Re-Staging Cultural Memory in Contemporary Taiwan Theatre:
Wang Qimei, Stanley Lai, and Lin Huaimin

Cultural Memories and Performative Rhetoric on Stage

Adopting Richard Schechner's definition of performance as "restored behavior," Joseph Roach in his study of culture and performance in New Orleans suggests that "the concept of restored behavior emerges from the cusp of the art and human sciences as the process wherein cultures understand themselves reflexively and whereby they explain themselves to others" (218). He further points out that "literature itself (and not just dramatic literature) may be understood as the historic archive of restored behavior, the repository and the medium of transmission of performative tropes" (218). Roach's study leads him to discuss the paradoxical relations between the act of improvisation and cultural memory. The ritualistic repetition of restored behavior re-enacts and stabilizes the past through deliberately formulated and stylized steps and gestures, while improvisation and its creative eruptions, Roach argues, instead of erasing or negating memory, actually celebrate cultural memories. For Roach, the disclosure of suppressed improvisations is a "method of cultural critique" (222).

In this article, I would like to follow the line of thinking introduced above and re-examine contemporary Taiwanese theatre and analyze signs of cultural memory through which the directors re-stage and re-inscribe the past in order to construct new cultural identities. In the last decade, in all cultural forms of expression, including public forums, scholarship, literature, the visual arts, film, drama, and dance, there has been an on-going process of self-conscious construction of a new Taiwanese identity. Along with this quest came a clear shift from the narrative of the monolithic Han Chinese to a variety of hybridized local subjectivities. I hope to demonstrate through my analysis of the production and the reception of performative texts in contemporary Taiwan theatre that the effort to sever ties from the traditional narratives of Han identity is especially apparent in the texts of second generation Chinese diaspora artists. I will analyse the work of Wang Qimei, Stan Lai, and Lin Huaimin, artists today in their
forties, whose parents were born in China and fled to Taiwan in 1949. It is of note that while all three are Western-trained intellectuals, they combine avant-garde ideas as well as traditional Chinese culture and history. What makes their situation more complicated is that they also face the confusion of national and ethnic identity of Chinese and Taiwanese. Throughout their formative years in Taiwan, they considered themselves Chinese, but as soon as they left Taiwan they were considered Taiwanese, whether on the Mainland or elsewhere. When they returned from their graduate education in the West and tried to re-adjust to their Taiwan identity, they faced the criticism of the indigenous Taiwanese.

In my analysis, I will discuss the staging and the performance of the process of constructing a Taiwan national-ethnic identity and the complex problems underneath the surface of the performative rhetoric.

Taiwan's Identity as an Orphan

In a symposium on the relocation of Taiwanese literary history, held at Taipei in October 1995, the Taiwanese woman writer Ping Lu remarks, in reaction to the debate on the "origins" of Taiwanese literature: "If we open the world map and examine the relation between Taiwan and mainland China, would the island grow bigger, or smaller? Would the island extend an arm and reach the mainland, as a peninsula? Or would the globe get compressed and result in the island's drifting away from the mainland for good... All possibilities are laid out in the imaginary web woven in Taiwanese literature" (54). This statement paradoxically and yet characteristically illustrates the ambiguous and complex relation between Taiwan and Mainland China. The proximity of the geographical positions and the several movements of immigration in history seem to dictate some sort of blood relation. The contrast in size between the Mainland and the small island of Taiwan, moreover, imposes a parent-child bond. In recent history, the composition of the government of Taiwan has been turned over twice, first by the hands of the Qing government to that of Japan in 1895, and then from Japan to the Kuomintang (KMT) government that fled the Mainland in 1945. Wu Zhuoliu's novel, The Orphan of Asia (1943-45), reflects the ambiguous cultural identity of the Taiwanese between Japan and China, and the anxiety of being disowned by the Mother Country. Peng Ruijin has pointed out that the "Orphan consciousness" revealed in Wu Zhuoliu's novel has deeply touched the sensitivity of all Taiwanese (94). Li Qiao's trilogy, Hanye sanbuqü (Cold Nights, 1981), too, depicts the history of Taiwan under Japanese occupation, and the strong urge of a child wanting to return to the Mother. However, while in the former the Mother Country is China, in the latter the "Mother" image has been transformed into the mountains of Taiwan.

The desire for recognition by the Mainland, manifest in the "Orphan Complex" of the Taiwan literary imagination, has evolved into the construction of a new identity by the 1980s and 1990s. Starting with the 1970s, Taiwanese intellectuals began to search for traditional Taiwanese cultural symbols which could represent the uniqueness of the Taiwanese experience. Jiang Xun, a Taiwan art critic, pointed out that this search involved not only literary activities, but also other forms of arts, such as Shih Weiling's local ballads, Hsusheng Magazine's introductions to indigenous folk arts, Xuésgh Sh Art Journal's praises of Hong Kong, and the Cloud Gate's dance of the local ritual dance Bajiajiang (1977, 67). The Kaohsiung Incident of 1978 was a heavy blow to the aspirations of most Taiwanese and its after effect was the resistance against the political terrorism of the KMT government. Further, the debate over Chinese versus Taiwan consciousness during the early 1980s further polarized the two camps (Zhang 11). Thomas B. Gold, for instance, explains that the "quest for a unique Taiwan identity" began early in the mid-1970s and coincided with Taiwan's "increased diplomatic isolation and the rise of the tangwai, the dissident party" (61). He lists several central themes shared by Taiwanese artistic expression, including literature, music, film, dance, theater, and scholarship (61-64). Gold concludes that, by the 1980s and the 1990s, "defining Taiwanese identity is still a process at the stage of rediscovering a history comprised of a diverse array of components, but it has become a conscious project" (64).

The lifting of the Martial Law in 1987 established the transition from the KMT period to the period of an emerging indigenous Taiwan. Now, more people became involved in the construction of an indigenous cultural identity. The theatrical articulation of differences in Wang's work is representative of this process because it echoes the diverse voices and perspectives in the moments of transformation. We also observe a gradual shift from a construction of national identity and a historical narration based on "pure blood" — the pure Central Land Han Origin or the pure Taiwan Origin — to the narration of "hybridity." From the acts of protest to acts of disengagement, there is a process of the growth of Taiwanese indigenous voices as well as a shift from monolithic

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1 The debates on the origin of Taiwan literature has been carried on since the early 1980s and the term "Taiwan literature" was established during the debate on the issue in 1983-84 (see Zhang 44-46). For representative views on the "Chinese consciousness" or the "Taiwan consciousness" in Taiwan literature, see Yie. On the situation of Chinese versus Taiwan consciousness in Taiwan literature over the past forty years, see Lin Ruiming; Ma; Chen Zhaoying; Chen Fangming. The debate following the articles by Chen Zhaoying and Chen Fangming is still ongoing in the recent issues of the journal Zhongguo Wenzue.

2 The Kaohsiung Incident was a period of political oppression and resulted in the imprisonment of many people. It also caused the death of Lin Yixun's family.

3 Chen Yingzheng is the leading figure among critics who insist on the orthodox origin in the Chinese tradition, while Yie Shihao insists on indigenous consciousness (see Ma) and Wu Michi represents, for instance, the "pure blood theory" on the Taiwanese side.
identity to hybridized identities, from national subjectivity to community subjectivities.

With the staging of *The Orphan of the World*, we can see how Wang Qimei painstakingly maps the hybridized identities of the Taiwanese experience. Wang’s biography is relevant here. She was born in 1946 in Beijing but was raised and educated in Taipei. She obtained a BA in Chinese Literature from Taiwan University and an MA in Theatre Studies from the University of Oregon. She returned to Taiwan in 1976 and since then she has been teaching and directing plays in Taiwan. In the preface to the premiere of the play in May 1987, she writes: “we grew up and progressed with Taiwan; this is our home, our land, our concerns and everything” (3). For the play, the problematic of Taiwan identity and its metaphor, “orphan,” were conscious choices and Wang explains this with reference to Wu Zhuoliu’s *The Orphan of Asia* and Li Quo’ s *Cold Nights* (Yang 157). During the preparation period and the rehearsals, Wang required her actors and actresses to read these texts, as well as Lian Heng’s *General History of Taiwan* (1918). The latter text is of importance as it contains the histories of Taiwan Aborigines as well as the early Fukien and Hakka immigrants. Wang also required her actors and actresses to inquire about their own family histories from the earliest time through immigration to the present generation, and encouraged them to improvise stories of their own (for a similar approach see Liu). The premiere was warmly received by the audience because, according to contemporary writers such as Ah Cheng or Jiang Xun, the play provides good education of Taiwanese history to the audience. Ah Cheng, for example, wrote that the play speaks with sincerity about “all the suppressed or forgotten pasts of Taiwan and stirs deeply the wounds in the heart of most Taiwanese” (169). From the premiere in 1987 onward, Wang continued to revise the play. Her revisions of the play include such as the change in perspectives and voices of the different participating actors, the shift from rural scenes to urban life, from a fishing harbor to the stock market, from a family factory to monopolized chain stores, from local theatre performances to TV viewing, etc.

Wang’s attempt is to replace the monolithic master narrative of Han culture with an acknowledgement of the voices of indigenous Taiwan. She tries to recapture on stage the different cultural memories of the Taiwanese of the past 400 years. She starts from the dramatization of the linguistic differences of languages used on the island, aboriginal dialects, Hakka, Fukien, Mandarin, and Japanese. She also tries to make use of theatrical extra-lingual elements, such as music, lighting, stage sets, space, and carefully choreographed dance to reinforce the multiplicity of Taiwanese identity. The play starts with the polyphonic choreography of several groups of dancers traversing across different corners on the stage, representing the different aboriginal tribes of Taiwan — Beinan, Bunun, Atayal, and Tsou. The acoustic space is woven with four contrapuntal but harmonious Aboriginal ritual melodies, the Atayal’s "Wedding Ritual Song," the

Bunnun’s "Harvest Song," the Tsou’s "Ode to the Hero," and the Beinan’s "Youngster’s Monkey Sacrifice." In the following scene, the audience sees three groups of people, representing the Hans, the Fukienists, and the Hakkas, reciting in different languages and tunes the classical texts of Sanzijing and Han Poetry. Along praise for the sincerity of Wang’s intentions, however, theatre commentators criticized the "heaviness" of the play, in the sense that her allusions to history were too many and overpowering (see Qiu). The freedom and space Wang gives to her actors are in reality an illusion because the play is highly coded and programmed with historical and social consciousness. In this sense, Qiu Kunliang’s criticism is justified. However, the intensity of historical allusions appears to strike a cord with the audience.

The Blank Spot (*Liubai*) of the Sign: Stan Lai’s Missing Utopia

The work of two other contemporary Taiwan playwrights, Stan Lai and Lin Huaimin, not surprisingly also show a high level of searching for one’s roots and identity construction in order to narrate the history of Taiwan. In their work, too, there are moments of interstices in the re-staging and re-inscribing of the past through visual signs of cultural memory. The work of Stan Lai and Lin Huaimin manifest a continuous effort to re-examine the collective cultural identities of Taiwan. Fixed identifications are reinscribed; the past is restaged; various cultural temporalities emerge. These different terms of cultural engagement are enacted in a bodily and performative way on the stage to make way for a space for a cultural hybridity in which any assumed hierarchy would be questioned. More specifically, the reason which makes Stan Lai and Lin Huaimin different from Wang Qimei’s historically homogeneous space is that Lai and Lin construct a stage of disjuncted and transitional space. We can further discuss such difference of space by analyzing the signs of interstices which carry collective cultural memory as well as the interactive tension of political forces. The combat in ideological territories is particularly sharp right on the borderline where the conflicting and incongruous signs meet on stage.

Stan Lai’s play *Anlian/Taohuayuan* (Missing/Peach Blossom Spring) offers a typical post-modern revision of the China myth. And here again, the biography of the dramatist is relevant: Stan Lai’s parents were born in China and they moved to the US in the 1940s. Lai was born in 1954 in Washington, but moved to Taipei in 1966 with his family. There, he finished his high school education and undergraduate university and obtained a BA degree in English literature from Fu Jen University. 1978 to 1983 he studied at the University of California at Berkeley and obtained his PhD in drama. Lai returned to Taiwan in 1983 and has been teaching and directing plays in Taiwan since. Stan Lai’s plays, such as *This Was the Way We Grew Up, That Night We Performed Comedians’ Dialogues, Yuenhuan Stories, The Journey to the West*, etc., are all experiments in search of
the contemporary Taiwanese mind which he perceives as a combination of cultural impact from the West, from Japan, as well as the entire cultural memory of Taiwan history, especially the relations between China and Taiwan. Zhu Tianwen, a renowned woman writer, observed Stan Lai's success: because of the common experience Lai drew from the public's everyday life and from their shared cultural memory, "each of the performances he presents has become a significant social activity carrying for every audience a sense of social participation and belongingness" (13).

The play Anliang/Taohuayuan is composed of two plays, or the rehearsals of the two plays, Anliang and Taohuayuan, on the same stage. Anliang is a modern stage melodrama, set in a hospital in Taipei of the 1970s, in which old and sick Jiang misses and hallucinates about the meetings with his young lover Yun from whom he had been separated during the chaotic times of war on mainland China in the 1930s. The audience soon realizes that Jiang has been "missing" Yun all the years since he settled in Taiwan in 1949, and even after he married a Taiwanese wife. Taohuayuan, a farce in classical theatrical style, presents a parodic version of the classical text Taohuayuan, a synonym for utopia in Chinese, by Tao Yuanming (365-427) of the Wei-Jin Period (4th century AD). In this play, the audience finds that the reason the fisherman Old Tao leaves home is because his wife Chunhua has an affair with his Boss Yuan. The interpolating structure of these two plays, owing to the mistake of the rehearsal schedule, makes each play a frame for the other, one interpreting the other and at the same time de-framing each other. The lines the actors speak in each play form a further dialogue between the two plays. The backdrop for Taohuayuan, a traditional Chinese landscape painting, with a dreamlike village among beautiful pink peach blossom trees, and the remote, mysterious and misty mountains located in the background, becomes the visual translation of what Jiang in Anliang nostalgically misses all the years: the utopia of young love, in itself a metaphor of the homeland, China. The young love remains intact and immaculate in Jiang's imaginary construct, a replica of the social reality of Mainland Chinese who fled to Taiwan 1949. The trick Stan Lai plays with this visual interpretation of the utopian spiritual origin, the audience soon realizes, is that he leaves one spot on the backdrop blank. This blank spot, the so-called Liubai, is a traditional Chinese technique painters use in order to leave some space untouched by the brush so that the objects on the canvas do not appear too crowded. But, in Lai's version, the blank spot turns out to be a meaningful visual icon of interstices, a missing sign, or a sign which escapes the reader's (the audience's) interpretation. On the stage, the audience sees the stage hand physically painting and filling the blank spot during the progress of the play. The meaning of "Taohuayuan," or of "China," thus becomes incomplete, with interstices, awaiting a Taiwanese's re-interpretation.

Stan Lai skilfully inserts intertextual dialogue with the classical text Taohuayuan through making the actor Old Tao's quote Tao Yuanming's text while at the same time commenting on it and changing the meaning of the text. Old Tao, referring both to Taohuayuan and to the author Tao Yuanming, recites: "Passing by along the river, forgetting the distance on the way. ... Forgetting! Forgetting! It's good to forget! Forget about Chunhua, forget about Boss Yuan!" (Scene 7). By forgetting about "Chunhua" and "Boss Yuan," Old Tao has dropped the two major parts of "Taohuayuan" and kept only "Tao," the author of the text, or, as the sound of "Tao" suggests, the meaning of escape. But, who is the author of the current text? How to escape? The original text has been appropriated and broken into phrases of different meaning by Old Tao. In other words, let us forget the original text, forget history, forget the meaning assigned by the author, and let us create a new text.

Through the staging of Anliang and interacting with Old Tao's re-interpretation of Tao Yuanming's text, Stan Lai's intention of a critical re-examination of the diaspora's nostalgic dreams for the past, for China, becomes more obvious especially in the visual set-up in Scene 10. In this scene, the skiescape for Anliang, the Taipei city, is covered up by the beautiful scene of Taohuayuan, and the slides of Anliang are projected onto the huge classical landscape painting. This projection creates a curious effect of double vision: on the background of the peach blossom spring, we see a series of pictures of Taipei streets, houses, buildings, from a telescopic view of the city to a close-up of the hospital, its interior, and then to the x-ray picture of Jiang's infected lung. The landscape painting and the image of Jiang's lung on the x-ray photograph collide on the background, disjointed yet harmoniously correspondent. The visual impact of this juxtaposition is unsettling; the audience sees the projection and introduction both ways: the city map of Taipei is superimposed by the memories of the past, the utopian land, and the street names of Taipei literally take up place names of China, such as Changchun, Jinh, Tianceping, Beijing, Nanjing, etc. People walk on the streets of Taipei as if traversing through places in China. For Stan Lai, this nostalgic mentality of the diaspora in Taiwan functions as a collective disease, structured and institutionalized.

Over forty years' separation, the diaspora's nostalgic hope for home and return has become a disease, then a slap in the face, and finally a joke, because the younger generation does not share their memories, and also because the "Taohuayuan" is no longer the same. Even the young actress who plays Yun, Jiang's lost love, insists that it is impossible for her to be Yun, or to act out the ungraspable cloud-like memories which the director-within-the-play wishes to reconstruct. What is the "Taohuayuan" to Stan Lai after all? "Taohuayuan" seems to suggest a land of unreality, in which Old Tao, Chunhua, and Boss Yuan, all dressed in white, with handkerchiefs covering their eyes, play hide-and-seek cheerfully and innocently in slow motion. When Lai was working on his play That Night We Performed Comedians' Dialogue in 1984, trying to reconstruct
the traditional Chinese folk art “cross-talk,” he went to Japan for a two-weeks’ break. On the streets of Kyoto, he experienced the gap between tradition and modern life. He said,

I spent one whole day taking pictures of the wooden floor in one old temple at Kyoto. The interstices on the wooden floor and on the wooden wall attract my attention, interstices formed through hundreds of years, interstices of different angles. I suddenly realized that such unwelcome interstices, after the passage of long years, have become natural and smooth, an integral part in the environment. (Soong 16)

Severing ties with history, changing the significations of a sign, and escaping from the fixed version of a text are the statements Stan Lai makes in his play. For Stan Lai, tradition, as well as China, are incomplete signs, with a blank spot to be filled up each time during the performative act of interpretation. China, Lai suggests through this play, is a sign of a utopian past, a motherland, for most Taiwanese, but this sign has a blank spot in it to be rewritten, re-staged and reinscribed, and the unreal collective image of “China” has to be removed from the lung.

The Half-Transparent Screen: Lin Huaimin’s Chinese Signs

The inscription of the double vision — the traditional with the post-modern — with the sign of interstices, can also be found in Lin Huaimin’s Cloud Gate works. Like Wang Qimei and Stan Lai, Lin Huaimin is also a second generation Taiwanese of the 1949 diaspora from China. Lin was born in 1947 in the countryside of southern Taiwan, Jiayi, and received his higher education in Journalism in Taipei. He started out as a novelist and studied in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Iowa University for some time. But his interest in dance moved him to study dance: first at the University of Iowa, then with Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham in New York. Lin returned to Taiwan in 1972 and started the Cloud Gate Dance Ensemble in 1973. The announced objective of the Ensemble was to compose music by Chinese, to choreograph the dance by Chinese, and to dance by Chinese for the Chinese audience. In Lin’s works, the audience sees a site and a process of the struggles of different cultures shared by most Taiwanese. Martha Graham once said, “Art is the evocation of man’s inner nature. Through art, which finds its roots in man’s unconscious - race memory - is the history and psyche of race brought into focus” (50). For Lin, the race memory is the hidden roots, the Chinese as well as the Taiwanese, which he needs to explore through many experiments. But he also faces the drastic change of modern Taiwan which is taking place in his time. The reason Lin’s work is popular is mostly because of his intermingling of the West — such as Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Paul Taylor — with “Chineseness,” such as the long sleeves, long cloth, classical masks or costumes. At the same time, his audience feels uncomfortable because they have to confront with the changes and shifts of the connotations of the “Chineseness” Lin has recorded in his dance language, and especially the increasing ambiguity of the androgynous male bodies on stage, an aspect of which the Taiwanese audience is not ready to cope with yet. In each piece, such as The Story of the White Snake, Little Drummer, Legacy, Dream of the Red Chamber, The Dreamscape, up to his latest work, Nine Songs, we can see obvious visual icons borrowed from traditional Chinese culture as the target of dialogue so as to resist, to disengage, and to re-construct Taiwanese identity.

Within the frame of traditional “Chinese” elements we also notice a gradual shift to the relocation of the “Taiwanese” after 1980 in Lin’s work. This may be a result of Lin’s second visit to the US and under the impact of Taiwan’s forced withdrawal from the United Nations. He now asks himself: “Have we artists employed the images of the current state of Taiwan as our cultural signs?” (qtd. in Ho 11) and states in 1987 - on the fifteenth anniversary of the foundation of the Cloud Gate Ensemble — “my fatherland is no longer the far away places recorded in the textbooks; it is Taiwan” (1993, 245). Loyalty to the Mainland and its culture keeps the Chinese diaspora from accepting the reality of their settlement in Taiwan, and thus China and Taiwan exist in Taiwanese mentality as a binary belief system. In Shooting the Sun (1992), an ancient myth shared by the Ataya Aboriginals, Lin symbolically and ritualistically kills one of the two suns, the two dictating political forces. Legacy (1978), Lin acknowledges, is an important transition point for himself. During the process of preparation for the staging of this play — it is about the history of early immigration from the Mainland to Taiwan — Lin, similarly to Wang, asks his dancers to study the history of Taiwan, and to tell the stories of their own ancestors according to their family genealogy (Liu 23). Lin was convinced that through dance the audience could participate in unison and could be moved to generate new courage and strength to face the difficult political situation around 1978 (Wen 29-37).

Starting with Dream Land (1985), however, we start to observe an insersion of incongruous interstices in Lin’s language of dance. In Dreamscape, a half-transparent screen with Dunhuang Cave paintings projected on it separate the front stage and the back stage. Groups of dancers in modern suits or in ancient costume scatter in front of the screen as well as behind the screen. The audience thus observes the sharp contrast between the classical Chinese world and modern Taiwan. This half-transparent screen becomes Lin’s interpretation of the Taiwanese condition: a sign visually links and separates the past and the present. The visual motif is impersonated by a young man who dresses in modern suit and appears in various scenes, unassociated with the happenings of the stage. At the beginning of the dance, this young man stands in front of a huge red gate, representing Chinese history, wondering whether he should
enter the gate or not. The function of the character is that he erects a barrier between the audience and the image of ancient China on the stage. The disorienting visual icon recurs also in Lin’s later works, as the cyclist, the traveller, or the roller skater in *The Lottery, Masquerade*, and *Nine Songs* (1993).

Lin also uses *The Watery Sleeve* — a characteristic dance language in traditional Chinese dance — as a personal narrative and a theme, linking with and separating the present from the past in many of his plays. Early in *Hanshi*, in which Lin himself plays the tragic figure Jie Zhitui of ancient China, Lin dances with a long strip of white cloth and turns the solo dance into a duet of himself and the white cloth, thus representing a dialogue with Chinese history. In *Nine Hymns*, the Lady of the Xiang River, with her tranquil gestures, her long white cloth, and her heavy expressionless mask, is a metaphorical figure of the objectified female subject awaiting the emperor’s attention, representing the traditional Chinese culture of Confucian etiquette and of patient waiting. *Nine Songs*, a reinterpretation of Qu Yuan’s (329-299 BC) poetic elegy *Nine Hymns*, is Lin’s manifestation of his farewell to China. Lin needs to quote and re-stage once again ancient Chinese culture so as to purify himself of his nostalgia. The original text of *Nine Hymns* is composed of eleven sections; the first nine hymns are the chants by shaman priests and priestesses to incite the god to descend and take physical possession of themselves; the tenth hymn is a lament for soldiers who have died for their country; and the eleventh hymn is a fragment of a funeral dirge. Lin takes only six parts out of the first nine hymns and keeps the tenth and the eleventh. Apparently, he does not intend to re-construct this classical ritual, but merely borrows the form in order to exercise his own ritual of incantation and requiem. The central message, according to Lin, is that, after all the ceremonies and waiting, God never arrives. In contrast, the Lady of the Xiang River — the priestess who starts and finishes the whole dance — actually carries the force of revitalization. The dance of the priestess is a typical indigenous Taiwan ritual dance of fertility. The life force and the sexual connotation of her gestures come from her belly, and from the earth. The priestess even assumes the position of the mourning mother from the Ficta, cleansing the dead body of her sons, pacifying the souls who died for the country including the martyrs in the revolutions of the 1911, in the Japanese occupation, in the 2-28 Incident, and Tiananmen Square.

**Conclusion**

Wang Qimei’s orphan plays from 1987 to 1992 symbolically and symptomatically express the collective need to build a new Taiwanese cultural identity, but paradoxically the ritualistic and historical structure of the plays erase the diversity of voices and result in a flat and homogeneous text. Stan Lai and Lin Huaimin share the collective need for a new Taiwan cultural identity. Their plays, however, avoid the collectivization of voices and manage to present a more complicated version of the Taiwanese condition through employing signs of double articulation. Their texts are constructs containing the cultural memory of China and they summon the memories of the past through re-staging these historicities on stage. At the same time, they also manage renewal by re-constructing the signs of history by expressing their incongruities and interstices, by inserting a blank spot in them or making the sign itself a half-transparent screen. The incongruities and interstices of the signs of history thus create a double articulation, both linking and separating the past and the present, China and Taiwan, and maintaining the co-relation of the two perspectives. In sum, for the second generation of the Chinese diaspora in Taiwan, these plays represent the urgency to re-define their Taiwanese identity.

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**Works Cited**


