10 Taiyu serial dramas in Taiwan
A history of problem-making
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The construction of a problem, be it a crisis or a moral panic, is an attempt of policing and control, for the maintenance of hegemony and authority (Hall et al. 1978). A problem emerges as a problem only when it is out of its proper place, just like dirt becomes dirt only when it is not properly placed in the earth. The elimination of dirt is necessary in maintaining the cleanliness of the social order (Douglas 2002). In other words, it is the need for a particular social arrangement that constitutes the existence of a problem. Taiyu, the lingua franca of the Taiwanese, became a problem of dialect (called Minmamya) to be eliminated when the KMT colonial regime moved to Taiwan, building it as a Chinese nation and instituting Mandarin as the national language. Television is central to the building of the Chinese nation. Taiyu serial dramas were broadcast soon after the first network was established in 1962, but have been constructed as the most problematic and debased genre since the early 1970s when the second TV station, CTV (1969), and the third, CTS (1971), were established and used serial dramas to compete for profit. Accusations directed at the poverty of its quality and the vulgarity of the audiences have characterized mainstream criticisms and constructions of Taiyu serial dramas as problems from the 1970s to the present. This chapter investigates not only the how and what but also the why of this problem-construction, as an attempt to understand the power mechanisms at work in struggling for hegemonic control. It charts two historical moments – the 1970s and from the 1990s to the present – when language has played a significant role in the articulations of serial dramas as problems and explores the changing political, economic and cultural forces that situate them as problems worthy of discussion. I argue that the history of this problem-making demonstrates the centrality of Chinese culture in political domination through cultural means, with ethnic/class politics playing a central role in the maintenance of a hierarchical social order. In the 1970s, Chinese culture was used to create ethnic/class divisions within Taiwan while simultaneously creating the illusion of a symbolic whole under the name of the Republic of China. However, since the 1990s, and intensifying after the 2000s, with the entanglement of democratization and neoliberalization in Taiwan and the rise of China, the ethnic/class tension is not just complicated by conflicted national identifications and Chinese culture promoted by both the KMT Party’s Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China, but also for unification purposes. While democratization, which involved the search for Taiwanese identity, led to the rise of Taiyu-based Hsiangtu drama, the neoliberal definition of culture as economic resource, which consecrates Chinese culture through capital investment, facilitates this unification process while creating further ethnic/class/national identity divisions within Taiwan. The result is a disparaging of Taiyu-based culture in general and, in particular, Taiyu serial drama as a problem to be reformed.

Mapping conjunctures: the 1970s

After World War II, the Kuomintang (KMT) Party took over Taiwan from Japan in 1945. In 1947, martial law was implemented as a result of Taiwanese resistance against KMT colonial rule. When the KMT lost China to the Communist Party, they moved the Republic of China to Taiwan in 1949 and built Taiwan as a military base from which to mount the campaign to reclaim China.

Culture plays a significant role in the KMT’s nation-building project. Chun points out that

the reality of the ‘Republic of China’ is a paradigmatic instance of the nation as semiotic invention. The invention of ‘traditional Chinese culture’ as Taiwan’s national culture is a ‘hegemonic presence whose fate is linked inextricably to the very mechanism of political domination that has served to perpetuate the domination of the state.

(Chun 2000: 10)

In legitimizing its minority rule, the KMT state on the one hand used traditional Chinese culture to create ethnic divisions (between Wusheengren, Mainlanders who came with Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan, and Benshengren, the early settlers) in order to suppress and subordinate existing local culture in maintaining the privilege of the Mainlanders. On the other hand, it also used this culture to construct an all-embracing vision of Chinese history and civilization that transcends primordial sentiments and, as such, to create shared values for a newfound community called ‘Cultural China’. In the name of national survival, different social/cultural engineering projects were enforced, backed by martial law, to produce subjects/citizens of Chinese culture (Chun 2000; Yang 2008a).

Chun identifies three phases of cultural policy enforced by the KMT state in creating/politicizing Chinese culture as the national culture: cultural reunification (1945–67), cultural renaissance (1967–77) and cultural reconstruction (1977–2000). In the first phase, Mandarin was instituted as the only and official language (to purge Japanese influence and to subordinate the local Taiwanese), which in turn became the precondition for the extensive inculcation of Chinese culture. The second stage was marked by a systematic effort
to redefine the content of these ideas and values [of Chinese culture], to cultivate a large scale societal consciousness through existing institutional means and to use the vehicle of social expression as the motor for national development in other domains, economic and political” (Chun 2000: 12). The third stage is characterized by the ‘domestication’ of ethnic culture and the ‘sublimation’ of Chinese culture into desirable objects of consumption, a process which coincides with the liberalization policy and the development of the culture industry (Chun 2000: 14).

This section focuses on the second stage, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, when Chinese culture, implemented through the policy of ‘Chinese Culture Renaissance Movement’ (zhonghua wenhua fusing yuan-dong), was situated as a rhetorical weapon against the communist Cultural Revolution. But in practice it was used against the local people and culture through its large-scale inculcation as the hegemonic form of societal consciousness: ‘Specifically, the movement worked to strengthen national spirit education, promote Mandarin Chinese and carry on Confucian traditions and culture’ (Lin 2005: 75). The aim of this Cultural Renaissance movement was to uphold Chiang’s leadership through defending Chinese culture. ‘Chinese culture’ meant a culture of adhering to the Three Principles of the People, supporting combat missions, denouncing Mao Zedong and opposing communism (Lin 2005).

The particular arrangement of the TV industry needs to be understood within this political juncture in which culture became the primary weapon that the KMT party-state used to fight against not only communists, China but also the Taiwanese locals. Not only was the establishment of the first TV station a symbol of competition with communist China, it was also used as a political propaganda tool to build the Chinese nation in Taiwan and strengthen KMT rule. The missions propagated in the Cultural Renaissance movement were written into the goals of the three networks. For example, from 1962 to 1969, TTV stated that its goal was to:

- correct social consciousness, maintain national interests and national dignity;
- adhere to government policies and promote anti-communism ideologies;
- emphasize traditional ethics and morality and maintain free democracies;
- use Mandarin as the primary language (Su 1991: 125).

In 1976, the three networks all emphasized the same goals: to use Mandarin and to promote the Three Principles of the People and national policies, anti-communist ideals and Chinese culture and tradition (Su 1991: 125).

Despite the political imperative to use TV for propaganda, the government was unwilling to invest in the infrastructure for the TV industry. This resulted in the particular arrangement of the Taiwanese TV industry, generally characterized as ‘clientelism’ or ‘patron–client dependency’ between the government and private capital. The government gave favours to private capital in exchange for capitalists’ loyalty so that it was possible to use TV for political control, while the capitalists used their support from the government to further their economic and political capital (Lin 2006). The three networks have slightly different industrial structures, each controlled by different factions of the government (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Education and the KMT Party), which form the institutions for establishing TV policies as well as the main body of censorship boards, while private capital came from local capitalists, KMT members and foreign capital (Lin 2006; Su 1991). As a result, two contradictory goals emerge: the government’s need to use TV as a propaganda tool and the capitalists’ need to earn profit (Lin 2006). These two goals provide the epistemological conditions for the articulation of the problem of serial dramas.

**Constructing Taiyu/Minnanyu serial drama as a problem**

As serial dramas are seen as the most profitable genre among the three networks, commercialization was identified as the root cause of the problem in this period; in order to pursue profits, it has been argued that serial dramas sacrificed their goal of educating the people. “In order to attract more advertisers, the three networks have succumbed to advertisers’ demand for more cruel and violent content with fighting scenes, strange spirits, vulgar and dialect programs, especially in Primetime serial dramas” (Central Daily News 1972). The problem of commercialization involved two dimensions: content and audience. With regard to the content, serial dramas are seen as bad programmes that do not live up to the goal of Chinese nation-building; they contain too much violence, superstition and crying, and too little Chinese tradition, culture and positive thinking. Second, the criticism of commercialization always assumes a hierarchical relationship between the critic/the ideal audience and the uneducated and uncultured mass as ‘TV has direct impact on our consciousness and it is like a hypodermic needle… program content exerts absolute impact on audiences, especially those with low knowledge level and children who are easily infected/influenced’ (United Daily News 1972). In this context, the low knowledge level audiences are marked by their ethnicity/language as the majority of the Taiwanese (Bengshengren) (about 80 per cent) who speak Taiyu, Hakka and Japanese. At the same time, children and teenagers, who are the future citizens, are constructed as potentially under threat from their vulgar parents and grandparents who know little or no Mandarin but mostly Taiyu and are hence in need of TV’s education.

Here’s a typical example of how the problem of serial dramas tends to be expressed:

Families with television share a common concern: too much Minnanyu [Taiyu], superstition, and fighting scenes... Current programs are under
the control of advertisers... The purpose of business is to earn profit, not ethics and morality, hence, they believe that the more vulgar the programs are, the more money they can earn... TV's function is education, good programs can cultivate the culture of the society while bad programs will degenerate our morality... We have old and honorable history, we can get program ideas from our history... Serial dramas should find material from history, on the one hand, it helps us understand and re-live our history; on the other hand, history can teach us how to be a good Chinese. As for Minyanyu programs, there shouldn't be too many. Language plays an influential role in promoting national solidarity and unifying the nation. As we are promoting Mandarin, we should maintain the absolute privilege status of Mandarin. (Hu 1972)

Similar criticisms abound (Jiang 1979: 149) that succumbing to advertiser's demands will ruin the government and education system's effort in promoting traditional ethics and morality, science, and Mandarin education along with the mental health of children and teenagers (Central Daily News 1972). Many solutions were offered at the time, including eliminating serial dramas altogether from TV and replacing them with TV news. However, most discussions focus on two solutions: first, nationalize TV to eliminate commercial influence; second, enforce content control, especially with regard to Taiyu programmes. The patron-client dependency that upholds the industrial structure makes content control the easiest. As a result, network self-regulations in 1972 as well as Regulations for National Broadcasting in 1976 and 1977 were implemented to control TV content.

Here, I identify the essence of these regulations/solutions that illustrate how controlling content was designed to maintain the power of the KMT Mainlander elite. First, with regard to language, the three networks' self-regulation in 1972 stated that dialect programmes should not exceed 16 per cent of all the programmes; only one Minyanyu programme was allowed in prime-time for all the networks, thus restricting Minyanyu programmes to marginal, non-prime-time slots. In the same year, the Ministry of Education ruled that each network was allowed to broadcast Minyanyu programmes for no more than one hour each day (Jiang 1979: 66). In 1976, the Information Bureau implemented the first Broadcasting Law, demanding a gradual reduction of dialect programmes each year. Second, the promotion of Chinese culture, ethics and tradition was translated into policy terms by way of a number of restrictions on drama content: no more than a quarter of the content to describe the dark side of life; no depiction of the triumph of the villain over the hero and ethnic/racial tensions; no negative portrayal of the rich or the upper class as immortal or as using their power to exploit people; no positive portrayal of the lower class or ordinary people as possessing a better sense of justice; no description of anti-family ethics and no negative portrayal of the military or government officials; and no depiction of people as possessing superpowers (Jiang 1979: 67-8). These policies were meant to create the illusion of a harmonious, peaceful and prosperous society under KMT rule and to disempower ordinary people by depriving them of their sense of justice and their power to revolt, while maintaining the hierarchically structured society according to the required ethnic/language/class division.

Chinese culture is constructed as the national culture and norm, and along with it the power of the Mainlander elite is secured through the construction of Taiyu serial dramas as low quality for uneducated audiences. The vulgarizing of Taiyu serial dramas along with the banning of the language in education and public life created profound effects in the production of a language hierarchy as well as a hierarchy among ethnicities, such that people who speak Mandarin are considered better educated and more cultivated, while people who speak Taiyu are uncultured and uneducated.

Mapping conjunctures: from the 1990s to the present

The suppression of Taiyu led to the near extinction of Taiyu serial drama for two decades; however, democratization and neoliberal privatization fertilized the soil for the emergence of Hsiangtu drama in the 1990s and idol drama in the 2000s. Democratization demanded the KMT Party-state to withdraw their control of the TV industry, leading to a series of impacts: privatization and the legalization of cable in 1993, establishment of FTV (the fourth network) in 1997 and the privatization of TTV in 2000s. Moreover, the restriction on Japanese audio-visual products was lifted in 1993, as well as the ban on the use of dialects. These policies provided the conditions for the emergence of Hsiangtu drama and idol drama. The former literally means 'rural and earthy drama' and is referred to as indigenous (benjin) drama that uses Taiyu as its primary language in depicting the family affairs taking place in Taiwan, while the latter refers to Mandarin-speaking, idol-based urban love stories. Hsiangtu drama from the start has been constructed as a problem of value. Its valuelessness is legitimized through its counterpart, idol drama. This section maps out the political economic context, mainly the hegemony of the Chinese-language market, impacting on the devaluing and problemizing of Hsiangtu drama.

Processes of democratization began in the late 1970s; it led to the establishment of the second party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), in 1986, the lifting of martial law in 1987, direct presidential elections in 1996 and the election of a DPP president from 2000 to 2008. What characterizes Taiwan's democratic process is its entanglement with neoliberal globalization, which is further complicated by the rise of China as an economic power. Culture is the primary battlefield where in the entanglements of democratization and neoliberalization are played out. This is the third stage that Chun identifies as characterized by the 'domestication' of ethnic culture and the 'sublimation' of Chinese culture into desirable objects of consumption. Democratization in the 1990s revolved around issues of ethnicity and language, in particular,
the search for Taiwanese consciousness through a (re)discovery of Taiwan's languages, cultures and traditions. Culture, defined as a traditional way of life rooted in the local communities, became the resource for the construction of Taiwanese identity (as opposed to Chinese identity) in Taiwan's democratic decolonizing cultural movements. However, this notion of culture is increasingly in tension with the dominance of the global discourse of creative industries, which sees culture as an economic resource, especially since the 2000s, when the 'invasion' of the Korean Wave in Taiwan and across Asia demonstrated the success of South Korea's cultural-economic policy. The neoliberal redefinition of culture domesticates the democratization of Taiwanese consciousness through the commodification of ethnic culture, exemplified by the state's implementation of a 'Culture Production Industry' (wenhua chanye) in 1995. However, since 2000, the definition of culture that is central to the formation of Taiwanese consciousness, despite its entanglement with commodification, has shifted to Cultural Creative Industry (wenhua chuangyi chanye), which treats culture purely as an economic resource (Yang 2008b), as exemplified by the claim that 'culture creative industry uses small to win big... it is the route to money' (Pan 2001). In 2008 the newly elected KMT president vowed to develop creative industry, with his policy consultant claiming that, 'we need to change our ideas and think of culture as a form of capital and as a technology that brings about economic development. We have entered the new age of "The Fourth Wave"' (Hao 2009: 16).

The 'sublimation' of Chinese culture cannot be separated from the globalization process; however, this sublimation, rather than being defined through the consumption of China in the form of symbols as Chun identifies in the late 1990s, should be analysed through the hegemony of the 'Chinese-language market' in the 2000s. The shifting meanings of culture since the millennium as a result of neoliberal globalization facilitate the revival of Chinese culture in Taiwan. By essentializing culture as an economic resource, traditional Chinese culture, in particular Confucian tradition, is constructed as a means for generating profit and crystallized into the business lingo of the 'Chinese-language market' (Huayu shichang).

The hegemony of the Chinese language market, although constructed through economic terms, needs to be understood through the changing political situations in Taiwan. Two factors are essential to the formation of this hegemony: first, the entanglement of neoliberalization and democratization leads to democratization without corresponding transitional justice in Taiwan. In the realm of the TV industry, the domination of the KMT Waisheng elite was never addressed or reformed, but was now complicated by the privatization of the industry that led to the penetration of China's influences through capital investment, with these elites playing a major role in this process. Media industries which promote pro-China agendas are financially supported by the Chinese state (Hu 2012), leading to the formation of a new patron-client dependency between pro-China capitalists and the Chinese state. Second, with the loss of political office in 2000, the KMT Party officially took up the strategy of allying with communist China to fight against the pro-independence DPP Party (liangong zhi taida) in 2006. The support of China in winning presidential elections in 2008 and 2012 meant that the KMT's significant agenda became to promote economic and cultural integration with China, resulting in the re-visibility of 'traditional Chinese culture' in education, business and media, along with a polarization of wealth between the pro-China rich capitalists and the poor majority.

Culture plays a significant part in this process of neoliberalization through China for political ends. The Chinese state, KMT state and cross-strait capitalists promulgated a cultural-economic concept of the 'Chinese-language market' for political purposes. In this discourse, what binds together China and Taiwan through the Chinese-language market is Chinese culture, and Taiwan is best equipped to sell Chinese culture not only because it preserved Chinese culture but also because of its more sophisticated and advanced media industry: 'Taiwan's strength is its Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics. It is its best niche in the world, we should keep this position in the Chinese World... this is Taiwanese producers' strength' (Ma 2010: 95). Proponents of this view in Taiwan are mostly Mainlanders who occupy significant positions in the creative industries in Taiwan (such as Wang Wei-Zhong) as well as political positions (such as Long Ying-Tai, the minister of culture in Taiwan).

Across the Strait, both the Chinese state and Chinese entertainment businesses also undertake the mission to promote this view. For example, Liu Chang-le, the director for Phoenix Media Corporations in China, who is said to be 'a master who thinks from the perspective of all the Chinese around the world' claims that

I think Taiwan has the great potential to be the dream factory for the Chinese in the world because of its rich experiences and great tradition. The best thing for Taiwan is to persist in promoting traditional Chinese culture... Taiwan should position itself as the foundation of traditional Chinese culture, using Chinese popular culture such as pop music and TV serial dramas as its modern expression.

(Wu 2010: 110)

Ironically, the Chinese state, while silent on the impacts of the Cultural Revolution that destroyed traditional Chinese culture, now embraces Chinese culture as its combat strategy in uniting Taiwan. Chinese culture is constructed as shared by all Chinese because it is the greatest and longest civilization based on blood and morality. Zhou (2009) states that 'promoting Chinese culture is the shared project for scholars on both sides of the Strait' (Zhou 2009) and cites the Taiwanese scholar, Huang:

it is the five thousand years of history that links our blood together and supports our shared values from both sides of the Strait. Chinese culture has been the bedrock for maintaining peace and harmony across the
Strait. To ground Chinese culture as our principle for cultural exchange is to intensify our sense of identity and belonging for the same culture, ancestors, and bloodline. (Zhou 2009)

In 2008, China’s president Hu Jintao announced ‘Hu’s six points’ (Hu liu di an) as policy guidelines, including promoting Chinese culture and emphasizing its spiritual connection with Taiwan (Zhou 2009). Similarly, president Xi Jinping, after assuming power in 2012, continued to use Chinese culture as a weapon for uniting Taiwan. As he claims, ‘We hope people across the Strait can stay in solidarity and cooperate together in order to contribute to the recovery of Chinese culture and hence, the Chinese nation’ (Zhou 2009). The minister of culture from China, Tsai Wu, further points out, ‘we will continue to strengthen the cultural exchange across the Strait, endore the development and promotion of Chinese culture, and fortify the cooperation between the culture creative industries on both sides of the Strait in order to increase their competitive edge in the world’ (Tsuyoshi 2013).

From the 1990s, the older form of Chinese culture supported by the Waisheng elite persisted, even though it was challenged by the search for Taiwanese identity through a discovery of Taiwanese culture as a result of democratization. However, since the 2000s, neoliberalization, in particular, through China re-privileges Chinese culture through the economic rhetoric of the Chinese language market. The pro-China Waisheng elite benefit from being the dependent client of the patron Chinese state, along with the cross-strait capitalists, by promoting traditional Chinese culture for unification while simultaneously engaging in struggles to undermine Taiwanese culture/language. This constitutes the larger context in which Taiwan’s TV industry has to work.

The TV drama industry in neoliberal times

Democratization through Bengtuhua (indigenization or Taiwanization) was the major factor contributing to the rise and popularity of Hsiangtu drama in the 1990s. First, the Bentuhua movement in the political sphere led to the search for Taiwanese consciousness and the construction of Taiwanese identity. Hsiangtu drama used Taiwan as the backdrop and addressed issues that were relevant to Taiwan’s culture and society. Second, at the level of culture, Bengtuhua focused on the issue of ethnicity (divided through language). Third, democratic reform led to more open elections at the level of local government. The three networks, controlled by the KMT, used Taiyu as a gesture to promote ‘the harmony of ethnicities’ in order to get votes from the Taiwanese (Ko 1999). Hsiangtu drama was part of this political machine:

It suffices to say that 1995 and 1996 were the times when KMT power utilized, if not manipulated, the social meanings evoked by [Hsiangtu] dramas for its own political ends. The strategy was to re-formulate the raised anti-mainlander, anti-KMT hostility, to dissociate the KMT from the mainlander-complex, and to articulate the KMT with a more localized and grass-rooted image of President Lee Teng-Hui. (Ko 1999: 47)

This is evidenced by the fact that Hsiangtu drama was banned from 1992 to 1994 when the KMT Party did not fare well in elections. It was only when the first directly elected president, Lee Teng-Hui, of Bengsheng ethnicity, assumed power in 1996 that Hsiangtu drama became a constant feature in Taiwan’s television (Ko 1999).

Democratization as privatization also led to the constant presence of East Asia through TV dramas – mainly, Japanese and Korean dramas. The establishment of Japanese channel cables and the import of Japanese trendy dramas led to the Japanese craze phenomenon in the 1990s. This, in turn, enabled the TV industry to copy Japanese scripts and formats and remake them as idol dramas in Taiwan. As opposed to Hsiangtu drama that targets older, working-class, Taiyu-speaking audiences who favour family-centred, mother-and-daughter-in-law plots, idol dramas feature the love stories of young, Mandarin-speaking career-women in urban settings. As idol-driven placement ads fit the new lifestyle advertising, their ability to generate profit from the international market allows their cultural value to be elevated from being a symbol of re-colonization by Japan to becoming the driving force in the making of the Chinese Wave. This value shift is embedded in the hegemony of the Chinese-language market, which can only be understood through the ‘China factor’.

As soon as Taiwan and China opened the door for exchange in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Taiwan TV industry immediately caught ‘Mainland Fever’ (Lin 1991a). The TV industry, mostly controlled by Mainlander elites from the KMT Party, went to China to produce dramas that featured love stories taking place in the ‘actual’ China, replacing the constructed imaginary China that was the previous mainstream. As Bentuhua has given rise to the popularity of Hsiangtu drama, these Mainlander producers and directors began to ride on the trend of neoliberal globalization and use the notion of an overseas market (the Chinese market) to emphasize the value of these TV dramas shot in China. Since the 2000s, with the success of the Japanese-scripted, Taiwan-produced idol drama Meteor Garden in Asia, idol drama is touted as Taiwan’s comparative advantage in the new cultural economy. Moreover, the popularity of idol dramas in China further heightened the significance of the concept of the Chinese-language market promoted by the Taiwanese industry and, later, by the Chinese state and Chinese capitalists.

In this discourse, China is described as the large market where the real profit lies while Taiwan is depicted as a small market that has no potential for generating profit. As Liqiao’s editorial points out,
Taiwan's TV dramas need to leave Taiwan in order to reach the broader Chinese language audiences. The basic point is, we need to see China's large population as the market. If we position our dramas in the Chinese language world, even if they have low ratings, it also means a lot of people. The Chinese language market, of course, refers to Mainland China across the Strait.

(Liupao 2011)

Caught in this entangled process of democratization, which views culture as a resource for Taiwanese identity construction, and neoliberalization, which treats culture as an economic resource, complicated by ethnic as well as political conflicts in Taiwan, Hsiangtu drama has become the placeholder for all these unresolved conflicts and anxieties being articulated as the problem of Taiwan's culture, and the Mainlander-controlled television industry in particular.

**Hsiangtu drama as the problem**

Two concepts are central to the construction of Hsiangtu drama as problematic: quality and commercialization (market). These two concepts, however, are intricately but contradictorily articulated. The terms of the debate were set when Hsiangtu dramas gained popularity in the 1990s, making the Mainlander producers, directors and managers, as well as actors and actresses, feel displaced (Ko 1999). When the first prime-time Tsaiyuy Hsiangtu drama *Ai (Love)* was featured in 1990, the language had to be changed to Mandarin due to policy regulations; however, as more TV dramas began to use Tsaiyu as a result of the KMT's need to get votes from the Taiwanese (hence, lower regulations), critics focused on the use of Tsaiyu in dramas as the cause of ethnic tensions: "It is inappropriate for Mandarin dramas to oversmear Minnanuy... we need to trim down Minnanuy in order to "balance" language use so as to avoid the tensions caused by Mandarin-speaking actors and actresses" (Lin 1991b).

After 1993, when the language restrictions were relaxed, Hsiangtu drama reached its peak. However, at the same time, Hsiangtu drama is constructed as made for an elementary school-level audience (Chen 1997a) and, thus, is of low taste and low quality. The concepts of international audience, overseas audience or international perspective are constantly invoked to justify Hsiangtu drama's 'small feet', which limit the TV industry's becoming international (Chen 1997b: 12). The Mainlander producers and directors played a significant part in articulating the problem of Hsiangtu drama as too local, too small-minded. For example, the producer of the first Hsiangtu drama, *Ai (Love)*, Kuo Jiang-hong, claimed he was not happy to see the 'overfloodling' of Hsiangtu drama in prime-time: 'Hsiangtu drama has good ratings but it does not have overseas markets.' He was disappointed at 'the short-sightedness of the networks' and advocated that the three networks should have their own principles and directions. Despite the good ratings generated from Hsiangtu drama, he will insist on having an "international perspective" (gaangi guan) (Lin 1994). Moreover, the chief manager of CTS in an internal policy meeting stated, 'television should lead the fashion, not be led by the audiences; media business should aim at more trendy topics and international markets, not to serve elementary-school level audiences' (Chen 1997b; Ko 1999: 64-5). Media celebrate these producers as having the vision to develop overseas markets and move forward in leaving Taiwan's small, local audience behind for the international world. 'New shows have begun to move forward to seriously consider the Chinese language market' (Chen 1997a).

Ethnic politics plays a significant part in determining the quality of the drama. If Hsiangtu drama's low quality is constructed through its articulation with elementary school-level audiences, referring mainly to the Bengshengren who do not speak (standard) Mandarin, by implication the good-quality TV dramas are made by Mainlanders. Coexisting with the emergence of Hsiangtu drama is 'China Fever' in the TV industry. While the production of Hsiangtu drama causes concerns over the lowering of cultural taste, Mainlander TV producers such as Qiong Yao and Pei-pei Yang are praised for their insistence on quality by going to China to shoot dramas, despite the uncertainty of financial returns (Lin 1994). Moreover, the only quality Hsiangtu drama to be recognized is The First Family (*Diji shijia*), a drama praised for its use of an all-Mainlander team as its base for production. It is constructed as 'a breakthrough in Hsiangtu drama genre' and represents 'Hsiangtu drama's conscience' because of its 'excellent skills in the well-managed dialogue, along with humour, humanity, and shared sentiments' (Chen 1996). Moreover, *China Times* Center for Cultural News held a workshop called 'Debates on Artworks Under the Spotlight' (*guandian zuo pin lan Zhuang*) and praised the show as 'our prospect for the future direction' of drama production (Chen 1996: 22).

Since the 2000s, ethnic politics has become a dirty concept in Taiwan, as it was seen to divide Taiwan and its association with electoral politics. These ethnic tensions became submerged in public discourse, despite their ghostly presence in everyday life. However, the entangled concepts of quality and market/audience that were used to denigrate Hsiangtu drama persist, albeit in a more complicated and contradictory manner. In terms of quality, the notion of 'realism' is used in contradictory ways in order to situate Hsiangtu dramas as inferior to idol drama. On the one hand, Hsiangtu drama is criticized for not being real enough, for not reflecting the reality of the society (Chang 2013). Taiwan's Hsiangtu drama is very similar to American soap opera in terms of form and content. In terms of form, it follows the melodramatic mode, accentuating the binaries of right and wrong, hate and love in order to incite intense feelings and to eventually settle for the triumph of virtue over evil. Moreover, it follows the American 'neverending' format, which allows the drama to run for two or three years, depending on the ratings. In terms of content, it incorporates social events and timely issues, from graft and corruption in politics to topical references...
from Korean dramas. The plot is criticized for its diversion from reality as it is filled with 'perversion' and 'rotten tricks' including 'messy male/female relationships, life full of obstacles, tragic love, strange diseases, suicides and so on' (Zhu 2005: 13). American soap opera, ironically, is constructed as realistic: American soap operas are popular because they are realistic. They offer a real world for housewives to reflect on and learn how to solve their daily problems. This is what Taiwan's serial drama lacks' (Hsieh 1999).

Realism is also used to elevate the quality of Korean idol dramas over Hsiangtu dramas. Korean dramas are considered more real through the concept of 'approximating everyday life' (zhenghuahuo), which facilitates women's identification (Yang 2008a). However, this principle of realism bends when applied to Hsiangtu drama. Hsiangtu drama is considered 'too real' to be love fantasies for women. Heiniao Lizi, a columnist on TV dramas in the China Times, claims,

Are there any characters in Bentu [Hsiangtu] drama who can incite women's desire?... Who would dream about the kind of life that is full of schemes and dirty power struggles? Who would dream of competing for corporate ownership? You only have to ask the audiences whether they identify with the characters to understand how removed our TV industry is from our audience.

(Heiniao 2006)

The value of Korean drama or idol dramas in general lies in their escapist nature as love fantasies, something that the realistic Hsiangtu drama lacks.

The problem of Hsiangtu drama as either too unrealistic or too realistic is seen as the result of the TV industry's pursuit of ratings. Terms such as 'perversion' and 'exaggerated plot' are constantly invoked as examples of the problem of the commercialization of culture (Zhu 2005; TVBS News 2011: 13). Even Zheng Wen-hua, the scriptwriter of a very popular Hsiangtu drama, Hurricane, said the show was low-quality and vulgar and that, in order to survive, he has lost his principles and ideals (Yeh 2004). Implicit in these comments is the notion of vulgar audience and vulgarity is intertwined with gender, ethnicity and uneven geographic development, as demonstrated through the stereotypical image of the Hsiangtu drama audience, 'the rural obasan' (Yang 2008a).

If Hsiangtu drama's low quality is attributed to excessive commercialization, it is also censured ironically for a lack of commercialization. Through the binary construction of the local versus the global/international and the privileging of the global over the local in terms of the size of the market, Hsiangtu drama is constructed as a problem because of its association with Bentu (local), meaning Taiyu language and culture. As value has 'no proper body of its own but can be expressed only in different' (Anagnost 2004: 191), the derogation of Hsiangtu drama is made through the construction of idol drama as not only having the quality to 'open up people's mind and intellect' but as also 'accompanied by a huge consumer market' (Yeh 1999), offering 'business opportunities not just limited to idols'. Moreover, it also helps to sow the seeds to spread Taiwan's culture abroad and should be considered a 'good weapon to sell Taiwan overseas' and a form of soft power (Commerce Time 2012). Hsiangtu drama, despite its good ratings both in Taiwan and in South-East Asian countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, is constructed as having no market outside Taiwan (Lin 2003).

However, this international market is in effect defined as the China market. This is due to the fact that, in the 1990s, multinational corporations used Taiwan as a stepping stone to China's market, particularly in the domain of music. Many Mainlanders rode this wave to go to China and used the Chinese-language market as their leverage in the competitive field of the TV industry. Especially after 2008, with the support of the KMT state, the Chinese state and cross-strait capitalists, the Chinese-language market has become the unchallenged hegemony used to derogate the local as vulgar in cultural taste due to its small market size, be it Hsiangtu dramas or Taiyu-based movies and music. As the Taiwanese director Chen Kuo-chiung, who now works for a Chinese corporation, Huayi Brothers, says, 'any [cultural] commodity that appeals to the local audience can only reap profits from the local audience and that determines its significance... If we only engage with the audiences from the South where Taiyu is still the lingua franca, we will never produce big international hits' (TVBS News 2013: 30), 'We need a mainstream market to nourish our own subjectivity and that market is China' (Lin 2003).

Within this context where culture becomes an economic resource and quality is measured in market terms, the local, embodied by Hsiangtu drama, becomes a dirty word, a problem to be solved. The solutions offered include: first, to 'target the middle class or elite market'; second, to 'walk out of Taiwan to embrace the broader Chinese language audiences' (Lihpao 2011). Despite the fact that Taiwan has a quite well-educated population and a strong middle class, these two solutions suggest that that the local audiences, the Taiwanese, are not middle-class or elite, and that the Chinese are the right audiences. The association of cultivated taste with Chinese (Huairen) and vulgarity with Taiwanese (those who are from the south who speak Taiyu) through market terms cannot make sense unless analysed from the historical perspective of the KMT colonial period.

The dominance of the Chinese-language market led San-Li, the most significant TV station for idol drama and Hsiangtu drama production, to change its policy and produce a new genre of TV drama, Huaju (Chinese drama) in 2012. Huaju, according to San-Li, is made for Chinese people in general, and Chinese on the Mainland in particular, and is meant to bring out the Chinese Wave in Asia. However, to produce and sell Chinese dramas in China also means an emphasis on hierarchically structured family relations (in the name of Confucian tradition) and the elimination of any offensive to the Chinese state, including San-Li's cancelling of the most popular political show in Taiwan, which advocated Taiwan's independence, in order to appease Beijing.
Conclusion

The construction of Taiyu serial TV dramas as problems can only make sense in the history of the implementation of TV to promote Chinese culture and Mandarin by the KMT state in the 1970s, the democratic movements in the 1990s and the hegemony of the Chinese-language market, supported by the Taiwanese state’s policy to neoliberalize through China and the Chinese state’s aim to unite Taiwan. Ethnolinguistic politics is central to this process. In the 1970s, within the patron-client based political-economic industrial structure, TV dramas carried the mission of inculcating Chinese culture through entertainment. Mandarin, imposed by the KMT state as the national language, was seen as the true expression of Chinese culture, which was used to unite the nation. However, the imposition of Mandarin worked not to unite the nation but to create and maintain ethnic division in order to subordinate the non-Mandarin-speaking people. Within this context, Taiyu serial dramas became a problem of quality caused by commercialization, with the state offering the legal solution to gradually eliminate the ‘dialects’.

Democratization, which foregrounds issues of ethnicity/language, led to the rise of Taiwanese consciousness and, hence, the emergence and popularity of Hsiangtu drama. However, with the entanglement of democratization and neoliberal globalization, culture became an economic resource: Chinese culture, through the economic rhetoric of the Chinese language market, became leverage for the Mainlander elite, who have dominated the TV industry since its inception, to collaborate with Chinese capitalists, the KMT state and the Chinese state in maintaining their power. Hsiangtu drama, which uses Taiyu and addresses Taiwanese audiences, became a problem in need of reform. The concepts of realism and commercialization are contradictory to articulate to demonstrate Hsiangtu drama’s low quality as a way of increasing the value of Chinese-market-based, Mandarin-speaking dramas that promote Chinese culture.

Two counter-discourses are used to defend Hsiangtu dramas, but both fail to challenge the hegemony of Chinese culture, now transformed into the Chinese-language market. The first discourse is articulated by fans: it’s just entertainment, there is no need to be so serious about it (Suzhi 2003). This discourse reinforces the dominant quality discourse that sees Hsiangtu drama as having no cultural value, but being a form of brainless entertainment; hence, not worthy of paying attention to. The second discourse adheres to the neoliberal definition of culture which values the quality of culture in terms of its economic value. It elevates the status of Hsiangtu drama by claiming South-East Asia as its overseas market, and emphasizes the profits it generates from placement ads and tourism (Huang et al. 2013). Instead of challenging the ethnic politics that undergird the political-economic process of value production, both these two counter-discourses unquestionably adopt the terms that are used to demean Taiyu serial drama. By using the master’s tool, these limited and scattered resistances do not dismantles the master’s house, but strengthen the hegemony of culture as economic resource and Mandarin/Chinese culture as quality.

The history of Taiyu-based serial drama as a problem demonstrates the centrality of Chinese culture in political domination through cultural means. It maintains the existing regime in order to benefit certain groups of people (based on ethnicity and class). However, the persistent popularity of Taiyu-based dramas speaks to people’s need for local culture, for a sense of community, based on their everyday life experiences and the languages they speak. This is the domain of the social and Taiyu serial drama is the primary cultural form that undertakes the mediation of the social. If, as Bauman (2002) suggests, the social is the space where the political can be nourished, then the celebration of Chinese culture through the logic of the economy by cross-strait capitalists, the KMT state and the Chinese state is an attempt to eliminate this political space for domination.

Note

1 Taiyu is the lingua franca of the people who lived in Taiwan before the KMT’s language reform. The KMT party calls it Minnanu to emphasize its provincial character, in order to legitimate the claim of a Republic of China that includes Taiwan. It is also called Hokklo because it originates from the Hokklo area. But I use the term Taiyu, not only because it has been called Taiyu since the Japanese colonial period among the Taiwanese population, but also to claim it as a language rather than a dialect.

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