don't find America foreign and instead, we feel Taiwan alienating" (Chi 2001: 28).

Conclusion: Drama of Anxiety and Disillusionment

In his published review,²³ Chen Zheng-xi regards the play as a sincere attempt at exploring identity issues, pointing to the fact that at the time of this production, numerous troupes would either play into the rising trend of Taiwanization by presenting a purely Taiwanese perspective in the name of professionalism or jump on the bandwagon to go to China by offering a greater-China perspective in the name of exchange (2002: 58). If the exploration of identity is about one's becoming a subject, then the honest dramatization of the various issues related to national identity in this play proves such a possibility. However, in responding to Chi's preface, he asks, "If *Utopia Ltd.* depicts a society without a shared myth, then apart from pointing out the cultural predicament, shouldn't the people in the cultural circle be responsible for attempting to construct such a myth?" (p. 58).

Such a longing for a myth or a shared national narrative is perhaps also felt by the playwright, but in the end, he has none to offer the audience. *Utopia Ltd.*, once stripped of the witty wordplay that permeates the first half of the play, teems with frustration, confusion, and disillusionment. In this sincere but frustrated search, the audience may detect the playwright's anxiety. This is a postcolonial play concerned with the loss of subjectivity and the dilemma of establishing a nation. There is a need for a nation, a place of identification, but the playwright himself cannot see how this nation could arise in Taiwan, where each new narrative is constantly questioned, and where the construction of subjectivity encounters the challenges of global forces. There is no way out. The playwright cannot assume an authoritative voice. Or rather, the highly intellectual, questioning voice of Xiaoji is indeed authorial. Aware of all the challenges that are involved in establishing a nation and the danger of extreme Taiwanese nationalism, she is at best searching, and at worst confused.



FIGURE 4. Virus claims that she does not want to be trapped by a job or Taiwan, and yet is seen to exhibit her emotions to the company in the epilogue. This final image seems to signify hope, however slim, in a bleak situation. (Photo: Courtesy of Creative Society)

The dream of making movies is destroyed, Utopia Ltd. is disbanded, and the ideal beauty and innocence embodied by the girl in a nostalgic past turns into the embarrassing reality of being a mouthpiece for a political party that most members of the group cannot support. When all is deconstructed, subverted, and laid bare, what is left for the Taiwanese to hope for? Where can they go to look for Utopia? “Ltd.” (limited) in the title suggests the limitation of artistic ideals and, more significantly, of utopian imagination. From being playful and eliciting laughter to presenting heightened tension, *Utopia Ltd.* gradually leads its audiences to explore the core question of Taiwan’s identity in the most honest way. It does not offer a utopian Taiwan for the sake of the future as do some plays, but it does offer hope.

In the epilogue, as the members pack their things and leave the studio, they show glimpses of their humanity and concern for each other. Director Li offers to find a job for Virus, and Virus asks him whether the discovery of Director Liu to be his past dream girl is a big blow to him. They share a moment of sincerity and intimacy. Finally, Xiaoji leaves, taking only one item: the poster for a movie that the team wished to make. Virus, the future master of the nation, says to Xiaoji,

“Last time I told you that I wouldn’t feel sad when I have to leave this company someday. I lied” (p. 99). After Xiaoji leaves, Virus, staying to close the door, cries (Fig. 4). Virus, spending time together with the other members, has grown to care, and Xiaoji still holds on to their dream. The dreams that will not die and the hopes that will not be extinguished suggest a glimpse of optimism in the bleak landscape of Taiwan the play portrays.

NOTES

1. Lung Ying-tai, a well-known cultural critic and writer at the time, once pointed out in her newspaper column that the total number of pages on Taiwan in the twelve volumes of elementary and secondary school textbooks was thirty out of twelve hundred, or less than 3 percent (1987: 44).

2. Since the talk of a Taiwanese identity is no longer a taboo or a crime of treason after the lifting of martial law, almost every year there are surveys conducted by various organizations about the national identification of the people and about the future of Taiwan. It is certain that a Taiwanese identity has been gradually forged in the twenty-first century, as evidenced in the surveys, which show an increasing majority of people identifying themselves as Taiwanese, followed by dual identities, with a very low percentage identifying themselves as Chinese. To give only one of the many examples, in December 2009, a survey conducted by the nonpartisan, award-winning magazine *Common Wealth* (*Tianxia*) indicated that 62 percent of interviewees saw themselves as Taiwanese, 8 percent as Chinese, and 22 percent as both. Noticeably, 75 percent of young people between ages eighteen and twenty-nine identified themselves as Taiwanese (Lin Xing-fei 2009: 63). The results were similar to those of a survey conducted one month earlier by National Taiwan University, whose statistics showed 63.6 percent saw themselves as Taiwanese, 5.6 percent as Chinese, and 29.1 percent as both (Zou Jing-wen 2009).

3. In China, this imported Western form is called *huaaju* (話劇, spoken drama), but in Taiwan this form is more commonly referred to as *wutaiju* (舞台劇, stage drama) in general and *xiandaixiju/juchang* (現代戲劇/劇場, modern drama or theatre) in academic settings. When this Western form was first introduced to Taiwan in the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), it was called *sinju* (new drama). The use of the term *huaaju* became dominant with the KMT party-state moving to Taiwan in 1949. However, between the 1950s and the 1970s, the prevailing orthodox “anti-communism and anti-soviet combat” propaganda of *huaaju*, produced by troupes affiliated with the party-state, had little appeal to audiences. Attempts were made by some writers to write new types of *huaaju* in the 1970s, with only limited success. Not until the “little theatre” movement in the 1980s did the audience members start to return to theatre. Gradually, the term “little theatre” (*xiaojuchang*) replaced *huaaju* and further evolved into *wutaiju* to refer to this Western form. It is important to point out that since the late 1980s, the use of the

term *huaju* in Taiwan has been rare. The term, usually pejorative, describes antiquated ways of creating drama and implies that the products of these methods are constrained by the limits of conservative and ideologically correct content.

4. Modern theatre as understood today in Taiwan did not gain momentum until the little theatre movement in the 1980s. It started with the Experimental Theatre Festival in 1980 and continued for another four years. Its unexpected success and impact lay in arousing audience interest in theatre, the cultivation of a new generation of actors and directors, as well as the establishment of many little theatre troupes. This period was called by scholar Chung Ming-der the first phase, followed by the politicized second phase from 1986 to 1990. It must be noted that there is no general agreement on the periodization of the movement.

5. My discussion of *Utopia Ltd.* is based mainly on the published script and the video recording of the 2001 production, along with miscellaneous production materials sent by Creative Society and personal correspondence with playwright Chi Wei-jan, director Li Huan-xiong, and the chief executive of Creative Society, Li Hui-na.

6. When modern theatre troupes started to be founded in the late 1980s, they were generally called “little theatre,” referring to their size, to their antiestablishment and subversive nature at the time, and to the imported Western form that the troupes used. The 1990s witnessed the establishment of more theatre troupes and the emergence of the two most popular troupes: Stan Lai’s Performing Art Workshop and Li Quo-xiu’s Ping-fong Acting Troupe. Called “big theatre” or “mainstream theatre,” these troupes produced shows, usually enjoying good box office and unprecedentedly touring to major cities other than Taipei. The denomination of “little theatre” and “big theatre,” however, is confusing. Nowadays, a theatre troupe usually schedules a new production to be performed in one or three major cities, running for one or two weekends in each city. If the production is very popular, then the theatre troupe, normally a well-known one, may have it restaged in the future with the same pattern described above.

7. In *The History of Taiwan Drama (Taiwan xijushi)* published in 2003, Lin He-yi singles out Chi as the only playwright in the 1990s worthy of note, following the important playwrights in the 1980s, including Wang Qi-mei, Jin Shi-jie, Stan Lai, and Li Quo-xiu (Lin He-yi 2003: 269–270). In an article published in 2004, theatre critic and professor Chen Zheng-xi also concludes that judging from the productions in recent years, there have been no impressive scripts with the exception of Chi’s works (Chen 2004: 31).

8. Most of the scripts have a chance to be published only if the productions are extremely popular. If not, the scripts might be published after being produced, either because they were the works of famous directors or playwrights, or because the theatre troupes have gained some kind of governmental subsidy.

9. All the demographic information is based on Copper (2009: 14).

10. Nowadays, a new terminology, “New Inhabitants” (新住民, *xinzhumu*-

ming), often replaces the label “Mainlanders” to include both Mainlanders and “foreign brides” (外籍新娘, *waijixinliang*). Such a recent invention dispenses with the old designations that cast these two groups as perpetual outsiders.

11. White Terror in Taiwan refers to the persecution and suppression of dissidents by the KMT regime, mostly under the reign of Chiang Kai-shek, from the late 1940s to the late 1980s or early 1990s. It began soon after the 228 Incident or 228 Massacre in 1947. On 27 February 1947, the brutal beating of a widow peddler by a KMT officer aroused the pent-up dissatisfaction of the Native Taiwanese with the corrupt administration of Chen-yi, a governor appointed by Chiang Kai-shek. The next day, an island-wide uprising occurred. The settlement between local Taiwanese intellectuals and government officials was broken when the KMT troops, secretly requested by Chen-yi, arrived on 8 March and started massive killings of Native Taiwanese that lasted until mid May. This incident ushered in the era of White Terror and the world’s longest martial law rule. During the height of White Terror in the 1950s, thousands of people were arrested, usually on suspicion of being “subversive,” were murdered, or simply disappeared mysteriously through the KMT secret agent systems. White Terror ended with the lifting of martial law in 1987, or with the abolishment of Betrayers Punishment Act in 1991.

12. Banyan trees are very common in Taiwan, and I am not sure where there is one shared cultural association for people on the island, except for one popular love song called “Under the Banyan Tree.” In the 1980s, this song was known to almost everybody in Taiwan, and it has evolved into a classic popular song. Based on a Japanese song with new lyrics, it expresses how a man misses his sweetheart and the happy time they spent together. The banyan tree along the roadside is where he met her for the first time and thus the place he misses as well. In 2000, this song occupied the third place in the category of translated songs in “Voting for the Most Popular Songs of the Past One Hundred Years in Taiwan,” an activity held by the Cultural Bureau of the Taipei city government.

13. I am indebted to Kathy Foley, editor of *Asian Theatre Journal*, for the suggestion of relationships between Xiaoji’s description of her experience and White Terror.

14. In a press conference for this show, Chi Wei-jan expressed his worries that without any gimmicks or star actors, *Utopia Ltd.* might not be able to draw huge crowds. In response, those present jokingly proposed a slogan that would work: “If you are not coming to see this show, you do not identify with Taiwan” (Huang 2001). This anecdote evidences how “loving Taiwan” as a label is on most people’s radar. Yet, most Taiwanese people tend to be skeptical and dismiss the claim by a public figure as a popular performative act.

15. In political circles, the violation of the Nationality Act, which prohibits government officials from holding dual citizenship, has frequently caused scandals, mostly involving KMT politicians and congressmen who fail to renounce their American citizenship. In Taiwan, people claiming dual citizenship are not uncommon, but high-ranking government officials’ claiming

dual citizenship becomes complicated and raises the issue of commitment to the island.

16. Although one may think a Taiwanese nationalist like Assistant Director would support the DPP rather than the KMT, it is risky to associate the Justice Party with the KMT, since the script does not make any other specific references.

17. *Tieshi* means “iron lion,” while *yulinlong* literally means “jade ornament.” These two phrases are randomly put together. In 1999 *Tieshi Yulinglong* (鐵獅玉玲瓏) was the name of one unit in a variety show that became extremely popular for several years. In the unit, two male comedians cross-dressed as female storytellers, in exaggerated makeup and costumes similar to *gezaixi* (Taiwanese opera). Telling well-known folklore or Chinese legends in Hoklo, they parodied the stories, while simultaneously referring to contemporary events woven with popular culture and slang.

18. The origin of the term *taike* (台客) is believed to be a discriminative denomination used by the Mainlanders to refer to Native Taiwanese in the 1950s. That is how this term is used in the play. However, in the past few years, *taike* has undergone several discursive transformations. It evolved from a pejorative term describing people who are vulgar and tasteless in dress style and demeanor to exhibiting homegrown charm or localness and representing a type of Taiwanese national character.

19. The use of “pig” to refer to the Mainlanders had to do with the catchphrase “The dogs are gone, but the pigs have come” (狗去豬來) among the Native Taiwanese during the first several years of the KMT regime. It demonstrates the disillusionment of the Native Taiwanese for the imagined motherland China, which they longed for and welcomed ardently but which proved to be another alien conqueror with its political suppression and discriminative policies toward Native Taiwanese. The Japanese, who ruthlessly oppressed the Taiwanese, are compared to dogs, a violent animal, but at least they can guard the house from thieves. In contrast, the corrupt and irresponsible KMT regime is compared to pigs, characterized by being unclean and doing nothing but eating.

20. Ang Lee, born in 1954 in southern Taiwan into a Mainlander family, went to America to study in 1979. He made his successful debut in Taiwan with *Pushing Hands* and *The Wedding Banquet* in the early 1990s, both of which were made possible through Taiwan’s Domestic Film Fund.

21. In the case of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Assistant Director may be correct in his viewpoint. As a China/Taiwan/Hong Kong/United States production, it uses the capital and marketing strategies of the Hollywood film industry and incorporates talents from Asia and the United States. Responses to the success of this model in the newspapers are positive, arguing that filmmakers in Taiwan can benefit from learning with an international team and that foreign capital can expand the scope of the film. However, much of this is only a myth. Few technicians and actors in this film are from Taiwan; most of the technicians are from Hong Kong because they know how to make good sword-fight films with tight budgets, as Ang Lee expressed. In addition, American cor-

porations work only with recognized directors and usually demand exorbitantly high shares of profits. A transnational co-production like this does not help the development of Taiwan's film industry technically or economically. Taiwan does not fight back or make its way into Hollywood. Rather, Hollywood uses its capital to appropriate the talents of these Asian countries and sell exoticism demonstrated in this type of film to Western markets while at the same time succeeding at the Asian local markets with the appeal of their local movie stars.

22. There is no knowing how Ang Lee positions himself regarding the issue of cultural identity and identification. By the year 2007, when Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* won the prestigious Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival, China used its clout to force the organization to change the film from its original designation, a Taiwanese film, to Taiwan, China. Ang Lee's response to the change is that "it is unfortunate" and that he does not know how to explain it. In a press conference, he said, "I don't really have much to say except that it has been changed from one to the other. If you can find out what's going on, please let me know." He added, "I just hope you enjoy the movie and let the movie speak for itself. You know where I come from" ("Controversy Swirls around Ang Lee," 2007). I consider that Ang Lee's mild response may have to do partly with his personality—modest and succinct—and partly with the mechanism of markets. No one can afford to lose the huge markets of China by offending its authorities. By doing so, an artist could also lose a potential source of capital.

23. At the time of this production, reading and hence publishing reviews was not as popular as it is today. The only regular venue at the time was a monthly magazine titled *Performing Arts*, started in 1992. To encourage review writing, a new web platform for performance reviews (表演藝術評論臺) was launched in September 2011. Interested readers can visit <http://pareviews.ncafroc.org.tw>.

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